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2. Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War

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Through much of the Spanish Civil War, and for many years after, Soviet propagandists often claimed that the many impediments to fully functioning Soviet-Spanish diplomatic relations that existed between 1917-1936 suddenly melted away at the start of the war. In this version of events, the Spanish Republic had in the Soviet regime an immediate ally and friend, one it could count on even as Spain's traditional allies cowered behind the veil of the Non-Intervention Agreement. The official Spanish communist history of the war, Dolores Ibárruri's *Guerra y revolución*, asserts that, "from the first moment, the Soviet government and people, united in a single purpose, enthusiastically came to the side of the Spanish people...." ¹ Even Maiskii, writing during the Khrushchev thaw, insisted that, "from the very beginning of the Spanish conflict ... the Soviet people took their stand firmly and decidedly on the side of Spanish democracy." ²

The intention of Ibárruri, Maiskii, and other pro-Soviet chroniclers of the Spanish struggle is clear: to present a tidy portrait of Soviet involvement in the civil war, a narrative in which Moscow immediately recognized the critical nature of the Republic's predicament and came to its aid without delay. This version of events, however, is easily refuted. Quite apart from the practical impossibility of the Soviet Union's offering full support to a country from which it remained diplomatically estranged, and with which it had failed to exchange even low-level consular staff, there remains the overarching fact that, well into August 1936, Moscow had yet to stake out a clear position on events in Spain. The Soviet leadership not only hesitated upon receiving news of the July uprising, but also reacted relatively slowly and inconsistently. It is true that, by early September, in addition to humanitarian and diplomatic support, the Soviets had settled on a policy of extensive covert military assistance. But during the intervening six weeks, Moscow's position regarding the Iberian war was far from certain.

I. Soviet Diplomats and the Non-Intervention Committee

In the days immediately following the rebel uprising, the Soviets played a waiting game, allowing events to unfold fully before taking decisive action. On 23 July, the Italian Chargé d'Affaires in Moscow, Vincenzo Berardis, told his government that the Soviet leaders were "annoyed and perplexed ... by the events in Spain." He added that "under no circumstances" would the Soviets enter the fray. ³ Declassified documents from the Military Archive indicate that Moscow had an early opportunity to involve itself in the Spanish conflict. On 25 July, the Spanish Premier Giral appealed to the Soviet ambassador in Paris for military assistance:

Gracious Sir!

The government of the Spanish Republic needs to supply its army with a significant quantity of modern weapons to wage war on what began as and continues to be a civil war against the legal authority and constitutional government.... As head of my government, and knowing the possibilities and availability of weapons at the disposal of the USSR, I decided to apply to you so that you would inform your government of our government's wish and necessity to seek a supply from your country of a great quantity of weapons and all categories of military supplies. ⁴

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This telegram evidently elicited no response from the Soviet leadership. Only one week into the civil war, the Kremlin was very far from willing to commit itself to direct military aid. It should be noted that the USSR was not the only foreign government to which the Spaniards turned for military assistance; in the first six weeks of the civil war, the Republic lobbied throughout the world for aid. ⁵

Several days later, on 29 July, the British ambassador in Moscow reported that the Soviets were displaying "great," but only a "non-committal interest" in the Spanish war. ⁶ On 6 August, Berardis reported to Rome that the Soviet government had taken steps to become committed "as little as possible" in the events unfolding on the Iberian Peninsula. ⁷ As late as 13 August, the French military attaché to Moscow was reporting that Stalin "would prefer to avoid any intervention for fear of provoking a reaction from Germany and Italy." ⁸

Earlier still, in the last week of July, several events occurring some distance from Spain would come to have a profound impact on Moscow's later involvement in Spanish affairs. The first was the decision of France, on 25 July, and supported by Britain, to pursue a policy of non-intervention in the Spanish war. ⁹ The second was the emergence on 29 and 30 July of irrefutable proof that the Germans and Italians were intervening on the side of the rebels. ¹⁰ Thus, from the Soviet point of view, the Western democracies intended to stand by while the fascist powers assisted in the defeat of the Spanish Republic. Out of these simultaneous developments, the Soviets would mold their multi-pronged approach to the Spanish war. On the one hand, the Soviet government signed the Non-Intervention Agreement and sought to use its influence on the NIC to protest fascist violations of the European-wide pact. At the same time, Moscow allied itself unilaterally with Republican Spain, finalized its long-frustrated diplomatic relations with Madrid, and militarily challenged Germany and Italy on the ground and in the skies of Spain.

The Soviet intervention in the war, as we shall see in later chapters, was further complicated by a political and cultural agenda that was made manifest in a variety of ways—some benign and others quite destructive—not only in the Spanish Republic but also in the Soviet Union and internationally. As the present section is concerned only with diplomacy, other components of the Soviet regime's involvement in wartime Spain will be reserved for subsequent chapters of this work. For now, let us concentrate on Soviet diplomatic maneuverings: at the NIC seat in London, at the newly established embassy and consulate in Spain, and in relation to the Republic's wartime mission to Moscow.

The concept of non-intervention was born from the French and British governments' common desire to avoid a clash with the fascist powers over the Iberian Peninsula. That the Western democracies would indeed stay out of the war was not immediately apparent, for the prospect of the Republic's overthrow had rightfully sounded alarms through the halls of at least one government, that of France. Not only did the Spanish Republic have a legal claim to international assistance in suppressing an internal rebellion, a potential rebel victory was also cause for great concern to Spain's closest democratic neighbor.

It was widely thought that the imposition of a regime in Madrid sympathetic to, if not allied with, Hitler and Mussolini would leave France caught in a vise between three hostile forces. France's interwar defensive preparations were concentrated solely on the northeastern border; Paris could not defend its sovereignty against additional threats from the southeast and southwest. A hostile Spain would also threaten France's supply route to its colonies in northern and western Africa. At the same time, the implication for Britain was obvious: a France surrounded by antagonistic powers would leave London without a major continental ally.



However convincing these justifications for intervention in favor of the Loyalists, in both

France and Britain even stronger forces were lobbying to stay out of the war entirely. Blum's government in Paris, though a kindred Popular Front coalition, sensibly feared that the armed Iberian struggle between left and right could spill over into France. Baldwin's National government in Britain, meanwhile, though hardly concerned over the threat of civil war, was far from sympathetic to the plight of a regime it had long regarded as "red." It is worth remembering that, in the mid-1930s, the British ruling and upper classes, and to a certain degree the press, feared the excesses of the left far more than those of the right.

