CIVIL WAR CASE STUDY 1: THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR (1936–39)

‘A civil war is not a war but a sickness,’ wrote Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. ‘The enemy is within. One fights almost against oneself.’ Yet Spain’s tragedy in 1936 was even greater. It had become enmeshed in the international civil war, which started in earnest with the Bolshevik revolution.


The Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936 after more than a century of social, economic and political division. Half a million people died in this conflict between 1936 and 1939.

As you read through this chapter, consider the following essay questions:

- Why did a civil war break out in Spain in 1936?
- How significant was the impact of foreign involvement on the outcome of the Spanish Civil War?
- What were the key effects of the Spanish Civil War?

Timeline of events – 1820–1931

1820 The Spanish Army, supported by liberals, overthrows the absolute monarchy and makes Spain a **constitutional monarchy** in a modernizing revolution
1821 Absolute monarchy is restored to Spain by French forces in an attempt to reinstate the old order
1833 In an attempt to prevent a female succession following the death of King Ferdinand, there is a revolt by ‘Carlists’. The army intervenes to defeat the Carlists, who nevertheless remain a strong conservative force in Spanish politics (see Interesting Facts box)
1833–69 The army’s influence in national politics increases during the ‘rule of the Queens’
1869–70 Anarchist revolts take place against the state
1870–71 The monarchy is overthrown and the First Republic is established
1871 The army restores a constitutional monarchy
1875–1918 During this period the constitutional monarchy allows for democratic elections. The system is corrupt, however. Power remains in the hands of the wealthy oligarchs or ‘caciques’
1898 Spanish nationalism suffers when Spain is defeated in 1898 in a war with the USA
1914–18 Spain remains neutral during World War I and experiences economic growth
1918–23 The economy falters and 12 different governments fail to redress the crisis. The regime reaches new lows in 1921, when the army, sent to crush a revolt led by Abd-el-Krim in Spanish Morocco, is massacred by Moors
1923–30 General Primo de Rivera takes control in a bloodless coup and rules for seven years, thus fatally undermining the legitimacy of the monarchy
1931 The King abdicates and the Second Republic is established

Carlism
Carlism is a political movement in Spain that looks to establish a separate line of the Bourbon family on the Spanish throne. This line is descended from Carlos V (1788–1855).
Review questions

Study the timeline above and then read the following quotation.

_The notion that political problems could more naturally be solved by violence than by debate was firmly entrenched in a country in which for a thousand years civil war has been if not exactly the norm then certainly no rarity._

From Paul Preston, _The Spanish Civil War: Reaction, Revolution and Revenge_, 2006

1. Looking at the timeline above showing events in Spain in the 19th and early 20th centuries, what evidence is there for Preston’s argument?

2. What factors were causing tensions in Spain during this time? (Economic, military, religious, political?)

3. What example of foreign intervention was there in Spain in the 19th century?

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**Long-term causes of the Spanish Civil War: political instability (1820–1931)**

In the 19th century, Spain had struggled between periods of conservatism and liberalism. As you can see from the timeline above, there were several issues that caused tension and division in Spain in the century before the 1930s, fractures that were to become more acute in the decade before the civil war broke out.

**Weakness of government**

From 1871, Spain had been a constitutional monarchy. The King was head of state, and he appointed a Prime Minister who should have commanded a majority in the parliament (Cortes). Yet although the Cortes was elected by the male population, real power was held by the wealthy oligarchs, and political control shifted between their different cliques. There were two main parties, the Conservatives and the Liberals, but in fact there was no real difference between them. Elections were rigged or decided by corruption. There were no mass democratic political parties:

_the consequence was, at a very superficial level, political stability, but beneath it tremendous social instability, because nothing ever really changed … Elections changed virtually nothing. Only a relatively small proportion of the electorate had the right to vote, and since nothing changed … the population was forced into apathy or violent opposition to the system._

From Paul Preston, _Modern History Review_, September 1991

**The role of the Spanish Army**

The army had a powerful political position in Spain due to its role in Spain’s imperial past. It believed that it was the protector of the nation, and that this meant it had the right and duty to intervene in politics if a crisis occurred. It had intervened in this way several times, in 1820, 1871 and 1923. It did not, however, act to save the King in 1931, and this led to his exile. The army intervened again during the Second Republic and lastly in 1936. It was this last intervention that was to lead to civil war.

The army was unpopular with the people. It had a reputation for brutality, it was expensive and required heavy taxes to maintain. The army had also proved ineffective when it lost the Spanish Empire during the 19th century, and lost the war with America in 1898. It had also struggled to keep control of Morocco between 1906 and 1926.
The army was in need of reform. It was too big, and had too many officers. The upper and middle classes, however, defended their interests, as they dominated the officer corps. The army was generally conservative, but the ‘Africanistas’ – those who were experienced in the wars in Morocco – were the most traditional and nationalistic.

The role of the church

The Catholic Church was rich and powerful in Spain, and there had been disputes between church and state throughout the 19th century. The state had guaranteed the role of the church in education and in elements of the economy, and the church had used its wealth to gain considerable political and social influence. It used its power to support social, political and economic conservatism and was opposed to modernizing and liberal forces. The aristocracy was closely tied to the church; they made up the vast majority of senior clergy, and provided much of the funding for the church. This meant the church was inclined to defend the rights and status of the upper classes, which led to resentment amongst the poor. In many urban areas there were protests against the church, although it was more popular in the rural areas.

Economic causes

The plight of the agricultural workers was a key factor in the discontent that led to the civil war. Spain was mainly an agricultural economy, and agriculture was the main source of employment. Unfortunately, there were fundamental problems that made it inefficient. It did not provide sufficient food and work was only seasonal. There was the need for workers to migrate in search of work – most lived in abject poverty and the gap between rich and poor was vast. In the centre and south of Spain, land was owned in huge estates, the latifundia, by the ‘Grandees’ who dominated the political system. In the north, peasants owned small plots of land, but often these were too small to make an adequate living.

Rioting and disorder often broke out in the countryside. The Civil Guard were deployed to ruthlessly repress any disorder. With no support from the church, some looked to groups such as the anarchists, who argued for the redistribution of land. Yet many of the Catholic small landholders were very conservative and resistant to socialist or anarchist ideas. The conservatism was exploited by the Catholic Agrarian Federation, which provided support for farmers in return for their rejection of socialist ideas; these same farmers were later to support Franco and to fight on his side during the war.

Industrially there was also the need for modernization and reform. Apart from in the north, there had been little Spanish industrialization in the 19th century. Expansion was limited by endemic poverty. Workers in the towns, meanwhile, faced low wages, long hours, unregulated working conditions, poor housing and little in the way of welfare provision. This situation led to the growth of trade unionism. But the trade unions competed with each other (for example the CNT and UGT). The unions failed to achieve anything substantial, as the employers could always find alternative labour sources from the countryside. The workers’ political parties had no real political power. With no legal means of improving their situation, violent uprising appealed to many as the means to effect change.

