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# THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

A Very Short Introduction

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# Chronology

1936

## July

- 17-18 Military rebellion begins in Spanish North Africa and spreads to garrisons in mainland Spain.
- 18-20 Rebellion defeated in Madrid and Barcelona.
- 24-25 French cabinet headed by parliamentary socialist Léon Blum stalls on its initial offer of military aid to the Spanish Republic.
- 28 Hitler and Mussolini each decide independently to aid military rebels. First planes arrive in Morocco to airlift the Army of Africa (commanded by Franco) to mainland Spain (Seville).

## August

Army of Africa fans out from Seville and begins its bloody march up through the south towards Madrid.

- 2 France announces its adherence to a policy of Non-Intervention.
- 14 Mass killings at Badajoz (Extremadura) after Franco's troops take the town.
- 15 British government bans the export of arms to Spain.
- 18 Federico García Lorca executed in Granada.
- 22 Madrid's Modelo prison is assaulted and political prisoners shot.
- 24 Soviet Union's first ambassador to Spain arrives in Madrid.
- 27-28 Aerial bombardment of Madrid begins.

**September**

- 3 Army of Africa takes Talavera, the last major centre on the southern advance to Madrid.
- 9 First meeting of Non-Intervention Committee in London.
- 18 Comintern executive agrees solidarity measures in support of the Spanish Republic, including recruitment of international volunteers to fight.
- 24 Anarcho-syndicalist CNT joins Catalan regional government.
- 25 Rebels issue decree forbidding political and trade union activity.
- 28 Franco's forces detour to Toledo, south-west of Madrid, to relieve garrison siege.
- 29 Soviet Union agrees to send arms to the Spanish Republic. Military junta appoints Franco to supreme political and military command of rebel zone.
- 30 Plá y Deniel, Bishop of Salamanca, issues a pastoral letter (entitled 'The Two Cities') defending the military rebels and in which, for the first time, the word 'crusade' is used to describe the Civil War. Republican government issues a decree signalling its intent to replace militia forces with a Popular Army subject to military discipline.

**October**

International Brigade volunteers begin to arrive.

- 1 Basque autonomy approved by Republican parliament.
- 7 Formation of autonomous Basque government under PNV leadership.
- 11 Amparo Barayón executed in Zamora.

**November**

- 6 Republican government moves to Valencia.
- 7 Battle for Madrid commences.
- 16 To assist Franco, Hitler dispatches Condor Legion, a special force equipped with latest German bomber and fighter aircraft and tanks.
- 18 Germany and Italy recognize Franco.

**December**

- 6 Mussolini agrees dispatch of an expeditionary force, Corpo di Truppe Volontarie (CTV), to assist Franco.
- 29 Pilar Espinosa executed in Candeleda (Avila).

1937

**January**

Mussolini massively increases supply of arms and troops to Franco.

- 2 British government makes 'gentleman's agreement' with Italy to maintain status quo in Mediterranean.
- 6 US establishes legal embargo on export of arms to Spain.

**February**

- 6-27 Battle of Jarama, on south-east Madrid front. First time in combat for the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Republican forces, with Russian tank and air support, stem the rebel offensive which threatened to cut the Madrid-Valencia highway.
- 7 Málaga taken by rebels, with Italian assistance. Refugees fleeing towards Almería are heavily bombed.

**March**

- 8-18 Battle of Guadalajara on north-east Madrid front. Mussolini's troops sustain first defeat after meeting in combat other Italians - Internationals from the Garibaldi Brigade. The stalemate around Madrid continues for the rest of the war.
- 30 General Mola begins rebel offensive on northern front (Vizcaya) and German Condor Legion bombs Durango.

**April**

- 19 Franco decrees unification of Falange and Carlists in a single party under his leadership. Establishment of short-lived Non-Intervention Committee sea patrol.
- 26 Basque capital of Guernica destroyed by German and Italian saturation bombing.

**May**

- 3-7 Street fighting and popular protests in Barcelona (the 'May Days').  
 17 Parliamentary socialist Juan Negrín becomes prime minister of a new Republican cabinet.  
 31 Germany and Italy withdraw from Non-Intervention Committee sea patrol.

**June**

- 3 Death of General Mola in aircrash.  
 16 Arrest of POUM leaders in Barcelona.  
 19 Bilbao falls to Franco's troops.  
 21 Blum cabinet resigns in France.  
 30 Portugal withdraws from Non-Intervention sea patrol agreement.

**July**

- 1 Collective letter from Spanish bishops endorses Franco regime.  
 6-26 Battle of Brunete on western Madrid front.

**August**

- Private religious ceremonies permitted once again in Republican Spain. Franco implements naval blockade of Republic's Mediterranean ports.  
 24 Republican military offensive on north-eastern (Aragon) front. Attacks from unknown sources begin on neutral ships making for Spanish Republican ports.  
 26 Franco's troops take Santander.