The French, who had initially backed Madrid, reversed course on 25 July. ¹¹ By early August, both France and its ally across the Channel had agreed to oversee an international body that sought to neutralize the possibility that the Spanish Civil War could erupt into a European-wide conflagration. In the first week of August the French diplomatic corps was enlisted to shop the idea of non-intervention around the major continental capitals. ¹² The USSR, at that date still officially on the fence, was one of the first to come out in favor of collective non-intervention. On 5 August, Moscow announced that it would subscribe to the proposal only if Portugal—by then clearly aiding the rebels—also signed on. ¹³ On 23 August, the Soviets formally adhered to the agreement, ¹⁴ and on 28 August the NKID decreed a ban on the export aboard any Soviet vessel of military cargo bound for Spain. ¹⁵ Ivan Maiskii, already the Soviet ambassador to London, became Moscow's official representative on the new committee. ¹⁶

The many twists and turns of Soviet involvement on the NIC need not detain us much longer, for historians have long had access to the Public Records Office archive of the Committee, and the published accounts of this ineffective international body are quite satisfactory. ¹⁷ Of primary importance, however, is the Soviet reaction to the escalation of German, Italian, and Portuguese military aid to the rebels even after those countries joined the Non-Intervention Committee. On three separate occasions—7, 12, and 23 October—Moscow repeated that if NIC signatory states continued to supply arms to the rebels, the Soviet government would "consider itself free from the obligations" of the Non-Intervention Agreement, or "would not consider itself bound" by the pact. ¹⁸

These pronouncements, like countless others emanating from the proceedings, were highly disingenuous. As we will see below, by early September the Kremlin had begun preparations for its own military assistance to the Loyalists. The first shipment of arms would arrive in Spain in early October, even as the Soviets were threatening to abandon the London committee. But Moscow's emerging relations with the Spanish Republic were far more complicated than is indicated by the obvious discrepancy between the Defense Commissariat's military pipeline to Spain and the oratorical bluster of the Soviet representative in London. Occurring at the same time was the formal rapprochement between the governments of the USSR and the Spanish Republic, and it is to this development that we now turn our attention.

II. Stalin's Diplomats in the Republic

At the very moment the Politburo was cabling instructions to Maiskii regarding Moscow's position on non-intervention, the Soviet leadership was also meeting to appoint personnel for its embassy in the Spanish Republic. After the myriad impediments to normalized Soviet-Spanish diplomacy since 1931, it took the two states only one month following the beginning of the civil war to agree to an exchange of ambassadors. ¹⁹ On 21 August, two days prior to its adherence to the Non-Intervention Agreement, the Politburo met to make embassy appointments. Marcel Rosenberg, a twenty-year veteran of the Soviet diplomatic corps and former Soviet delegate to the League of Nations, was given the nod as ambassador. The general consul to Barcelona would be Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko, a

revolutionary hero and the leader of the assault on the Winter Palace. ²⁰ In addition to a staff of assistants and interpreters, the Politburo appointed Jacob Gaikis as secretary to the Madrid delegation and Arthur Stashevsky as commercial attaché. At the same time, the Politburo appointed and dispatched a number of military advisors, including V. E. Gorev as military attaché and Nikolai Kuznetsov as naval attaché. ²¹ Additional military advisors were soon added, including Alexander Rodimtsev, who departed Moscow on 12 September. ²² These appointments made, the delegations were immediately sent via air and rail across Europe, many using fake passports supplied by the Czechoslovakian government. ²³ Rosenberg and his staff arrived first, reaching Madrid on 27 August. The initial Soviet entourage took up residence in the Alfonso Hotel, though it soon moved to the Palace Hotel, located at Plaza de las Cortes 7—the political center of the Republic. ²⁴ There the Soviet embassy remained for only eight weeks, following the Loyalist government to Valencia on 7 November 1936, where it was installed at an address of equal prominence, the Hotel Metropol, directly across from the bullring. ²⁵

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The appointment of the Soviet Union's first diplomatic mission to Spain, its heavy military advisory component, and its rapid dispatch signaled a shift in Stalin's attitude toward events in Spain. Until 21 August, the Soviet regime had demonstrated a great deal of interest in the Spanish conflict, but it was initially limited to exploiting the civil war for a massive solidarity campaign within the USSR and among the national Communist parties. To this end, the Politburo had already sent several Russians to Spain: the correspondent Mikhail Kol'tsov, who arrived first, on 8 August; the journalist Ilya Ehrenburg, who arrived in the second week of August; and the filmmakers Roman Karmen and Boris Makaseev, who were appointed on 15 August and arrived in Spain on 23 August. ²⁶ Apart from a number of Comintern agents already in Spain, these three members of the Russian media were Moscow's first official representatives sent to Spain. Their task was to support the domestic and international campaigns of solidarity, providing the government with print and visual materials for mass circulation. It was only with the appointment of the embassy staff in late August that Stalin seems to have shifted to a new stage of involvement, paving the way for closer diplomatic ties and military collaboration with the Republican government.

Rosenberg's sudden appearance in the Spanish capital was accompanied by considerable enthusiasm, not for the man himself, but for the widespread belief that improved relations with the Soviets could only help the Republic's flagging war effort. ²⁷ Claude Bowers, then the American ambassador in Madrid, took note of the "high state of excitement" that Rosenberg's arrival elicited among even ordinary Madrileños. ²⁸ Admittedly, some of the excitement surrounding Rosenberg's arrival was due to his propitious, if unintended, timing. In the late summer of 1936, as had been the custom for years, most of Madrid's diplomatic corps had fled to the seaside resort of San Sebastián. ²⁹ Taking center stage, Rosenberg presented his credentials to Azaña on 29 August. At the ceremony, the new ambassador made a brief speech in which he assured the Republican government that its political ideas and institutions would be respected by his delegation. In retrospect, it is remarkable that at this early stage of Soviet involvement in the Republic's affairs Rosenberg precisely anticipated the chief source of friction between the two states, and the principal controversy that has raged to this day:

I know perfectly well that the government of the Spanish Republic does not wish to have alien political or social ideas thrust upon its native ones. This desire fully corresponds to that of my government. ³⁰

In his own speech at the ceremony, Azaña avoided any acknowledgement that the political systems of the USSR and the Spanish Republic were highly dissimilar. But appreciating the potential salvation in an alliance with the Soviets, Azaña declared that the exchange of

ambassadors was "one of the most important events" to grace his presidency. ³¹ Later, Rosenberg's actions would stand in stark contrast to his early promise of non-intervention. At the time, of course, the remarks made for good diplomacy with his hosts, and good copy in Russia, where, three days later, *Izvestiia* printed his speech in full. ³²

At the time of the new ambassador's reception in Madrid, Catalonia was still without an official Soviet representative. In the absence of an appointed Soviet consul, in September 1936 the *Izvestiia* correspondent Ilya Ehrenburg used his journalistic cover to supply reports to Rosenberg on the political and military situation in Barcelona. These dispatches, which included detailed notes of meetings with the Catalan President Lluís Companys, were considered important enough to forward in duplicate to the entire Soviet leadership. Of special importance are the installments of 17 and 18 September, in which Ehrenburg alerts Rosenberg of two simultaneous crises developing, on the one hand between the Catalan regional government and the anarchist federation (FAI), and on the other between the Loyalist seat in Madrid and the Catalan authorities. In Ehrenburg's version, the alleged intransigence of the anarchists threatened to weaken the overall war effort and delay the required military conversions in vital Catalan industries. The journalist also reported that Companys would welcome the establishment of a Soviet consulate in Barcelona. ³³

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While it is impossible to determine precisely when Ehrenburg's letters on the Catalan question arrived in Moscow, it appears that they elicited an unusually hasty response. On 21 September, the Politburo appointed Antonov-Ovseenko as consul general to Barcelona.