Spain’s neutrality during World War I facilitated a short period of economic boom. With the increase of exports, however, there were also inflation and shortages, working-class living standards went down and working-class militancy increased. By the early 1920s, there were major economic problems, and this led to violent conflict between employers and employees particularly in industrial cities in Catalonia.
The role of the regions

A significant cause of tension was the ongoing struggle between the centralist state and Catalonia and the Basque provinces, which wanted decentralization and independence. The Catalans and the Basques had their own separate languages and cultures, and by the early 20th century they had their own industrialized economies and churches. Primo de Rivera took back the self-governing rights of Catalonia, and these separatist forces supported the Republican movement that overthrew Alfonso in 1931 (see below). (De Rivera was an experienced military official before becoming Prime Minister in 1923. He ruled Spain as a dictator until 1930.)

Political opposition

There were a number of groups opposed to the political status quo in Spain, and each would play a part in the political divisions that led to violent conflict in 1936. The liberal movement in Spain had achieved little in opposing conservative forces in the 19th century, although they remained a political force and supported the revolution that ousted the King in 1931. The Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE; Spanish Socialist Party) had grown in urban areas in the late 19th century, but had minimal impact, whereas the UGT was more visible in organizing strikes and protests in the urban regions. In addition, following the Bolshevik revolution, a small Communist Party had emerged. The socialists, as with the liberals, played a significant role in the revolution of 1931, but the parties became divided over what reforms should take place. The more moderate socialists were led by Indalecio Prieto, and the radicals were led by Largo Caballero.

The anarchists were also a major political group in Spain; as previously suggested, this was mainly due to their demand for the redistribution of land, which was popular with the peasants. The anarchists argued for revolutionary methods and boycotted all democratic processes. Their trade union was the CNT, which like the UGT was active in organizing strikes and protests. In addition, there was a more extreme anarchist faction called the Federación Anarquista Ibérica (FAI; Spanish Anarchist Federation), which perpetrated bombings and assassinations.

The fall of the monarchy and the establishment of the Second Republic

King Alfonso XIII (1885–1931) was not a modernizer. The impact of military defeat in Morocco, and the post-World War I Depression, put pressure on the King, and after 12 unsuccessful governments during the period 1918–23 Alfonso did not resist the coup of General Primo de Rivera.

De Rivera tried to establish an authoritarian right-wing regime to redress Spain’s problems, similar to the Italian fascist model. He started various infrastructure programmes for railways, roads and electrification, as well as irrigation schemes. Industrial production developed at three times the rate of output before 1923 and he ended the war in Morocco in 1925. Nevertheless, he ran up massive debts that put Spain into a dreadful situation when the Wall Street Crash came. He managed to alienate most of the powerful elements of society, including the landowners and the army. Thus De Rivera resigned in 1930, having not resolved Spain’s economic problems, or brought about long-term political stability. It seemed that dictatorship as a solution to Spain’s problems had failed. After municipal elections in April showed support for the San Sebastián Pact coalition of parties (republicans, liberals, socialists and Catalans), the King went into voluntary exile. This time neither the church nor the army intervened to save the King – there seemed nothing they could put in his place. A ‘velvet revolution’ had occurred and the Second Republic was established.
CIVIL WAR CASE STUDY 1: THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR (1936–39)

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Review questions

1. Draw a mind map or spider diagram of the key issues dividing Spain by 1931.
2. Explain the events that led to the fall of King Alfonso in 1931.
3. Looking at the long-term issues in Spain and the political events of the 19th century, what problems was the Second Republic likely to face? Do you consider that war was inevitable by mid 1931?

Short-term causes of the Spanish Civil War: political polarization

Timeline of events – 1931–36

1931 Apr Second Spanish Republic proclaimed
1933 Nov Spanish right wins general election
1934 Oct Asturias rising
1936 Feb Popular Front government elected
   July Army rising

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Picture analysis

A symbolic representation of the Second Republic.

Question

What image is given here of the Second Republic? (Look carefully at all the symbolism in the painting.)
Between 1931 and 1936, Spain became politically polarized. You may have already decided in your answers to the review question 3 on p.230 that civil war in Spain was very likely given the long-term structural problems and clear divisions that already existed in the 19th century. Nevertheless, it is important to note the following: ‘…in 1931 when the Second Republic was established, no-one, except a tiny minority on the lunatic fringe on the extreme right or left, believed that Spain’s problems could be solved only by war’ (Paul Preston, *Modern History Review*, September 1991). The events of the Second Republic were thus central in bringing about a situation, only five years later, in which large numbers of people thought war was inevitable, if not desirable.

The Left Republic (April 1931–November 1933)

In the elections that followed Alfonso’s departure, the centre-left won with the objective of modernizing Spain. The government declared a new constitution, stating that Spain was a ‘democratic republic of workers of all classes’. Manuel Azaña became the President and leading figure in the new regime. However, the key issues causing tension in Spain before the ‘velvet revolution’ of 1931 continued to dominate the political, economic and social atmosphere under the new left-wing government.

Azaña addressed the issue of the church’s power. His speeches were anticlerical, and an attempt was made to separate the church and state, and to limit church powers. The church was no longer in control of education, and the state payment of the clergy was to be stopped gradually over a two-year period. The power of the army was also attacked; the government attempted to reduce numbers by offering early retirement on full pay, an offer taken up by 50 per cent of officers. The military academy of Saragossa was closed (Franco had been its director). Yet this policy backfired to a certain extent, as not only was it expensive for the government, but it meant that the army was radicalized; those who remained in the army were the conservative and nationalist core, including the Africanistas.

The desperate economic problems that existed in Spain had been exacerbated by the Depression: agricultural prices were tumbling, wine and olive exports fell and land had gone out of cultivation. Peasant unemployment was rising. The effects were also being felt industrially; iron production fell by one-third and steel by almost one-half. Largo Caballero was Minister of Labour, and he initiated an extensive land redistribution programme, with compensation for landowners. In 1932, a law enabled the state to take over estates and to redistribute land to the peasants. Yet the government did not have the money for this change, and fewer than 7,000 families had benefited from the programme by 1933. The right saw this as a major threat to its interests, and an attempt to copy the Soviet system.

Civil unrest and violence continued under the Left Republic, and it dealt with its perpetrators brutally. The government introduced the Assault Guard in an attempt to produce a more left-wing military force. There were risings by both the right (General José Sanjurjo in 1932) against the reforms, and by the left (a good example was the Casas Viejos anarchist rising in 1933 – see below) against the slow pace of change. At this time, the risings were suppressed, as the majority of the army remained loyal.

As for the regional issues, Catalonia was given its own parliament, and some powers including law and order and dual control over education. Right-wing groups were angered by this change, as they saw it as a move towards independence for the regions and the break-up of Spain.

Each reform was perceived as an attack on one or more right-wing groups, i.e. the church, army, landowners or industrialists. A new right-wing party, the Confederación Española de
Derechas Autónomas (CEDA; Spanish Confederation of the Autonomous Right), was formed to defend church and landlords. CEDA was led by José María Gil-Robles and was modelled on the German Nazi Party. Indeed, the political divisions within Spain seemed to increase under the Second Republic. The right wing opposed the reforms, sometimes with violence.

