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Introduction

I. Diplomacy

1. Pre-July 1936

2. Civil War

3. To Moscow

II. Soviet Aid

4. Solidarity

5. Children

III. Cultural Policy

6. Pre-War

7. Agit-prop

8. Home Front

IV. Military Aid

9. Operation X

10. Hardware

11. Spanish Gold

V. Soviet Advisors

12. Command

13. Activities

14. Air Force

15. Tank Crews

16. Success &

Failure

Conclusion

Appendix A

Appendix B

Bibliography

10. Soviet Hardware Supplied to the Republic

1

Ascertaining the day of arrival of the first Soviet weapons in Spain has proved, for most historians of the civil war, a slippery task. The problem is due to two separate factors. On the one hand, pro-Franco propagandists, in part to justify the rebellion itself, long held that Russian weapons were present in Spain, in large amounts, from a very early date—according to some accounts, before July 18. ¹ By the late 1950s, most of these claims had been largely dismissed by Western researchers, ² though until quite recently, historians would still occasionally refer to Soviet military aid to the Republic as dating from July 1936. ³ It is significant that, in his memoir of the war, the American ambassador to Madrid sought to refute both the erroneous Franquista propaganda claims of pre-war Soviet shipments as well as the gross exaggerations of the quantity of Russian hardware deployed in Spain:

Up until that time [October 1936] I invariably asked war correspondents from the front about foreign war material, and, without exception, they all said they had seen many Italian and German planes, tanks, guns, and soldiers, but they had not seen any Russian material. The amount of material bought in Russia has been grossly exaggerated. None appeared until four months after the planes, tanks, and even soldiers sent by Hitler and Mussolini were notoriously in Spain. ⁴

Further complicating the issue, the Soviets took great pains to conceal from the world the fact of their military assistance to the Republic, efforts which, if eventually foiled, nonetheless succeeded in delaying its discovery, or at least badly confusing the issue. ⁵ As a matter of routine, for example, Cyrillic markings on Russian-made hardware were painted over upon arrival in Spain. ⁶

The inaccuracies and confusion that circulated during the war regarding Soviet arms were in part clarified by research conducted in the 1950s and 1960s, but many problems remained. Some participants who later went on record, when asked about the first arrival of Soviet arms in Spain, gave the imprecise period of "October 1936," ⁷ while another well-regarded source asserted that the first weapons arrived in the end of that month. ⁸ In light of indisputable evidence that places Soviet weaponry on the Madrid front in the first week of November, most, like Juan García Durán, Angel Viñas, and others, have concluded that this matériel must have landed in Spain sometime in mid- to late October. ⁹

5

Russian Military Archive documents now demonstrate convincingly that the first *igrek* to arrive in Spain, originating in the Black Sea port of Feodosiia, was aboard the Spanish vessel *Campeche*, which sailed into Cartagena on 4 October 1936. This first delivery consisted of 6 English howitzers with 6000 shells, 240 German grenade launchers and 100,000 grenades, and 20,362 rifles with 7 million rounds of ammunition. ¹⁰ The second *igrek*, the Soviet ship *Komsomol*, arrived eight days later, on 12 October. Its cargo included fifty T-26 tanks and, in some accounts, forty armored cars. ¹¹

Despite the opening of Russian archives, the task of arriving at exact numbers for Soviet weapons deliveries to Spain remains problematic. For decades, scholars have produced widely divergent accounts of the total amount of weaponry supplied to the Republic by the USSR. The first official Soviet publication to list weapons transferred to Spain indicated that Moscow provided Spain with 806 planes, 362 tanks, and 1,555 artillery pieces. ¹² A second

Soviet publication from the same year revised these figures considerably, claiming instead 648 planes, 347 tanks, and 1,186 pieces of artillery. ¹³ Many historians in the West and Francoist and post-Francoist Spain tended to dismiss these Soviet inventories as too low; one Spaniard claimed that the Soviets supplied the Republic with 1008 airplanes; ¹⁴ another claimed 1,409. ¹⁵ An Italian historian put the number at 1,244; ¹⁶ a Frenchman at 922. ¹⁷ A Spanish researcher who examined all of these claims opted instead for the very first Soviet figures (806 planes, 362 tanks, etc.). ¹⁸ Bollothen, perhaps wisely, discusses probable totals without committing to any. ¹⁹ Looking towards the Russian archives, one would hope to answer two questions raised by these disputes: Why the discrepancies, and which amounts are correct? As we shall see, the first question is more easily resolved than the second.