³⁴ He departed immediately and arrived at his new post on 1 October.

This new chronology should resolve the long-disputed issue of the arrival of the Soviets' top diplomats. It is evident that the precise time of the appointment and arrival of the consul is not trivial; Antonov-Ovseenko's mission to Spain was quite unlike Rosenberg's, for it is convincing evidence of Moscow's evolving perception of the potential Soviet role in the conflict, specifically the need to rectify the perceived problem of Catalan revolutionary anarcho-syndicalism and to oversee a Soviet-style centralized authority in a republic that had, since its founding in 1931, allowed for extensive regional autonomy.

With Antonov-Ovseenko came a staff of assistants and his wife Sofiia. Like the ambassador, his entourage was received cordially by the regional authorities. On 3 October, Antonov-Ovseenko presented his credentials to Lluís Companys, the president of Catalonia. As was the case with Rosenberg, the Consul General's activities were given glowing front-page coverage in Soviet newspapers. ³⁵

The conduct of Rosenberg and Antonov-Ovseenko in Spain was fundamentally interventionist, but striking differences in personality and operational style caused observers to view the two men differently. The charges frequently leveled against Rosenberg include an exaggerated sense of self-importance, a tendency to micromanage, and a daily disregard for the autonomy of the Republican government. Certainly Rosenberg's earlier postings, first as the counselor to the Soviet Embassy in Paris, and later as the assistant Soviet secretary to the League of Nations, would have done much to elevate his confidence. In the French capital, Rosenberg was a popular figure in the salon life of the 1920s; in Geneva, meanwhile, his salary exceeded \$25,000, and he possessed a large villa, two limousines, a battery of secretaries, and a young bride. ³⁶

It is hard to imagine that the newly appointed ambassador to Spain did not attempt to replicate at least in part the lifestyle he had enjoyed during previous assignments to Western Europe. According to Louis Fischer, Rosenberg drew no small amount of attention in his frequent traversals of Madrid:

When we drove, a guard of the Spanish intelligence service sat with the chauffeur and our car was followed by another fast car. It was filled with six young bodyguards. They jumped out of their car the moment Rosenberg's car stopped. They followed him wherever he went and he would sometimes turn around and shoo them away. If he stepped into a pissoir on the Cuatro Caminos, they surrounded its tin walls and waited. [37](#)

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Moreover, if Rosenberg acted like a celebrity, he was certainly encouraged. Again, Fischer:

Once we got out in a park where militiamen were training. They recognized him right away, saluted with the clenched fist and shouted, "Viva Rusia."

"Viva España," he yelled back. The men were amused.

"That's the Fascist cry," I told him. "You should say, 'Viva la República.'"

"Viva la República," he yelled. [38](#)

Apart from the purely showy aspects of his character, Rosenberg's excesses had a more insidious nature. The socialist leader Luis Araquistain summed up Rosenberg's comportment this way:

More than an ambassador, [Rosenberg] acted like a Russian viceroy in Spain. He paid daily visits to Largo Caballero, sometimes accompanied by Russians of high rank, military or civilian. During the visits, which lasted hours on end, Rosenberg tried to give the head of the Spanish government instructions as to what he should do in order to direct the war successfully. His suggestions, which were practically orders, related mainly to army officers. Such and such generals and colonels should be dismissed and others appointed in their place. These recommendations were based, not on the competence of the officers, but on their political affiliations and on the degree of their amenability to the Communists. [39](#)

This was not the behavior expected from the same diplomat who had recently pledged to respect the Republic's political institutions. If many Loyalist officials tolerated the Soviet ambassador, it was in part due to the exigencies of war and the overwhelming importance of Russian military aid. But Prime Minister Largo Caballero grew tired of Rosenberg's frequent visits and unambiguous demands regarding policy and appointments. On one oft-cited occasion, the ambassador pushed the prime minister too far, prompting the following explosion:

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Get out! Get out! You must learn, Señor Ambassador, that the Spaniards may be poor and need aid from abroad, but we are sufficiently proud not to accept that a foreign ambassador should try and impose his will on the head of the Spanish government. [40](#)

Rosenberg's presumptuous meddling succeeded in alienating many in the Republican government, but his transgressions may have gone further still. Recently declassified documents from the former Soviet military archive reveal a substantive denunciation of Rosenberg's manner and professionalism by a major Soviet advisor. Writing to Voroshilov in mid-October 1936, the military attaché Gorev reported that the ambassador possessed an:

... unhealthy [sense of] self-esteem. He is terribly afraid for his authority; he fears lest someone should do something greater than what he does. The result is

that he fritters away his energy.... He is incredibly nervous whenever one of us goes into a situation on our own to handle something.... Too much petty surveillance means that he is missing the forest for the trees. [41](#)

Others shared this assessment. A Soviet political worker reported to Moscow that, shortly after arriving in Madrid in September 1936, he had his first of several altercations with Rosenberg. The ambassador had spoken to him, the advisor wrote, "in a way in which a Bolshevik should not speak." [42](#)

By December 1936, talk of Rosenberg's questionable conduct had reached Stalin's desk. As a result, the Soviet leader sent Largo Caballero a personal letter asking for an assessment of the advisory staff in Spain, and in particular his opinion concerning Rosenberg. [43](#)

Caballero's reply would seem to be favorable:

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The comrades who have come to assist us at our request are providing a great service. Their considerable experience is very useful to us and contributes in an efficient manner to the defense of Spain.... I can assure you that they are executing their duties with true enthusiasm and extraordinary courage. As for comrade Rosenberg, I can frankly report to you that we are satisfied with his conduct and activities among us. Everyone here is fond of him. He works a great deal, excessively in fact, and endangers his delicate fragile health.... [44](#)

The meaning of this letter is difficult to assess. Does it cast into doubt the well-known stories of a Largo Caballero at his wits' end with the ambassador? Or is it an indication only of the prime minister's desire to curry the best possible favor with the Soviet leadership? Or is the letter even authentic? Though widely quoted and incorporated into the scholarship on the war, its precise wording is disputed by the tirelessly anti-communist Araquistain. According to Araquistain—in a claim never substantiated elsewhere—Caballero's reply to Stalin was ambiguous but subtly negative: "The ambassador's health seems rather delicate," Caballero is purported to have written. "Perhaps a change of air would do him well." [45](#) Given that Rosenberg would be recalled four weeks after the letter was sent, one obvious conclusion is that the Stalin acted on Caballero's (alleged) displeasure by removing the ambassador. But the question of Rosenberg's recall is best discussed together with Antonov-Ovseenko's removal.