Although some historians see the failure of land reform as central to the failure of the government during this period, historian Paul Preston has argued that the right wing was in any case never going to give the regime a chance. Azaña also did himself a disservice when in January 1933 government guards set fire to houses in the village of Casas Viejas near Cádiz in an attempt to ‘smoke out’ a group of anarchists. Twenty-five people were killed. This incident lost the left-wing Republic a lot of working-class support, and led even the socialists to withdraw support from Azaña, who resigned in 1933.

The Right Republic (November 1933–February 1936)

In the elections of 1933, the Republic swung to the right, with the right-wing and centrist parties benefiting from the disunity of the left. Although CEDA was the largest party, the President resisted giving Gil-Robles power. However, CEDA forced the government’s hand in October 1934 by withdrawing support. Gil-Robles was made War Minister and two other CEDA party members were given cabinet posts.

The new government ruled for two years in what became known as the black years, because they embarked on systematically reversing the Left Republic’s reforms. Church control was restored over education and the clergy were again to be paid by the state. Azaña’s key economic reform – the land programme – was halted. Catalonia attempted to resist interference, and declared itself independent after CEDA joined the government. Its autonomy was suspended after the Asturian miners’ uprising in 1934. This rebellion was put down by troops, including Moroccan forces. Threats from the left of a ‘general strike’ increased. Historians have argued that the violent suppression of this uprising increased the likelihood of a civil war in Spain. In addition, the right lost the support of the Basques, who now backed the left wing. Violence was widespread.

The destabilization of the Spanish electoral system

It is worth noting that the Spanish electoral system ensured that only a small swing in the number of votes cast had a huge effect on the parliamentary system. Thus, although there was only a minor shift of votes from the left to the right, there was a big change in parliamentary power. The same was to happen in 1936 when the Popular Front gained control. The instability created by the electoral system was a contributory factor to the breakdown of the Second Republic.

The political response to the Right Republic was divided. Caballero was more extreme in his speeches than the more moderate Prieto. He suggested that CEDA was the Spanish Nazi party and that the left should seek a Soviet-style solution for Spain. Thus, he articulated the parallels in Spanish politics to the broader European political landscape.

In response, Gil-Robles demanded a shift to a more authoritarian approach to control the communists in Spain. This response led to more cooperation between the left’s factions: socialists, anarchists, syndicalists and now communists. Indeed, Prieto attempted to find some common ground between the left and centre groups to enable them to take on the right wing.
The Popular Front (February–July 1936)

The right wing disintegrated as the economic and the political situation deteriorated, and in the elections of February 1936, the ‘Popular Front’, which was an anti-fascist pact made up of various left-wing groups including the socialists and the communists, was victorious. However, here was the same policy that was being advocated by Stalin in his ‘Popular Front’ policy from 1935. Thus, the Popular Front was for many in Spain a final attempt to uphold democracy and peace, but others associated it with Stalin and the more extreme communist supporters.

The manifesto promoted by President Azaña, now returned to power, was liberal and not radical. Nevertheless, the government wanted to restore the reforms of the 1931–33 regime, and political prisoners were released. But there was still no political consensus; Caballero’s socialists did not join the government and the right would not accept the restoration of reforms.

The anarchists encouraged peasants to seize land, which led to an increase in violence in the countryside. They also openly recruited for their militias and organized bombings and assassinations. Open conflict between the anarchist FAI and fascist CEDA and Falange youth movements increased. The government again faced increasing disorder. In May, the CNT called a general strike, and there were several strikes throughout June. The right wing believed that Spain was in the early throes of a left-wing revolution.

Immediate causes of the Spanish Civil War

The victory of the left in the 1936 elections threw the right-wing CEDA into turmoil. Gil-Robles began to use his funds to support military plans for a coup. In fact, military officers began planning for a coup as soon as the Popular Front gained power. An extreme nationalist group of junior officers joined with the senior Africanista officers, including Mola and Franco. The catalyst for the coup was the murder of a popular CEDA leader on 13 July 1936.

Azaña knew that there were plans for a coup, and attempted to prevent it by moving key military figures to remote posts. However, they had already made their plans and set a date for the coup – 18 July 1936. The conspirators made contact with the fascist Falange and the monarchist ‘Carlist’ group. Spain was clearly polarized between groups inspired by the Soviets, who feared the fascists, and the right, which was inspired by Hitler and Mussolini and feared the communists.

When the details of the coup were discovered, the coup was initiated earlier, on 17 July, from Morocco. It spread to the mainland, and was successful in taking northern Spain and parts of Andalusia. Yet the rising failed in the main industrial areas, and the rebels did not take Madrid. Half the army had remained loyal to the Republic. Thus the coup overall was unsuccessful, and, had it remained a Spanish affair, it is quite possible that the Republicans would have won.

**STUDENT STUDY SECTION**

**Review questions**

1. To what extent did economic issues lead to a civil war?
2. What was the impact of international events on the growing divisions in Spain?

**Class debate**

Divide the class into three groups. Each group needs to argue one of the following:

- The right wing was responsible for the Spanish Civil War
- The left wing was responsible for the Spanish Civil War
- Both left and right were equally responsible for the Spanish Civil War

Falange

Falange (Phalanx) was founded by Primo de Rivera, the son of the former dictator, in 1933. By early 1936, it had 8,000 members (mainly students). They had a ‘blue shirted uniform’. The Falange demanded a strong authoritarian leadership, but was also committed to radical social change.
 Document analysis

Document A

When considering which side, the Right or Left can be held responsible for causing the Civil War, the debate often focuses on which side departed from democratic and legal means first. The Socialists are held responsible, by some, for refusing to join the Popular Front government which in turn concerned the Right; they thought this could be because the Socialists were now intent on revolution. The Right then planned the coup to prevent this.

In terms of which side resorted to violence first, it could be viewed as the Left in attempting to seize power in the Asturias Rising – but the right had attempted this earlier, in 1932 in the Sanjurjo Rising. In the end most historians agree that it was the right’s coup that triggered the general conflict.


Document B

Faced with the difficulties of modernising a backward economy and social structure in a country without strong democratic traditions, and against the background of the Depression, the Republic was facing insurmountable problems by 1936. Civil War may not have been inevitable but certainly did not come as a surprise.

From Patricia Knight, The Spanish Civil War, 1998

Question

Explain the key points made by Antony Beevor in Document A and Patricia Knight in Document B.

Research question

Salvador Dali painted ‘Soft Construction with Boiled Beans (Premonition of Civil War)’ in 1936. In pairs, research Dali’s motives in painting this picture and what the images in the picture represent with regard to Spain and war.
The course of the Spanish Civil War

With the assistance of Nazi Germany, General Franco airlifted 24,000 experienced troops of the Army of Africa to Spain. It was the fact that Hitler responded to Franco’s pleas for help, that kept Franco’s efforts alive. Once on the Spanish mainland, he used a policy of terror as his forces moved towards Madrid in August. Franco’s success was complemented by the achievements of General Emilio Mola, who took territory in the north (see map).