The cause of this considerable divergence of opinion is twofold. First, until the early 1990s, Western and Soviet historians alike worked without the benefit of direct access to the RGVA. Lacking hard archival data, scholars were forced to wade through myriad conflicting accounts, and many historians unwittingly incorporated rumors, errors, uncertainties, and propaganda into their studies. Second, there has always been some dispute about what should count as Soviet military aid. Assistance from Moscow was not limited to the weapons that traveled aboard *igreks* out of Russian ports. The Soviets also purchased arms in third countries for transfer directly to Spain, as did Comintern agents in Europe and Latin American. According to George Soria, the Republic acquired 321 airplanes from sources other than the Soviet Union: 143 from France, 50 from Czechoslovakia, 59 from the United States, 32 from England, and 37 from Holland. ²⁰

More significantly, as the Republic's own military industry grew, many weapons were assembled on Spanish soil under Soviet patent and supervision. Soviet advisors organized four Spanish installations that assembled and repaired the R-Z bomber and the I-15 and I-16 fighters. From July 1937 to April 1938, two of these factories alone turned out 320 refurbished or assembled aircraft, though some of the latter lacked engines or weaponry and were never put into service. In similar workshops the Soviets oversaw the production of 337 armored vehicles (most, however, far inferior to those originating in Russia). At its highpoint in 1938, the Republic's military production capabilities included not only the assembly of tanks, armored vehicles, and planes, but also artillery shells, cartridges, grenades, field spades, and barbed wire. ²¹ Should this matériel be tallied as Soviet military aid? On occasion it has been, on others not.

Unfortunately, nowhere in the newly accessible documentary evidence in Russia does one find a single inventory of all weapons sent from the USSR to Spain. Ribalkin, comparing Soviet documents with materials available in the West, has produced a comparative summary of Soviet, Italian and German military aid in the civil war [See Table IV-1]. Regarding Soviet shipments, Ribalkin's numbers largely confirm the figures in the 1974 Soviet history of World War II. It should be emphasized that Ribalkin's tally, evidently like that of the works he cites, claims to include only weapons sent to Spain as part of Operation X. This does not include any arms purchased from third parties, or weapons manufactured in Spain.

10

Table IV-1

Estimate of total military equipment, weapons, and supplies sent to Spain, 1936-39, according to Ribalkin and others ²²

Equipment Type	Republican Army	Nationalist Army	
	USSR	Germany	Italy

Airplanes of all types	648	621	632
Tanks	347	} 250	} 150
Armored vehicles	60		
Artillery guns	1,186	700	1,930
Mortar	340	6,174	1,426
Machine guns	20,486	31,000	3,436
Rifles	497,813	157,306	240,747
Ammunition (rounds)	862,000,000	250,000,000	324,900,000
Shells	3,400,000	1,100,000	7,700,000
Bombs	110,000	—	17,000
Submarines	—	—	4

Table IV-2

Military Equipment, Weapons, and Supplies Sent to Republican Spain from USSR, 1936-39, according to Howson ²³

Equipment Type	From USSR
Airplanes of all types	623, plus 4 UTI trainers
Tanks	331
Armored vehicles	60
Artillery guns	1090-1228
Grenade Throwers	12,578-15,008
Machine guns	240-340
Rifles	294,645-379,645
Ammunition (rounds)	—
Shells	—
Aviation bombs	—
Submarines	—

Table IV-3

Military Supplies Delivered by the Soviet Union to the Spanish Republic by period, October 1936-January 1939, according to official 1974 Soviet published figures ²⁴

	1.10.1936- 1.08.1937	14.12.1937- 11.08.1938	25.12.1938- 28.01.1939	Total
Airplanes of all types	496	152	—	648
Tanks	322	25	—	347
Armored vehicles	60	—	—	60
Artillery guns	714	469	3	1,186
Machine guns	12,804	4,910	2,772	20,486
Rifles	337,793	125,020	35,000	497,813