In contrast to Rosenberg, Antonov-Ovseenko was less combative and more perceptive of the nuances of inter-party relations in the Spanish Republic. Indeed, as Antonov-Ovseenko told Ehrenburg prior to traveling to Barcelona, his specific assignment was to bring the Catalan anarchists into the main war effort:

Moscow is of the opinion that rapprochement between Catalonia and Madrid is in Spain's interest. I must attempt to bring the anarchists to their senses, and bring them aboard the defensive struggle. They have, after all, a damned violent influence.... [46](#)

Once in the Catalan capital, Antonov-Ovseenko set about his task with a competence and sensitivity that largely eluded the ambassador in Madrid. Much unlike Rosenberg, who never bothered to learn Castilian, Antonov-Ovseenko proved a quick study with the thornier Catalan. [47](#) He immediately established good relations with Companys, and a propaganda newsreel shot by the Catalans shows the two men smiling at an overflowing Barcelona crowd at celebrations marking the nineteenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution. [48](#)

In Ehrenburg's perhaps exaggerated view, Antonov-Ovseenko was  well liked by nearly everyone. [49](#) On one notorious occasion, in front

of a throng of spectators, he gave a bear hug to the anarchist leader García Oliver, a risky public display for a representative of Stalin. ⁵⁰ He later attended a banquet at which the soon-to-be-assassinated Andreu Nin was also present. ⁵¹ But such scenes were not empty gestures. According to Mary Habeck and Ronald Radosh, Antonov-Ovseenko "seemed to want to follow a middle line in Spain." ⁵² With friendly relations established, he worked towards a compromise between the communists and the anarcho-syndicalist CNT. In reports to Moscow, he was even tolerant of the views and practices of Largo Caballero, the socialist leader who more than any other Spanish official quarreled with the Soviet diplomats and advisors. ⁵³

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Despite his generally sound reputation as a positive mediator, Antonov-Ovseenko was not averse to using more persuasive methods when he saw fit. He favored a purge of suspect elements in the armed forces, and called on Moscow to send political workers both to the front and rear guard. ⁵⁴ His most overt intervention in the war effort was his largely successful attempt in early November 1936 to weaken the Durruti-led CNT militias in Catalonia. With undisguised contempt for the Republic's government, and rejecting the defense of the capital as a political move, Durruti had refused to allow his troops to re-deploy to meet the Nationalist attack on Madrid. Alerting the NKID of Durruti's attitude, the consul general advised that it "must be smashed at all costs." ⁵⁵ Antonov-Ovseenko reported that Durruti's intransigence led the consul "to intervene in a firm way." ⁵⁶ The result—again, according to Antonov-Ovseenko himself—was the forced dispatch to the Madrid front of some one thousand anarchist soldiers, led by Durruti himself. ⁵⁷ The historical record leaves in doubt to what extent Antonov-Ovseenko's actions prompted Durruti's redeployment. It is not inconceivable that the consul general inflated his own role in this event to impress his Moscow superiors, but this view is purely speculative.

The documentary evidence preserves no record of Antonov-Ovseenko's reaction to Durruti's mysterious death in Madrid on 20 November. Given the consul's frustration with the anarchist leader, and his apparent role in getting Durruti sent to Madrid, it is tempting to view Antonov-Ovseenko's subsequent letter of condolence to Companys—not to mention the consul's prominent appearance at Durruti's funeral—as a somewhat disingenuous cover. ⁵⁸

While Antonov-Ovseenko's primary objective as consul general was to address the ideological and regional differences between the center and the Catalans, this was not the only issue on his agenda. The consul was also an active agent in the Soviet propaganda campaign at the front and in the rear guard. The broader parameters of Soviet cultural policy in Spain will be addressed in Chapter Three, but as the present discussion centers on the activities of the Soviet diplomats, Antonov-Ovseenko's participation must be at least briefly noted.

From the first days of his assignment in Spain, Antonov-Ovseenko was a key figure in disseminating Soviet cultural products to various organizations and effecting the insertion of Soviet propaganda into local media. To facilitate this work, he collaborated closely with the All-Union Society for Cultural Exchange with Foreign Countries, or VOKS. VOKS forwarded to Antonov-Ovseenko every conceivable variety of propaganda—the writings of Lenin and Stalin, newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets, current Soviet fiction, films, photographs, and even phonographic records—which the consul then distributed to the press, public educational institutions, worker cooperatives and clubs, and to soldiers at the front. ⁵⁹ The consul also coordinated speaking tours for pro-Soviet Spanish worker delegations that had visited the Soviet Union. ⁶⁰ Antonov-Ovseenko's collaborator in this propaganda effort was his wife Sofiia. A letter from Sofiia Antonov-Ovseenko to VOKS written in late October 1936

indicates the scope of the consul's propagandizing activities:

Dear Lev Nikolaevich: I want to draw your attention to our cultural work here in Barcelona. Vladimir Aleksandrovich wrote a letter to Aroseev [VOKS's Western Branch Director] outlining the general agenda, but I will repeat his message: the cultural exchange here is of the same conception, but there is as yet no material. The task before us is vast and possibly unrealizable. But please send us some material.... The Spanish delegation to the USSR has now returned, and their impressions were very considerable. We plan on making broad use of their statements.... Perhaps somewhere in Europe there roams some kind of exhibit containing posters and graphic art, school texts—it would be good to have such an exhibit here. [61](#)

III. The Diplomats Recalled

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Whether through propaganda efforts such as these, attempts to influence the policies of Largo Caballero, or manipulation of the placement of military units, both Antonov-Ovseenko and Rosenberg were by any measure active and aggressive players on the Spanish Republic's wartime stage. Even if much of their activity ostensibly remained within the broad goals of supporting the Republic's military effort, the overall impression made on many Republican observers was doubtlessly negative. Even Antonov-Ovseenko admitted in one dispatch to Moscow that his bellicose intervention in Catalan military affairs had provoked "distrust of our intentions." [62](#) Rosenberg, of course, had outdone even the consul, succeeding in getting himself thrown out of the prime minister's office. How, one wonders, did these performances play in Moscow?

There is ample evidence to suggest that the Soviet leadership was greatly distressed by the continually ruffling of Spanish feathers by the Kremlin's top diplomats. In the much-discussed letter from Stalin to Largo Caballero, dated 21 December 1936, the Soviet leader advocated measures that would "prevent the enemies of Spain from regarding it as a communist Republic." [63](#) In practice, this would mean pursuing a "parliamentary road" rather than a revolutionary one, appeasing the rural and urban middle classes, and involving the Republican Party more directly in the functions of the government. More to the point, however, Stalin also asked Largo Caballero for his opinion of Rosenberg and the rest of the advisory staff. By any reckoning, the letter reflects a concern in Moscow that the conduct of the diplomatic mission might not be in line with the non-revolutionary direction that it was felt the Republic must now take.