The army coup had aimed to crush the ‘left revolution’, but had instead politicized and radicalized many Spaniards towards the left. The supporters of the Republican regime of 1936 became known as the ‘Loyalists’, and those that supported the rebels called themselves ‘Nationalists’. Divisions could generally be drawn by class: the workers supporting the Republic and the middle and upper classes the Nationalists. The Nationalists also had the support of much of the church. However, alliances could also be accidental, depending on where they were when the war developed. The peasants of the north and central Spain tended to be Nationalists, while the landless labourers of the south followed the Republicans. The Basques and Catalans supported the Republic, as it had backed their autonomous ambitions.

Although the Nationalists made gains in the first weeks of the war, the Republic retained some advantages. It remained in control of most major cities and key industrial areas, it had Spain’s gold reserves, and important elements of the military – most of the air force and navy – remained loyal. Yet as you can see from the timeline and the maps below, the Nationalists were able to make steady progress in pushing back the Republic.

Timeline of the Spanish Civil War – 1936–39

Key

- Republican held areas
- Nationalist held areas


Republican- and Nationalist-held territory, July 1936.
1936
Jul  Franco's forces airlifted from Morocco to southern Spain
Aug  Britain and France begin policy of non-intervention
4 Sep  Largo Caballero forms new Republican government
13 Sep  San Sebastián taken by Nationalists
Oct  Republic incorporates militias into new Popular Army
1 Oct  Franco becomes head of Nationalist government and supreme military commander
29 Oct  Soviet intervention begins; German and Italian planes bomb Madrid
6 Nov  Republican government leaves Madrid for Valencia
23 Nov  Nationalists abandon attempt to take Madrid

1937
Feb  Nationalist offensive to cut the links between Madrid and Valencia fails at the battle of Jarama. Russian tanks and planes play a crucial role in the battle
8 Feb  Fall of Málaga to the Nationalists
March  Nationalist offensive to tighten the pressure on Madrid from the north fails at the battle of Guadalajara. This was a major defeat for the Italian Army, and again Soviet equipment was vital to Republican success
Apr  Franco unites Carlists, fascists and monarchists into one movement
26 Apr  German Condor Legion bombs and destroys Guernica
15 May  Fall of Largo Caballero
17 May  Juan Negrín forms new government
19 Jun  Fall of Bilbao to the Nationalists; end of Basque independence
Jul  Republican offensive to break the siege of Madrid to the west fails at Brunete
Aug  Republican offensive to break out from Madrid to the north-east fails at Belchite
Sep–Oct  Nationalists captured rest of northern Spain
Dec  Newly organized Republican Popular Army captures Teruel in central Spain.

1938
Feb  Nationalists retake Teruel and launch the strategically crucial advance to the Mediterranean to cut Catalonia off from the rest of Republican Spain
Apr  Nationalists reach the Mediterranean at Vinaroz. Republican Spain cut in two
Jul  Republican offensive on the River Ebro fails
Nov  Nationalists drive Republicans back across River Ebro. Nationalists march on Barcelona

1939
Feb  Barcelona falls to Nationalists
28 Mar  Nationalists enter Madrid
1 Apr  Franco announces end of war.
Why did the Nationalists win the Spanish Civil War?

We can analyze the reasons for the Nationalist victory by considering the weaknesses of the Republicans versus the strengths of the Nationalists.

Republican weaknesses

**Political disunity**

Caballero became head of a coalition government in September 1936. His rule was weakened by the fact that the Republicans were politically divided. Indeed, Republicans subscribed to widely different ideologies. The key divisions were between the communists and socialists, who believed that the ‘revolution’ should now be postponed until the war was won, and the anarchists, who argued that the war could only be won through revolutionary policies. The anarchists, dominant in Catalonia, Aragon and Andalusia, encouraged ‘revolution from below’ in the areas they controlled, and some historians suggest that this added a crucial hurdle for the Republic, as they had to try to regain their centralized control. The communists/socialists had more influence in Madrid and Valencia. The regions of Catalonia, the Basque region and Asturias became virtually independent.

The war generally increased the popularity of the communists. For example, in July 1936 the Spanish Communist Party numbered around 40,000 members, but by October 1937 it had 400,000 members. The Communist Party exploited the fact that it was the only Republican group with clear foreign support – from the USSR. However, to retain control the communists often used ‘terror’ tactics, which led to some resistance even in sympathetic territories (for example, the ‘May Days’ in Barcelona in 1937 – see below). In addition, the communists and socialists wanted victory in the war to strengthen the Second Republic, whereas the anarchists wanted a new revolutionary regime.

The lack of unity between the forces of the Republic is exemplified in the four days of street fighting in Barcelona in May 1937 – communists and socialists on one side and the anarchists and POUM on the other. This fighting became known as the ‘May Days’. As a result of this turmoil, Caballero was replaced by the Marxist Juan Negrín, the communists’ choice, as leader. Negrín attacked the POUM and anarchist leaders, who were imprisoned or executed. His more authoritarian regime lasted until March 1939, when there was military a coup in Madrid.

**Military problems**

The Republic lacked strong military leadership. There was no unified command, and the communists and anarchists would not work together. Indeed, the anarchist militias and the Basques refused to be led by a central command structure. The Basques would not permit their forces to defend areas outside their own territory. In addition, loyal army officers, with potentially valuable experience, were not trusted by the Republic.

In the first vital weeks of the war, the Republic was dependent on ineffective militia units that formed haphazardly. This meant that they fought a series of local conflicts rather than one clear overall campaign. Different fronts operated separately, although to some extent this situation was due to the territory held by the Republicans. Many battlefields were not within range of their air force, and they failed to sustain offensive campaigns in 1937 at Brunete, Belchite and Teruel. Indeed, it was not until the end of 1936 that the Republicans started to replace militias with a coherent ‘Popular Army’.

**Economic problems**

In areas under anarchist control, industries, public utilities and transport were taken over by workers’ committees; in the countryside collective farms were set up. However, neither
of these systems could supply the needs of the Republic to fight the war. Some historians have argued that this situation was due more to the impact of the war than to a badly run government, but most believe that the collectives impaired the Republic’s war effort. Production in the key area of Catalan fell by two-thirds between 1936 and 1939, and the Republic was increasingly affected by food and raw material shortages. Inflation was also a problem, reaching 300 per cent during the war. At the same time wages only increased by 15 per cent.

The international body known as the Non-Intervention Committee (NIC), established by Britain and France in 1936 for the purpose of preventing the foreign influx of support to the warring parties in Spain, also had an impact on the Republic. It starved the Republic of all credit; the USSR was the only country willing to trade with it. Even this trade had to be paid for using the entire gold reserves of Spain. Paul Preston has argued that communist control ultimately improved the situation by centralizing control, but this happened too late to save the Republic.