**September**

- 10 Nyon Conference of main European powers convenes to discuss attacks by 'unknown' submarines on neutral shipping in the Mediterranean. Italy, widely known to be responsible, and Germany do not attend.

**October**

- 21 Fall of Republican North (Gijón and Avilés).  
 29 Republican government moves from Valencia to Barcelona.

**November**

- 6 Italy joins German-Japanese Anti-Comintern pact.

**December**

- Air raids on Barcelona.  
 15 Republican forces commence Teruel offensive (Aragon).  
 24 Franco begins counter-offensive on Teruel front.

1938

**January**

- 7 Republican forces take town of Teruel.

**February**

- 22 Franco's forces re-take Teruel.

**March**

- 10 Franco launches new offensive in Aragon aiming to reach Mediterranean coast and cut Republican zone in two.  
 12 Franco repeals Republic's civil marriage law. Hitler occupies Austria.  
 13 Blum forms a new cabinet in France, and Negrín flies to Paris to plead for re-opening of French border.  
 16-18 Round the clock bombing of Barcelona by Italian planes based in Majorca.  
 17 French government opens border with Spain.

**April**

- 3 Franco's forces take Lérida.  
 8 Blum government falls in France and is replaced by a more conservative administration under Edouard Daladier.  
 15 Franco's forces reach the Mediterranean at Vinaroz and split the Republic in two.  
 16 Anglo-Italian Agreement. This was commonly understood in international diplomatic circles to signal Britain's implicit acceptance that Italian troops would remain in Spain until the end of the Civil War.  
 21 Franco begins offensive against Valencia.

**May**

- 1 Negrín publishes Republic's 13-point programme of war aims.
- 4 Vatican agrees full diplomatic relations with Franco.
- 11 Spanish Republic unsuccessfully petitions League of Nations for an end to Non-Intervention.
- 23 Republican army's XIV (guerrilla) corps carries out an innovative commando raid, liberating Republican soldiers imprisoned in the coastal fortress of Carchuna (Motril, Granada) just behind rebel lines.
- 24 First papal nuncio formally received by Franco.

**June**

- 13 French government closes border with Spain.

**July**

- 5 Non-Intervention Committee approves plan to withdraw international volunteers from Spain.
- 25 Republican army launches the Ebro offensive, the greatest battle of the war; its aim is to relieve Franco's military pressure on Valencia, but also to turn the international diplomatic tide.

**August**

- 17 Negrín militarizes Catalan arms factories in order to impose central government control. Catalan and Basque ministers resign from his cabinet in protest.
- 18 Franco refuses all peace initiatives.

**September**

- 29 Munich conference between Britain, France, Germany, and Italy. France and Britain agree to Hitler's annexation of Czech Sudetenland.

**October**

Battle of the Ebro continues.

- 4 Republic withdraws foreign volunteers from line in accordance with Non-Intervention Committee plan.

- 8 With tacit support of the Vatican, Negrín creates a commission to oversee the re-introduction of public worship in Catalonia.
- 24 Trial of POUM leaders begins.
- 29 Farewell parade of International Brigades in Barcelona.

**November**

- 16 Battle of the Ebro ends as Republican forces retreat back across the river. More than a military defeat, the Ebro was a political defeat determined by the outcome at Munich.
- 29 Air attacks on Barcelona and Valencia.

**December**

- 19 Germany takes control of various Spanish mining operations.
- 23 Franco begins his offensive against Catalonia.

1939

**January**

- 23 Negrín declares martial law in Republican zone.
- 26 Franco's troops take Barcelona. Mass flight of refugees to French frontier.

**February**

- 1 Republican parliament meets for the last time on Spanish soil at the castle of Figueres.
- 9 Franco issues the Law of Political Responsibilities which retrospectively redefines Republican political activity as criminal.
- 10 Fall of Catalonia. Franco closes frontier with France. Negrín flies back to Republican centre-south zone.
- 27 Britain and France recognize Franco.

**March**

- 4-6 Confused revolt at Republican naval base in Cartagena results in fleet setting sail. It is interned by the French in North Africa, pending delivery to Franco. The Republic thus loses the means of evacuating thousands of refugees who fear for their lives.

- 5 Colonel Segismundo Casado, Republican commander on the Madrid front, rebels against Negrín in the mistaken belief that, as an army officer, he will be able to negotiate with Franco a 'peace with guarantees'.
- 6-13 Street fighting in Madrid between pro- and anti-Casado forces. Republican army elsewhere in centre-south zone holds aloof.
- 26-28 Casado's forces win in Madrid, but Franco refuses to negotiate. Casado has no choice but to order the Republican air force and army to surrender.
- 27 Franco's troops occupy Madrid. Mass flight of refugees; Republican refugees congregate in the Mediterranean ports, especially Alicante, but relatively few escape due to lack of boats. Franco signs the Anti-Comintern pact.

#### April

- 1 Franco issues his final war communiqué announcing the end of military hostilities. The USA recognizes Franco's regime.
- 6 Franco makes public Spain's adherence to the Anti-Comintern pact.