It appears that, after December 1936, the Kremlin's faith in Rosenberg and Antonov-Ovseenko diminished rapidly. Curiously, Spain's ambassador to the USSR, Marcelino Pascua, was better apprised of Moscow's view of the men than the doomed diplomats themselves. On 2 February 1937, Pascua met in the Kremlin with Stalin, Voroshilov, and Molotov. Midway through the meeting, Stalin surprised the ambassador by criticizing his principal representatives in Spain:

As for Rosenberg, we'll recall him and send down someone less *enfant terrible*. Someone more "official." And as for Antonov-Ovseenko, we'll substitute him with someone less revolutionary and conspicuous. [64](#)

Even while Pascua was absorbing these pronouncements, Stalin looked to the Spaniard for help in his decision. "Who of our other representatives, excluding the diplomats," Stalin asked, "should we allow to continue working?" [65](#) Pascua pointed no fingers for the Soviet dictator, but exactly a week later, on 9 February, the Politburo voted to recall Rosenberg

and promote his deputy, Leon Gaikis, to the ambassadorship. [66](#)

Thus Gaikis, who had served as counselor in the embassy the previous August, became head of the Soviet diplomatic mission. On 16 March 1937, he presented his credentials to Azaña, and exchanged short speeches with the president. [67](#) In a gesture that speaks volumes about his predecessor's alleged conduct, Gaikis assured his audience of the Soviet government's "absolute respect for the national sovereignty" of the Republic. [68](#)

Interestingly, one of Gaikis' first actions after becoming ambassador was the drafting of a confidential memo to the NKID deputy commissar, in which the diplomat denounced Antonov-Ovseenko for his interference in local Catalan politics. [69](#) Not long thereafter, Antonov-Ovseenko was recalled to Moscow. [70](#)

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About Gaikis' tenure as ambassador neither contemporaries nor historians have had much to say. [71](#) His correspondence with VOKS indicates that he continued the propaganda work of Rosenberg and Antonov-Ovseenko, organizing various cultural exchanges between the USSR and Spain. [72](#) Otherwise, it is clear that, in comparison to his predecessors, he was a far less visible presence in the Republic's governmental and military affairs. According to del Vayo, Negrín seldom saw the new ambassador, despite his previous close ties with Rosenberg. [73](#) It appears that Gaikis had orders to keep his head down and resist meddling excessively in internal Republican politics. But following those orders did not save the diplomat, and his tenure lasted just two months. In May 1937, Gaikis was recalled to Moscow and subsequently swallowed up in the purges. [74](#)

There exists some disagreement regarding the state of the Soviet embassy after Gaikis. Several writers—at least one eyewitness and one scholar—have claimed that the Kremlin appointed a certain Marchenko - first name unknown - to serve as the Soviet Union's third ambassador. [75](#) Marchenko had briefly served as the Soviet plenipotentiary in Spain between the tenures of Rosenberg and Gaikis, but otherwise he scarcely casts a shadow over Soviet-Spanish relations during the Civil War. [76](#) In any case, there is no record of a third ambassador-level appointment in the published *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR* or the Politburo protocols. The records of the Society for Cultural Exchange with Foreign Countries (VOKS) indicate that after May 1937 the Soviets' head diplomat in the Republic was indeed Marchenko, [77](#) but his official position was chargé d'affaires. [78](#) On this issue Araquistain, despite his well-known biases, is better informed than many. After Gaikis, he declares simply, "there were no more Soviet ambassadors in Spain." [79](#)

Thus, nine months after Moscow had established its first embassy in the Spanish Republic since the Russian Revolution, it had recalled its second and final ambassador and condemned this and two additional diplomats to their deaths. The civil war would of course rage on for another twenty-two months, and Moscow would continue to be the only major arms supplier to the Republic. For the balance of the war, however, the Soviets had no high-level diplomat on the Iberian Peninsula.

Considering the frequent claims in the historical literature that Stalin hoped to turn Spain into a Soviet satellite, or at least a closely allied People's Republic, the permanent withdrawal of diplomatic personnel in the first year of the war is a development that merits closer examination. Most historians have viewed Rosenberg's recall, coming so soon after the altercation in Largo Caballero's office, as a direct result of the ambassador's attempts to manipulate Republican policies. [80](#) This interpretation is not, however, unanimous. In their recent study of primary documents relating to the Soviet intervention, Habeck and Radosh reject the thesis that Rosenberg was recalled for his wanton disregard of his host government's autonomy since, in their view, "all of the Soviet advisors were busily

attempting to take over the Spanish war effort, the economy, the PCE and, eventually, the Spanish government itself." ⁸¹ They conclude that, "Rosenberg's efforts to do the same could hardly have provoked Stalin to pull him out." Instead, the scholars argue, Rosenberg was recalled and subsequently murdered because of his poor management style and petty squabbling with other members of the Soviet delegation. ⁸²

Araquistain's explanation is similar. He too believes that, because Stalin's goal was the subjugation of the entire Spanish state, the Soviet dictator would never recall the ambassador for working towards that end. Perhaps, Araquistain suggests, Rosenberg and the other high-level diplomats were not aggressive enough in pursuing Stalin's alleged goal. "The Spaniards," he writes, "considered the Soviet diplomats too brutal and intolerant for an independent state. But Moscow condemned its representatives for being excessively weak and human." ⁸³

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Additional light may be cast on this issue by examining Stalin's own words to Pascua on 2 February 1937, when the Soviet leader informed the Spanish ambassador that he was recalling his lead diplomats. This conversation excerpt, taken from Pascua's notes of the meeting and hitherto unpublished, describes a sharp change in Stalin's view of how the Soviets should proceed in Spain. At this point in the discussion, Pascua has just informed Stalin that Azaña is proposing a treaty of friendship with the USSR. The Soviet leader thought this an unwise move:

On the contrary. Perhaps it would be useful to declare that there are no special ties between the USSR and Spain. Yes, sympathy between the masses, but no secret treaty.... There are those in the English government who will come out in favor of aid if the USSR backs off.... Let me stress that [Spain] must distance herself somewhat from the USSR in order to obtain aid from England.... ⁸⁴

Stalin then mentioned that the first stage of the policy of distancing would be the recall of the two high-level Soviet diplomats present in Spain. In view of this evidence, it seems perfectly reasonable to conclude that the downgrading of the Soviet mission in the Spanish Republic was motivated by Stalin's desire to eventually win over the West.

Stalin's comments to Pascua do not entirely resolve the issue. As we will see below in the discussion of the military advisors in Part V, the diplomats were not alone in being singled out for recall and destruction by the Soviet leadership. A high percentage of all Soviet personnel who were sent to Spain would perish in the purges. The fate of Rosenberg, Antonov-Ovseenko, and Gaikis was shared by many who were less visible and operated in areas far removed from diplomacy. It may therefore be advisable to again consider the demise of the diplomats together with the rest of the Soviet contingent.