**Foreign Assistance**

Foreign aid has been seen as a critical factor in determining the outcome of the Spanish Civil War. Some historians have suggested its role has been exaggerated; nevertheless, there is no doubt that the foreign assistance given to the Republic was far more limited than that afforded to the Nationalists. The main ally of the Republic was the USSR, and it was the Soviets who initially saved the Republic and enabled it to fight a civil war in 1936–37. The Soviet aircraft and tanks were better early on than their German and Italian counterparts. However, no Soviet troops were sent to fight; they committed only 1,000 aircraft, 750 tanks and some advisers. In addition, this aid had to be paid for by the Republic, which sent, as we have seen, all of its gold reserves to Moscow.

The other key allies of the Republicans were the International Brigades, which were organized by the Soviet Comintern. Some 35,000 foreign volunteers went to fight in Spain. Although their role seems to have been significant in the defence of Madrid, overall their impact was limited. In 1938, the Soviets withdrew their support and the International Brigades went home, a final blow for the Republic.

Although France sent aid initially, the support ended when it joined Britain in the policy of non-intervention. This policy was primarily driven by anti-communist sentiments, but it also meant that Hitler and Mussolini had no opposition from the Western democracies. This policy has been condemned by many historians. Francisco José Romero Salvadó writes of the NIC that:

> ...it was never more than a sham which actually worked in favour of the insurgents. A legal government was equated to a group of seditious generals. The Republic was hindered by an arms embargo from mounting an effective defence and a perfect cloak was provided for the Axis powers to continue their activities. Under British auspices, the committee would remain until the end of the war an empty talking shop. It was a perfect weapon to prevent France from making a more direct commitment, preserve consensus at home and avoid confrontation with Germany and Italy.

*From Francisco J. Romero Salvadó, Modern History Review, February 1995*
Nationalist strengths

Political unity
The major strength of the Nationalists was unity. In July 1936, however, the Nationalists were almost as divided as the Republicans. Their only common aim was to overthrow the government. Initially, Generals Mola, Goded and Sanjurjo seemed more important than Franco, but after the first few weeks Franco had emerged as the leader. In September 1936, the generals decided that they needed a unified command. It was agreed that Franco would assume political and military control. He became head of government and head of state. This rise to power was due not only to other leaders dying, or doing badly in the war, but also to his position in command of the Army of Africa and because important German aid came through him.

To achieve political unity, Franco needed to control both the Carlists and the Falange. In 1937 their numbers were impressive: 70,000 and one million respectively. In April, Franco merged the two parties. This new party, Falange Española Tradicionalista (FET; Spanish Traditionalist Phalanx), was under his control.

Franco was also assisted by support from the church, which opposed the left and its secular ideologies. From the pulpit, church leaders would denounce atheist communism and call for a crusade to protect Christian civilization. Indeed, Franco used a mixture of propaganda and terror in the areas under his command.

Although some historians argue that the Soviet involvement in the war (which may have been Stalin’s deliberate policy) led to its extension, others have suggested that Franco gained...
power and authority from his victories on the battlefield, and that it was he who extended the war to enhance his own dictatorial power. The nationalistic politics of Franco were not undermined by the foreign support given by Germany and Italy.

**Military unity**
Militarily the Nationalists initially had similar problems to the Republicans – ‘columns’ of Carlist and Falangist militias attempted to operate alongside regular army units. In contrast, however, these militias were effectively drawn into the regular army. The Army of Africa played a significant role. It contained the best troops in the country, and it could cover for other forces while they were being trained and equipped. In open and mobile offensive operations, the Army of Africa proved itself the most effective force in the entire Civil War.

The unified command was key to the Nationalists’ success. Franco’s leadership was accepted by the other generals and right-wing parties. Ultimately, the Italian forces were under his command too. They were successful in pushing on and winning offensives, and were also able to adopt effective defensive tactics during the Republican offensive campaigns of 1937.

The Nationalists had sound communications, and managed to equip their growing army throughout the civil war. They could also rely on their large number of junior officers. Franco was an able military and political leader. He would often not pursue more radical advice given to him by his German and Italian advisers. His concern for his troops ensured that the majority was obedient.

**Economic advantage**
The business community backed the Nationalists, which meant they could get credit to buy war supplies. Also, by September 1936 they were in control of the main food-producing areas. After their successes in 1937 in the north, they added the main industrial areas to their control.

The Nationalists also benefited from international trade and credit, which was not restricted. It has been estimated that the USA gave $700 million in credit during the course of the war. This meant that Franco’s forces could buy all the rubber and oil they needed, acquired from US companies.

**Foreign assistance**
As suggested above, some historians have argued that foreign aid was a crucial factor in the Nationalists’ victory over the Republic. Hugh Thomas writes in his 1961 book *The Spanish Civil War* that the conflict ‘became an international crisis whose solution was decided by external circumstances.’ Indeed, the rebels benefited from more aid, which was of a better quality than that given to the Republicans, and its supply was continuous throughout the war. The Germans had airlifted Franco’s Army from Morocco to the mainland in the first stage of the war, at a vital moment in the conflict. The Germans also committed the Condor Legion – 10,000 troops, 800 aircraft and 200 tanks. The Italians sent 70,000–75,000 troops, 750 planes and 150 tanks. The Portuguese sent 20,000 troops and permitted aid to pass over their long border with Spain. This assistance was significant in several ways. It allowed the Nationalists to fight in the first place, owing to the German airlift, but German planes also gave the Nationalists control of the air from 1937. Franco’s command was not compromised, and after an Italian defeat at Guadalajara, they were taken under Spanish command. The key benefit for the Nationalists, however, was not the manpower, as most of their armies were Spanish, it was the modern equipment they received.
### Overview: foreign intervention

In general, the decision by foreign governments to get involved (or not get involved) in the Spanish Civil War was a result of both ideology and self-interest. Foreign intervention had two main effects:

- It both lengthened and intensified the war
- It meant that the Spanish issues that caused the war were overtaken and submerged by the wider ideological battles taking place in Europe.

### Britain

Britain took the lead in establishing the NIC in September 1936. Britain’s fear was that the war would spread and become a general European conflict. However, three of the key members of the NIC – Germany, Italy and the USSR – ignored the NIC completely and became the main foreign forces in Spain. In addition, Britain’s non-intervention policies were limited and tended to favour the Nationalists. They focused on preventing aid going to the Republic and allowed the Nationalists, but not the Republicans, to use Gibraltar as a communications base. In December 1936, they signed a trading agreement with the Nationalists that permitted British companies to trade with the rebel forces. The USA also allowed American companies to trade with the Nationalists, such as the Texaco oil company and General Motors. It would seem that Spain was sacrificed to the policy of appeasement in the same vein as Czechoslovakia; Britain wanted to avoid a general war at all costs, and did not want the civil war to damage its relations with Italy or Portugal.