That said, let us not ignore the fact that a certain logic vis-à-vis diplomacy and the Soviet intervention has now emerged. By early 1937, Stalin had decided that, although military aid would continue and propaganda campaigns would be mounted in both the USSR and the Spanish Republic to reinforce the notion of solidarity, in the highly visible area of diplomatic relations the Soviets needed to withdraw. This meant the recall of the active and omnipresent Rosenberg and Antonov-Ovseenko, and the substitution of the less conspicuous Gaikis. In the same vein, Gaikis' May 1937 recall and the simultaneous decision to leave the top diplomatic posts vacant signal that the Kremlin was by then convinced that nothing could be gained by maintaining high-level diplomatic relations.

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In general terms, Soviet diplomatic activity in the Spanish Republic was quite unlike any of Moscow's other foreign relations efforts. For much of the Soviet era, there were two models for the Kremlin's diplomatic operations abroad. The first might be called "normal diplomatic

relations"—that, is, arrangements which sought to reinforce amicable cultural and commercial ties with another state, even if great ideological divisions existed. This was the *modus operandi* pursued by the Soviet Union with most of the West. Where the Soviet Union held sway over a state through military occupation—for example, in the Eastern European "people's democracies"—a second model was employed. Here the Soviets were not bound by ideological differences and never ran the risk of causing offense or jeopardizing commercial agreements. The Soviet diplomat in a satellite state was, in effect, a viceroy.

Diplomatically, the Spanish Republic fit neither mold. The Republic constituted a unique case for Moscow, a state where the Kremlin attempted to consolidate influence through atypical diplomatic maneuvering, but where its lack of military supremacy prevented the exertion of full control. The inherent inability of Soviet diplomacy to impose Stalin's will in Spain was not, of course, decisive or even especially costly. Subsequent chapters of this study will make clear that the story of Soviet intervention in the Spanish Civil War was, in fact, a tale of multiple interventions. The diplomatic option may have given the Kremlin more headaches than success, but it was far from the only weapon in their arsenal. Moreover, as we shall see in Chapter Three, the Soviet leadership was not entirely responsible for the failure of diplomatic rapprochement with Spain. The case of the Republic's embassy in Moscow mirrors in unusually curious ways the Soviet mission to Loyalist Spain. This side of the diplomatic relationship, for which equally high expectations were rapidly downgraded and ultimately dashed, will be the subject of the next chapter.

Notes:

Note 1: "... el Gobierno y el pueblo soviéticos, unidos en una sola voluntad, se colocaran con entusiasmo, desde el primer momento, al lado del pueblo español cuando éste fue víctima de la rebelión de los generales fascistas." Dolores Ibárruri, et al., *Guerra y revolución en España 1936-1939* (Moscow: Progreso, 1967), vol. II, 104. [Back.](#)

Note 2: Ivan Maisky, *Spanish Notebooks* (London: Hutchinson, 1966), 65. [Back.](#)

Note 3: Ministero degli Affari Esteri, *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani* (Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1993), 8e. serie, vol. IV, 676. (Hereafter *DDI*.) [Back.](#)

Note 4: RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 960, l. 219. The translation is from the French. [Back.](#)

Note 5: The Republic's desperate and ultimately unsuccessful attempts to buy significant amounts of weapons in Western Europe is treated expertly, and in detail, in Gerald Howson's *Arms for Spain* (New York: Murray, 1998). [Back.](#)

Note 6: Foreign Office, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, Series 2, vol. XVII (London: H.M. Stationery Office), 36. [Back.](#)

Note 7: *DDI*, 8e. serie, vol. IV, 761. [Back.](#)

Note 8: Lieutenant-Colonel Simon to Daladier, 13 Aug. 1936; in *Documents Diplomatiques Français, 1932-1939*, 2e Série, Tome III, 19 Juillet-19 Novembre 1936, (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1966), 208. (Hereafter, *DDF*.) [Back.](#)

Note 9: See Michael Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: St. Martin's, 1994), 22-23. [Back.](#)

Note 10: See Hugh G. Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 3rd ed. rev. (New York: Simon &

Schuster, 1986), 363-364; and Alpert, *New International History*, 40. [Back.](#)

Note 11: Research by Anglo-American historians indicates that by mid-July, whatever lingering sympathies Blum held for the Republic were being overcome by steadily increasing pressure from Downing Street. For the first (and most important) study to take this position, see Jill Edwards, *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Macmillan, 1979), 26-29. [Back.](#)

Note 12: Throughout the month of August, twenty-seven European states signed on to the agreement. The only holdouts were neutral Switzerland and the Spanish Republic itself. [Back.](#)

Note 13: *Izvestiia*, 6 Aug. 1936. [Back.](#)

Note 14: *Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki SSSR* (Moscow: Izdat. politicheskoi literatury, 1977), vol. XIX: 402-03; (hereafter *DVP SSSR*). Paris was naturally elated. The same evening, the French chargé d'affaires in Moscow sent a jubilant message to Delbos, the foreign minister. See *DDF*, 2e. Série, vol III 271. [Back.](#)

Note 15: *Izvestiia*, 30 Aug. 1936. [Back.](#)

Note 16: Maiskii wrote in detail about his time on the NIC twice, in the translated *Spanish Notebooks* and in a work that to this date is available only in Russian, *Vospominaniia sovetskogo diplomata—1925-1945* (Tashkent: Nauka 1980). [Back.](#)

Note 17: See David Cattell, *Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957); and Harald Geiss, "Das 'Internationale Komitee für die Anwendung des Abkommens über die Nichteinmischung in Spanien' als Instrument sowjetischer Außenpolitik 1936-1938," Ph.D. diss. (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1977). See also the solid accounts of the NIC in Maisky, *Spanish Notebooks*; Alpert, *New International History*; Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*; Gabriel Jackson, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974); and Pierre Broué and Emile Témime, *The Revolution and Civil War in Spain*, trans. Tony White (London: Faber and Faber, 1970). [Back.](#)

Note 18: *DVP SSSR*, vol. XIX, 464-464, 470-471, 513-514. [Back.](#)

Note 19: Marina Casanova, *La diplomacia española durante la guerra civil* (Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, 1996), 68. The sanitized official Soviet version of diplomatic rapprochement effectively eliminates even this quite acceptable four-week lag; in the 1966 account of Ibárruri, the long-frustrated ties are overcome immediately. See *Guerra y Revolución*, vol. II, 104. [Back.](#)

Note 20: On Antonov-Ovseenko's early career, see Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 221; and *The Prophet Unarmed* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 116-117 and 160-161. [Back.](#)

Note 21: For Politburo appointments, see the following Protocols in RGASPI: the meeting of 21 Aug. 1936: f. 17, op. 3, del. 980, l. 308 and del. 981, l. 213. The Protocols do not, however, mention Gorev's appointment, though this is confirmed elsewhere, for example in the 14 Dec. 1937 report of Manfred Stern ("Kleber") to the Comintern. RGASPI, f. 495, op. 74, del. 206, ll. 91-146. Indeed, among published Soviet sources, Nikolai Kuznetsov confirms that Gorev arrived in Madrid with Rosenberg. See *Na dalekom meridiane* (Moscow: Nauka, 3rd ed., 1988), 14. [Back.](#)

Note 22: Aleksandr Rodimtsev, *Pod nebom Ispanii* (Moscow: Sov. Rossiia, 1968), 13-19. Meanwhile, Aleksandr Orlov, the Soviet intelligence advisor to Spain, claims to have been appointed by the Politburo on 26 August, though he did not leave the USSR until 9 September. See Orlov, "Answers to the Questionnaire of Prof. S. G. Payne" (unpublished,

1968). [Back.](#)

Note 23: Rodimtsev, *Pod nebom Ispanii*, 13-19. [Back.](#)

Note 24: Kuznetsov, the naval advisor who arrived just days after the ambassador, has written in some detail of the establishment of the Soviet HQ. See his *Memoirs of Wartime Minister of the Navy* (Moscow: Progreso, 1990), 54, and the same author's chapter, "Con los marinos españoles en su guerra nacional-revolucionaria," in *Bajo la bandera de la España republicana* (Moscow: Progreso, 1967), 133. [Back.](#)

Note 25: The Soviet delegation's various relocations in Madrid and Valencia, as well as a comparative discussion of the embassy's position vis-à-vis other foreign representatives, are taken up in Javier Cervera Gil, *Madrid en Guerra: La Ciudad Clandestina, 1936-1939* (Madrid: Alianza, 1998), 351-354. [Back.](#)

Note 26: Kol'tsov's appointment is discussed in his memoir, *Diario de la guerra española* (Madrid: Akal Editor, 1978), 8-11. Despite a number of claims that Kol'tsov was Stalin's personal agent, engaging in activities beyond the sphere of journalism, it is far more likely that he and his filmmaking countrymen were occupied with nothing more than providing Soviet-slanted reportage for mass circulation in Soviet and Comintern media. This is not to say that Kol'tsov had no influence with Stalin. He was certainly trusted both by Stalin and Voroshilov; otherwise, he would not have been sent to Spain, nor given access to the Soviet advisors or to soldiers on the front. Ehrenburg, on the other hand, was quite obviously a Stalinist agent in addition to a reporter, and, as will be discussed further in this chapter, sent several key confidential dispatches to Soviet advisors that had a marked impact on the Kremlin's policies in Spain. [Back.](#)

Note 27: For Rosenberg's generally upbeat reception in the Spanish press, see *Mundo Obrero*, 28 Aug., and *Claridad*, 28 and 29 Aug. In the secondary literature, only Soviet historians or their sympathizers make much of Rosenberg's arrival on the scene. See David Pritsker, *Podvig ispanskoi respubliki* (Moscow: Izdat. Sotsial'noekonomicheskoi literatury, 1962), 160; and Academy of Sciences of the USSR, *International Solidarity with the Spanish Republic, 1936-1939* (Moscow: Progreso, 1974), 308-309. [Back.](#)

Note 28: Claude G. Bowers, *My Mission to Spain: Watching the Rehearsal for World War II* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), 317. [Back.](#)

Note 29: Ibárruri, *Guerra y Revolución*, vol. II, 105. [Back.](#)

Note 30: *DVP SSSR*, vol. XIX, 416. [Back.](#)

Note 31: *Ibid.*, 417. [Back.](#)

Note 32: *Izvestiia*, 1 Sept. 1936. [Back.](#)

Note 33: The original Ehrenburg reports are located at RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 852, ll. 150-162. Translated copies are available in Mary Habeck and Ronald Radosh, *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 23-32. [Back.](#)

Note 34: Protocol of Politburo meeting of 21 Sept. 1936. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, del. 981, l. 213. The introduction of this declassified source from the former Party Archive should resolve the long-running dispute over the consul general's appointment and arrival in Spain. Thomas mistakenly reports that Antonov-Ovseenko arrived before Rosenberg, on August 25 (Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, 392-393). He neglects to provide a citation for this date, though perhaps it originated in Ibárruri's identical claim in *Guerra y Revolución* (vol. II, 105). At any rate, many subsequent writers have followed suit in this error, including, but hardly limited to, Angel Viñas, "Los condicionantes internacionales," in *La Guerra Civil*

Española: 50 años después, Manuel Tuñón de Lara, et al. (Barcelona: Editorial Labor, 1985), 147; and even two recent post-Soviet Russian accounts: M. V. Novikov, *SSSR, Komintern i grazhdanskaia voia v Ispanii 1936-1939* (Iaroslav: Iaroslavskii gos. pedagogicheskii universitet, 1995), vol. II: 4; and Oleg Sarin and Lev Dvoretzky, *Alien Wars: The Soviet Union's Aggressions Against the World, 1919-1989* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1996), 8, both of whose access to primary sources should have allowed a correction of the Englishman's error. Other historians, meanwhile, have brought the entire Soviet diplomatic mission to Spain on the same day, August 27. See the recent Alpert, *New International History*, 50. In fact, and quite apart from the above-cited new documentation that fixes his appointment by the Politburo in the third week of September, several reliable sources attest that Antonov-Ovseenko arrived on 1 October: *Izvestiia*, Oct. 3, 1936; Casanova, *Diplomacia española*, 69; V. A. Talashova, "Sovetskii komsomol - aktivnyi uchastnik dvizheniia solidarnosti s respublikanskoi Ispaniei v period natsional'no revoliutsionnoi voiny, 1936-1939," Ph.D. diss. (Vologda, 1972), 79. More convincing still is Ilya Ehrenburg's observation that he [Ehrenburg] "was often in Barcelona and on the Aragon front; At that time [August- September 1936], no Soviet representative was there." See Ehrenburg, *Menschen, Jahre, Leben: Memoiren* (East Berlin: Verlag Volk und Welt, 1978), vol. II: 373. Among all secondary sources, only two get it right: Pierre Broué, *Staline et la révolution: le cas espagnol* (Paris: Fayard, 1993), 103, though characteristically the French scholar offers no source; and Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933-1939* (New York: St. Martin's, 1984), 118. In his recent book *Arms for Spain*, Howson curiously neglects to mention the Soviet consul general. [Back.](#)

Note 35: *Izvestiia*, 3 and 4 Oct. 1936. [Back.](#)

Note 36: Louis Fischer, *Men and Politics* (London: Cape, 1941), 262-263. [Back.](#)

Note 37: *Ibid.*, 361. [Back.](#)

Note 38: *Ibid.* [Back.](#)

Note 39: Luis Araquistain, *La intervención de Rusia en el conflicto Español: Revelaciones de un Ex-Embajador de la República Española* (San José, Costa Rica: [s.n.] 1939), 11. The quotation also appears in Pierre Broué, *Staline et la révolution*, 102-103. [Back.](#)