### STUDENT STUDY SECTION

**Review activities**

Summarize the key points made in the text in a grid:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nationalists</th>
<th>Republicans</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political strengths/weaknesses</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Military strengths/weaknesses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic advantages/disadvantages</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign assistance</td>
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**Class debate**

Divide the class into two groups. One side will argue that the Nationalists’ strengths won the Spanish Civil War, the other will argue that it was due to Republican weaknesses. The motion is:

‘The strengths of the Nationalists won the Civil War’

Each side must have a series of thematic and coherent arguments. To gain a point, they have to support arguments with clear evidence.
Cartoon analysis

Question

What is the message of this cartoon with regard to the Non-Intervention Committee?

France

The French support for the Republic was inconsistent, and this reflected the complexity of its position towards the civil war. It was not in French interests to have a right-wing regime on its border that could join with Italy and Germany to encircle France. But French politics was also polarized, and the government feared a revolt in France should it fully commit in Spain. France was also reliant on Britain, which was more anti-Republic, for its foreign policy options. In the end, the French restricted themselves mainly to humanitarian assistance. The impact of the French pursuing non-intervention with Britain dealt a fatal blow to the Republic, which could have benefited greatly from support from this large country on its border. The resulting reliance of the Republic on the Soviets polarized the politics of the Spanish Civil War, and associated the Republic with ‘Soviet communism’. Nevertheless, the French did not stop citizens from joining the International Brigades, which were mainly organized in France. In addition, France was the main centre for the coordination of Soviet aid.

USSR

The USSR’s reasons for supporting the Republic were not simply ideological. The Spanish conflict in fact presented Stalin with a dilemma. The emergence of another fascist state in Europe would strengthen Hitler’s position in Europe. On the other hand, a Republic victory could panic Britain and France into an alliance with Hitler against the threat of communism. Such an outcome would ruin Stalin’s policy of bringing Britain and France into an alliance with the USSR to contain Hitler. Stalin was divided between these two concerns. Initially he welcomed the NIC, but seeing that Germany and Italy were able to ignore its rules, he then went on to organize the transport of international volunteers to Spain and also weapons from Russia. He actually withdrew from the NIC in October 1936.
Although some historians have argued that Franco protracted the Spanish Civil War to enhance his own power, Stalin also had a motive for dragging the fighting out. The war would drain the resources of Germany, and the longer it went on the more likely it was for the war to develop into a general war. This general war would then be waged on the other side of Europe, far from the borders of the USSR.

Nevertheless, Stalin withdrew Soviet support in June 1938. Not only did the Republic seem to be losing, but it now seemed that the Western democracies were set on appeasing the fascist dictators. Stalin’s aim of creating a bloc to resist Hitler ended when Czechoslovakia was abandoned by Britain and France in the Munich Agreement in September 1938.

Germany

Hitler’s Germany was cautious when the appeal for help came from the rebels. He was not yet ready for a general European war. Hermann Göring was important in the decision to support the rebels. Both he and Hitler wanted to stop the spread of communism, but Göring also wanted to test out his Luftwaffe in live conditions. There were economic and strategic benefits for Germany too; raw materials such as iron ore could be gained, and deploying to Spain would give Germany the potential to hamper Anglo-French maritime communications.

Hitler did not think the war would last long, and only wanted to commit limited aid. Although a member of the NIC (it left in May 1937), Germany supplied the Nationalists through Portugal. As well as its support of Franco in the initial stages of the war, the Condor Legion perpetrated the now infamous bombing of Guernica and they played a pivotal role supporting the nationalists in taking Catalonia.

German involvement was important to the outcome of the war, not only as it played crucial military roles at critical times during the fighting, but also as other governments were deterred from getting involved due to their presence.

Italy

Italy gave the most assistance of all the foreign powers. Mussolini wanted to be involved for a number of reasons. First, involvement would be in line with his anti-communist/socialist/democratic outlook and his pro-fascist stance. Second, he wished to enhance his influence as the key power in the Mediterranean and thereby demonstrate Italy’s might. Third, a fascist victory would weaken France and prevent French left-wing influence in Spain. Another fascist power would encircle France and put pressure on French colonies in North Africa.

As we have seen, the Italians not only sent 70,000–75,000 troops, they contributed many planes, tanks and weapons. Italian bombers attacked Spanish cities, and their submarines were a constant threat to supplies. Italy ignored its membership of the NIC. Historians suggest that although Italy sent many troops, the significant element of its intervention was its air and naval support, which helped the Nationalists to secure victory. As a wider result, the relationship between Italy and Germany was cemented in Spain.

Portugal

Portugal was an important part of the foreign contribution to Franco’s victory. Indeed, it was the only foreign force not compromised at any time by membership of the NIC. Not only did Portugal send 20,000 troops, but it was fundamental to supplying the rebels along the Spanish–Portuguese border, and provided a base for communications. Portugal’s long-term alliance with Britain led to the British being reluctant to counter its support for the Nationalists. This was, of course, an important benefit for Franco’s troops.
STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Read the following sources and answer the questions:

**Document A**

The Nationalists maintained that Guernica had been blown up by the Basques themselves, in order to discredit the blameless Nationalists. A later version said that Republican planes dropped bombs to detonate charges of dynamite placed in the sewers. Twenty years later it was still a crime in Franco’s Spain to say that Guernica had been destroyed by the Nationalists.

From David Mitchell, *The Spanish Civil War*, 1971

**Document B**

Our consciences were uneasy about it. After living through the raid we knew only too well that the destruction had come from the air. The Reds had hardly any planes, we knew that too. Amongst our own, we’d admit the truth: our side had bombed the town and it was a bad thing. ‘But what can we do about it now?’ we’d say. It was simply better to keep quiet.

From a statement by Juan Sangroniz, a Nationalist, quoted in Ronald Fraser, *Blood of Spain*, 1994

**Document C**

The Germans said the wind caused the bombs to drift eastwards [the target had been a bridge over the river]. In fact Guernica was a military target, being a communications centre close to the battle line. Retreating republican soldiers could only escape with any ease through Guernica because the bridge over the river was the last one before the sea. But if the aim of the Condor Legion was to destroy the bridge why did they not use their supremely accurate Stuka bombers? At least part of the aim must have been to cause maximum panic and confusion among civilians as well as soldiers. The use of incendiary bombs proves that some destruction of buildings and people other than the bridge must have been intended.

From Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 1977

Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica* has become the iconic image of the Spanish Civil War.
Questions

1. In what ways are the views expressed in Document A supported by the views in Document B?
2. What reasons are identified in Document C for the bombing of Guernica?

IBLP link – Communicators

As effective communicators, you should be able to express ideas and information confidently and creatively in a variety of ways – not just in your written work. Divide the class into groups.

Within each group, someone should take on one of the following roles:

- Spanish socialist from Barcelona
- Spanish Nationalist from Madrid
- French supporter of the Republican government
- German supporter of the Nationalist government
- Italian supporter of the Nationalist government
- Russian Stalinist supporter of the Republican government
- British non-interventionist
- American supporter of the Lincoln Brigade.

You must now write a speech, which should last around one minute, rallying people to join your forces fighting 'for freedom' in Spain. You must include details of why you believe your perspective to be right, and why people should fight or not intervene. Present your speech to your group, or to the whole class.