Note 40: This conversation, first mentioned in Luis Araquistain, *El comunismo y la guerra de España* (San José, Costa Rica: [s.n.] 1939), 11, was presented in greater detail in Hoy, 5 Dec. 1942, and has since been quoted often: see Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, 533-4; Bollothen, *Spanish Revolution*, 348; Alpert, *New International History*, 72. [Back.](#)

Note 41: RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, d. 832, l. 239. Cited in Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 94. [Back.](#)

Note 42: Report of M. Fred, 14 Dec. 1937; RGASPI, f. 495, op. 74, del. 206, ll. 91-146. Reproduced in Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 298. [Back.](#)

Note 43: The letter has been much discussed since its original publication in the *New York Times* on 4 June 1939. It was reprinted in Ibárruri, et al., *Guerra y Revolución*, vol. II, 101-2. For more, see Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, 533; and Bollothen, *Spanish Revolution*, 315. [Back.](#)

Note 44: Caballero to Stalin, Molotov and Voroshilov, 12 Jan. 1937. Reprinted in Ibárruri et al., *Guerra y Revolución*, vol. II, 102-103. [Back.](#)

Note 45: Luis Araquistain, *El comunismo y la guerra de España*, 11. [Back.](#)

Note 46: Ehrenburg, *Menschen, Jahre, Leben*, vol. II, 378. [Back.](#)

Note 47: The consul's preoccupation with the language is noted in Ehrenburg, *ibid.*, and discussed at length in Ovdii Savich, *Dva goda v Ispanii, 1937-1939* (Moscow: Sovetskii Pisatel', 1981), 9-11. Rosenberg's lack of Castilian is discussed by Araquistain in *El comunismo y la guerra de España*, 11. The author asserts that, unable to speak Spanish, the ambassador was nearly always accompanied by Alvarez del Vayo on his visits to the prime minister. [Back.](#)

Note 48: The newsreel, produced by Laya Films for the Generalitat, is entitled *Manifestaciones populares en Barcelona*. The Filmoteca Española preserves a copy. [Back.](#)

Note 49: Ehrenburg, *Menschen, Jahre, Leben*, vol. II, 378. [Back.](#)

Note 50: George Esenwein and Adrian Shubert, *Spain at War: The Spanish Civil War in Context 1931-1939* (London: Longman, 1995), 235. [Back.](#)

Note 51: Luis Araquistain, *El comunismo y la guerra de España*, 12. [Back.](#)

Note 52: Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 70. [Back.](#)

Note 53: RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 832, l. 199; quoted in Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 73-75. [Back.](#)

Note 54: *Ibid.* [Back.](#)

Note 55: Secret Archive (8), Antonov-Ovseenko to NKID, [illeg.] Nov. 1936; quoted in Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 82. [Back.](#)

Note 56: *Ibid.* [Back.](#)

Note 57: *Ibid.* [Back.](#)

Note 58: The letter of condolence was reprinted in part in *Izvestiia*, 23 Nov. 1936. On the consul's participation in the funeral, see Gabriel Jackson, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), 96. [Back.](#)

Note 59: The correspondence between VOKS and Antonov-Ovseenko is preserved in the VOKS archive at GARF. Files containing the consul's requests for propaganda materials, and VOKS directives on how these materials should be disseminated, include f. 5283, op. 7, del. 840, ll. 167-168; del. 1008, ll. 15-16; del. 1011, l. 21. [Back.](#)

Note 60: Correspondence between Antonov-Ovseenko and regional political organizations indicates that the consul was active in giving the returning delegates the widest possible exposure. See, for example, the exchange of letters between the consul and the representation of the Euzkadi government in Catalonia in December 1936. AHN-SGC, PS Barcelona, leg. 317. [Back.](#)

Note 61: Sofiiia Antonov-Ovseenko to VOKS, 31 Oct. 1936; GARF, f. 5283, op. 7, del. 840, l. 180. [Back.](#)

Note 62: Antonov-Ovseenko to NKID, 18 Oct. 1936; RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 832, l. 224. [Back.](#)

Note 63: The document in question appears in numerous secondary sources, including E. H. Carr, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 86-87. [Back.](#)

Note 64: The conversation is a reconstruction from Pascua's notes of the meeting. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, leg. 2, exp. 6, 12. [Back.](#)

Note 65: Ibid. [Back.](#)

Note 66: RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, del. 983, l. 321. [Back.](#)

Note 67: *Izvestiia*, 18 Mar. 1937. Even earlier, however, Gaikis was fulfilling ambassadorial functions, as is made evident in his correspondence with VOKS from 4 Mar. 1937; GARF, f. 5283, op. 7, del. 840, l. 175. [Back.](#)

Note 68: *DVP SSSR*, vol. XX, 130. [Back.](#)

Note 69: Gaikis to Krestinskii, 21 Mar. 1937; RGVA f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1932, l. 94. [Back.](#)

Note 70: Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, 702-3. [Back.](#)

Note 71: Thomas, for example, dismisses him in a sentence while misspelling his name; *ibid.*, 534. Elsewhere he goes unmentioned. There are no references in Casanova, Jackson, or Alpert. Bolloten discusses only his disappearance. [Back.](#)

Note 72: GARF, f. 5283, op. 7, del. 840, l. 175. [Back.](#)

Note 73: Julio Alvarez del Vayo, *The Last Optimist* (New York: Viking, 1950), 291. [Back.](#)

Note 74: Gaikis' recall is also little discussed in the literature. See David E. Allen, "The Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War," Ph.D. diss. (Stanford University, 1952), 482; Araquistain, *El comunismo y la guerra de España*, 12. [Back.](#)

Note 75: See Ehrenburg *Menschen, Jahre, Leben*, vol. II, 412, Allen, "Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War," 482; and del Vayo, *Last Optimist*, 291. [Back.](#)

Note 76: The report by Marchenko dated 22 February 1937, and signed "Plenipotentiary of the USSR in Spain" is one of the few that have surfaced from the thousands of pages of declassified documents examined by myself and other researchers. See RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 960, ll. 303-315; reproduced in Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 133-41. [Back.](#)

Note 77: Marchenko to VOKS, 23 June 1937; GARF, f. 5283, op. 7, del. 840, l. 45. [Back.](#)

Note 78: A letter to Litvinov on 10 Nov. 1938 is signed: Marchenko, Chargé d'affaires of the USSR in Spain. RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1081, l. 16. [Back.](#)

Note 79: Luis Araquistain, *El comunismo y la guerra de España*, 12. [Back.](#)

Note 80: See Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, 534. [Back.](#)

Note 81: Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 93. [Back.](#)

Note 82: Ibid. [Back.](#)

Note 83: Luis Araquistain, *El comunismo y la guerra de España*, 12. [Back.](#)

Note 84: AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, leg. 2, exp. 6, 12. [Back.](#)

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