The nature of the Spanish Civil War

Although for the foreign powers the war was 'limited', for the Spanish it was a 'total' war as well as a civil war. Propaganda was used on both sides to 'dehumanize' the enemy, even though that enemy was from the same country. Atrocities were common. Meanwhile, the targeting of civilians in bombing raids, symbolized in the attack on Guernica, offered a chilling premonition of what was to come in World War II. There were no lines drawn between civilian and combatant.

Militarily, the Spanish Civil War seems to have been fought at a 'crossroads' in the evolution of modern warfare. For example, in some cases cavalry charges proved effective, as in the Nationalist attack north of Teruel in February 1938. However, the importance of new technology – particularly the dominance of airpower – in future wars became clear in Spain, shown by the crushing of the major Republican offensives of 1937 and 1938 by the combined arms of the Condor Legion. Indeed, one of the reasons that the war lasted so long was due to the fact that neither side managed consistently to gain control of the air. Control of the sea was also important, and the Italians played a significant role in maintaining supply routes for the Nationalists.

The war on land was at times similar to the attrition and stalemate battles of World War I. Defence remained easier than attack. In repeated attacks by both sides around Madrid, casualties were high, with attackers taking little ground. In other battles, the changing nature of land warfare could be seen; the tactics of Blitzkrieg were evolving, with the application of tanks, artillery and air bombardment to prepare an advance.

The Spanish Civil War did not develop into a guerrilla war because, as Antony Beevor writes in The Battle for Spain:

The conditions for a universal guerrilla war simply did not exist. The best-suited regions, with the right terrain, were insufficient to have stretched nationalist forces beyond capacity. But on thinly held fronts, many more nationalist troops could have been held down by commando actions … Franco did not so much win the war: the republican commanders, with the odds already stacked against them, squandered the courage and sacrifice of their troops and lost it.

Effects and results of the Spanish Civil War – Spain

Human cost

The civil war had brought great human and material destruction to Spain. Around 100,000 Republicans were killed during the war, and about 70,000 Nationalists. Moreover, the killing continued after the war, as Franco launched a terror campaign to eradicate opposition. It is estimated that a further 40,000–200,000 were killed during this period, known as the ‘White Terror’.

Thousands of Republicans and their sympathizers were held for years in concentration camps and prisons. Often Republican children were taken from their parents to be ‘re-educated’. Some were placed with reliable Nationalist/Catholic families, while others were sent to orphanages where they were indoctrinated against the views and actions of their own parents. Divisions and hatred remained in Spanish society for decades.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Research activity

Research the part played by women in the Spanish Civil War, and how the war affected their role in society.
Economic cost

Spain’s economy was devastated by the war. Some 10–15 per cent of its wealth was destroyed, and per capita income was 28 per cent lower in 1939 than in 1935. Seventy per cent of Madrid’s factory machinery needed to be replaced, and its communications systems, including the city’s tram network, had to be rebuilt. Around a third of its merchant shipping was out of action. There was high inflation due to the cost of fighting the war, and the method used to attempt to pay for it – printing money. The Republican land reform was reversed by Franco, and Spain’s agricultural economy remained inefficient and ineffective. Labourers had to tolerate periodic unemployment, and landowners were not interested in modernization. In addition, Spain had massive debts to pay. Due to the human cost of the war, there was a corresponding lack of skilled workers, and an overriding general labour shortage. Spain attempted to find foreign loans for investment, but the British demanded that debt was paid back first, and the Germans also wanted the Spanish to repay the cost of the aid sent to them before further investment was made.

The economy may have improved due to the outbreak of World War II. Franco seems to have attempted to gain leverage over Spain’s debt to Britain and France in August 1939, by offering to remain neutral and not ally Spain with Nazi Germany. He also had discussions with the Germans, presumably offering a similar exchange, in November and December. Once war broke out, Britain and France relented, and signed trade agreements with Spain (France in January, and then Britain in March 1940). But the German exploitation of Spain’s resources during World War II may also have weakened the economy. The original debt remained after the war, and this gave Britain, France and the USA influence in Franco’s Spain. Spain was in isolation after World War II, and suffered famine in 1946. With industrial output at a level below that of 1918, Spain’s economy may have been saved by aid from the right-wing Argentine dictator, Perón.

Nevertheless, in the longer term, as the Cold War took hold, Spain became less isolated, and with some reforms in the 1950s and 1960s it developed a powerful capitalist economy. Spain industrialized and also developed a strong service industry.

Political effects

Franco emerged from the war as Spain’s dictator. He remained in power until his death in 1975, ruling, as Paul Preston writes, ‘as if it were a country occupied by a victorious foreign army’. Franco’s regime declared that they had to save the country from communism. The White Terror that ensued led to the killing of thousands of Republicans and the exodus of half a million Spaniards, who fled to neighbouring countries. They included most of the intellectuals of Spain – teachers, lawyers, researchers, doctors and famous writers, poets, artists and musicians. Those that remained had to conform to Franco’s authoritarian, Catholic and conservative views.

In 1939, the Law of Political Responsibility made supporters of the Republicans (either before or during the war) liable to punishment, including confiscation of land, large fines or even the death sentence. The law allowed for the transfer of vast amounts of land from Republicans to the state.

The key objectives of the new regime were to restore the power of the privileged class and to control the working class. Wages were cut and all industrial political activism was outlawed. The CNT and the UGT were destroyed. Employment for those Republicans who had escaped imprisonment was almost impossible. In rural areas, the inequalities and iniquities of the social and working system, described earlier in this chapter, were preserved and maintained by the Civil Guard.
All of the Republic’s reforms concerning the church were repealed, and indeed the 1950s have been termed the ‘era of the national church.’ The historian Frances Lannon writes, ‘The Catholic Church enjoyed a degree of state support that was much greater than at any time since the 18th century. Government and church combined to preach order, hierarchy and discipline. The counter-revolution had triumphed.’ The church took up the cause of the workers, and created links with their movements; Patricia Knight argues this was an attempt to infiltrate and prevent any resurgent communist groups. The aspirations of the Basques and Catalans for autonomy were also ended. Use of Catalan, Basque and Galician languages was forbidden and all power was centralized in Madrid. As Preston writes, ‘behind the rhetoric of national and social unity, until the death of Franco every effort was made to maintain the division between the victors and the vanquished’.

The suppression and removal of all political opposition led to a period of political stability in Spain. Fear of state repression meant that Spain appeared more unified than it had been for decades. Nevertheless, the defeat of the fascist powers in World War II made Franco more vulnerable. Under pressure from the monarchists, Franco agreed to restore the King, but kept himself as head of state. The army also lost its pre-eminence in society after Spain’s last colony, Morocco, gained its independence in 1956. Without an empire to run, and with no real external or internal threat, the old-style Spanish Army became defunct.

Franco increasingly delegated control from the 1960s, and following his death a democracy was restored in 1977. But the results of the war and the Nationalist victory for Spain had meant that it was a country ‘frozen in time’. No modernization took place for 36 years. The rest of Europe shunned Spain until Franco died.

**Effects and results of the Spanish Civil War – international**

**USSR and communism**

The communists had been defeated in Spain, and this undermined their international credibility. In addition, Stalin’s cynical contribution to the Republican cause, and the divisions it fostered within the left wing, disillusioned many former supporters of the USSR. Thus, the Soviets lost a lot of intellectual sympathy in the West.

Although the war accentuated the hostility between the Soviets and the Germans, it also pushed Soviet foreign policy away from attempting to build an alliance with the Western powers in order to contain Germany, to one based on appeasement of Nazi Germany. It had become clear to Stalin, through their actions in the NIC, that neither Britain nor France would be a sound ally against Hitler’s expansionist ambitions. Stalin began to show his interest in a possible deal with Nazi Germany as early as December 1937. His viewpoint was strengthened when Britain decided to sacrifice both Czechoslovakia and Spain in September 1938; the Munich Agreement was the turning point.

**Hitler’s Germany and Mussolini’s Italy**

Hitler was able to gain valuable military lessons from the war. The importance of air power was highlighted in the initial transport of Franco’s forces to the mainland, as was the effectiveness of applying air cover for ground troops in *Blitzkrieg*. The Germans were also able to test their bullet-resistant fuel tanks, and they discovered that their armoured vehicles needed to be able to use radio contact. The bombing of civilians also seemed, to some extent, effective. These were all important factors in the success of Hitler’s campaign in Europe in 1939–40. However, some drew the conclusion in March 1937, when the Italians were defeated at Guadalajara, that *Blitzkrieg* would not work.
The war brought Germany and Italy together, as it further prevented a reconciliation between the members of the Stresa Front (see p.116). Britain’s and France’s non-intervention policies, and pursuit of appeasement, strengthened Hitler’s position. Germany also seemed to be the principal country ‘defending the world from communism.’

Cooperation between Italy and Germany had far-reaching consequences, the most important of which was the removal of Italian constraint on Hitler’s policy of expansion in Central Europe. Although he had clearly indicated in Mein Kampf that he intended to construct a Greater Germany, Hitler had been impeded by Mussolini’s own interest in Austria. Military involvement in Spain, however, absorbed Mussolini’s attention, allowing Hitler to carry out, without Italian opposition, the annexation of Austria in 1938.


Britain and France

The military lesson taken by Britain, that the ‘bomber will always get through’, seemed to give more credibility to their policy of appeasement. The suffering and terror of Spanish civilians who had endured the bombing of their towns and cities made it clear that another general European war would witness horrors on a scale never seen before. The polarized political nature of the foreign intervention forces also led to more support for appeasement – it seemed that the warring factions would and should battle it out and exhaust one another without the democracies being dragged into the conflict. The spread of communism, as it manifested itself in Spain, still appeared the greater threat. However, the apparent ‘weakness’ of Britain and France over Spain, and their wider policy of appeasement, led Hitler to change his perception of Britain. Although he had initially intended to avoid a war and attempt to ally himself with the British, by 1938 he was losing his respect for Britain. Therefore, Britain’s attempts to avert war by non-intervention actually encouraged Hitler to be more aggressive.

The USA

The USA remained ostensibly neutral, and although horrified by the atrocities on both sides in the Spanish Civil War, offered no tangible assistance. Indeed, the war strengthened the country’s isolationist sentiment. President Roosevelt did make the ‘Quarantine the Aggressors’ speech in October 1937, but words meant little to the dictators in Europe and the military regime in Japan.

The UN called for economic sanctions against Franco in 1946, and all its member states broke off diplomatic relations. In addition, Spain was excluded from the USA’s massive economic recovery package for post-war Europe, Marshall Aid. The initial plan in the West was to wait for a crisis in Spain to bring about the overthrow of Franco. Yet the Americans changed their perspective on Franco’s Spain as the Cold War developed with the USSR. Franco was clearly a strong anti-communist force and, therefore, the ‘enemy of my enemy is my friend’. This philosophy transformed into direct economic aid when the Cold War became global in 1950. In 1951, President Eisenhower agreed to the first American grant to Spain, and in return the Americans were permitted to use air bases in Spain. Spain became an ally of the USA and was permitted to join the UN.

Was the Spanish Civil War a cause of World War II?

A number of key factors suggest that the Spanish Civil War played a significant part in the causes of World War II:
It emboldened Hitler by increasing his popularity at home and abroad.
Hitler drew closer to his former enemy, Italy.
Hitler gained practical military lessons that he would later apply in the campaigns of 1940. It was a distraction for Britain and France and pushed the USA further into isolation.
It fostered a new direction for Soviet foreign policy, meaning that there could be no broad alliance in Europe to contain Hitler.

Alternatively, A.J.P. Taylor, in *The Origins of the Second World War*, concludes that the Spanish Civil War was ‘without significant effect’ in causing World War II.

### Essay work
Planning essays is an essential way to revise topics as you approach examinations. In pairs or groups, plan out the essays below. Your plan should include:
- An introduction written out in full
- The opening sentence for each paragraph setting out your ‘topic’
- Bullet points setting out the evidence to go in each paragraph
- A conclusion written out in full.

Each group should present its essay plan to the rest of the class. How much overlap of content is there between the different essay plans? Some hints are given for your planning in the first three essays.

#### Essay 1
Analyze the causes of the Spanish Civil War.
You could structure this essay thematically, and consider the key issues in the long term and the short term. Your analysis should then explain why there were tensions that intensified over time. Remember to include the ‘trigger’ of the civil war, as this explains why the war broke out when it did.
- Themes: 1898–1931 – Economic/Social/Political/Empire
- Themes: 1931–36 – Land reforms/Church reforms/Social unrest/Reaction of right/Popular Front
- Trigger: 1936 – The attempted coup.

#### Essay 2
What were the key effects of the Spanish Civil War?
You might want to include material from this chapter on the ‘nature’ of the war in this essay, as well as focusing on the more general results. It might be helpful for you to structure your essay in two parts: effects of the war internally on Spain, and then effects of the war externally on other countries. Remember to attempt to adopt a thematic approach.

#### Essay 3
What was the impact of foreign intervention in the Spanish Civil War?
You could discuss this question in terms of how the ‘nature’ of the war was affected by foreign intervention:
- Polarizing the complex political divisions in Spain
- Increasing the brutality and casualty rate
- Protracting the war.

You could then discuss this question in terms of how the ‘outcome’ of the war was affected by foreign intervention:
- Germany / Italy / Portugal: Strengthening the military capabilities of the Nationalists
- USSR: Weakening the political unity of the Republic, and then undermining its ability to wage war by withdrawing support
- NIC and Neutrals benefited the Nationalists.
Now attempt to make detailed plans for the following essay questions:

- In what ways, and to what extent, did social and religious divisions lead to war in Spain in 1936? © IBO 2007
- To what extent was the Spanish Civil War caused by divisions in Spain and in Spanish society? © IBO 2005
- Assess the impact of political and constitutional developments in Spain between 1930 and 1939. © IBO M01
- Why did the Constitutional Monarchy in Spain collapse in 1931? © IBO N00