Table IV-4

Military Supplies Delivered by the Soviet Union to the Spanish Republic, by period, October 1936-July 1937, according to official, 1974 Soviet published figures and documents in RGVA

25

	1.10.1936- 6.12.1936	7.12.1936- 31.03.1937	1.04.1937- 1.08.1937	Total
Airplanes of all types	136	197	163	496
Tanks	106	150	66	322
Armored vehicles	30	30	—	60
Artillery guns	174		540	714
Machine guns	3,750	3,527	5,527	12,804
Rifles	60,183	128,817	148,793	337,793

Table IV-5

Soviet War Materials in, en route, or to be transported to Spain, up to 5 November 1936, according to lists in RGVA

26

	Aircraft	Tanks & Armored vehicles	Artillery	Infantry Weapons & Ammunition
Ready for Transport	31 SSS (Gruziatciia) 31 R-Z	37 T-26 (1 battalion)	24 English howitzers (115 mm)	1800 Colt machine guns + 26 million rds. 400 Shosha machine guns + 3.5 million rds. 3,820 foreign rifles + 7 million rds. 50 tons gunpowder
En Route	1 Lockheed (from Switzerland)	None	On the <i>Liyankkhem</i> : (left Mexico 26.10.36) 22 guns (77mm) + 70,000 rds. 8 guns (105 mm) + 13,000 rds. On the <i>Gilfern</i> : (left Danzig 30.10.36) 8 guns (76.2 mm) + 15,000 rds.	On the <i>Gilfern</i> : (left Danzig 30.10.36) 253 Stankovykh machine guns + 4,000,000 rds. 10,000 foreign rifles + 10,000,000 rds.
In Action	20 SB 40 I-15 31 I-16 1 Douglas 1 Clark	50 T-26 60 armored vehicles	6 English howitzers + 6,000 rds. 18 Armstrong guns (127 mm) + 14,000 rds.	340 grenade launchers + 180,000 grenades 200 Maksim

	1 Lockheed		30 McClain guns + 50,000 rds.	machine guns 150 Degtiarev machine guns + 30,000,000 rds. 350 foreign machine guns + 3,000,000 rds. 100 tons gunpowder 46,363 foreign rifles + 28,860 rds. 600 Louis guns + 12 million rds.
Total	167 aircraft	87 Tanks 60 armored vehicles	84 guns (medium caliber) 30 guns (small caliber)	340 grenade launchers 2553 mounted machine guns 1150 handheld machine guns 60,183 rifles 95,528,860 rds. ammunition 150 tons gunpowder

Table IV-6

Shipments of Soviet Weaponry to the Spanish Republic (*igreks*) 1936-39, according to official 1974 Soviet publication and documents in RGVA ²⁷

Period	Sept.1936- May 1937	June-Dec. 1937	1938	1939	Total
Number of Shipments	30	22	13	1	66

The issue of weapons quality has sparked considerable debate among analysts of Soviet participation in Spain. According to the version of anti-Communists and Soviet renegades, the weapons sent by the Soviets were mostly out-of-date, some obsolete and a not a few antiques; some critics claimed the weaponry dated from the First World War, others the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, and a few perhaps even the Crimean War of the mid-nineteenth century. ²⁸ In some weapons categories, this appears to be true. The research of Gerald Howson reveals that in the areas of rifles, machine-guns, and artillery, the Soviets sent their Spanish friends weapons that were either obsolete, in poor repair, or exceedingly difficult to maintain and arm. ²⁹ Howson demonstrates that the Soviets delivered rifles of at least eight different nationalities, ten different types, and six different calibers. Nearly a quarter of all rifles supplied to the Republic were 11-mm French and Austrian pieces dating from the 1880s; the 11-mm caliber had been obsolete worldwide since the turn of the century. Similarly, Soviet-supplied machine-guns and heavy guns were sufficiently mixed in origin and date to make reliable ammunition re-supply all but impossible. Of course, Howson is not the first to allege that in the categories of small arms and artillery the Soviets simply shipped their surplus or outdated equipment, much of which dated from the revolutionary era or earlier. ³⁰ The issue, however, has been excessively belabored. A recent memoir

makes multiple references to the "Russian relics from World War I" that the Soviets passed off as rifles and machine-guns. This vintage seems far more ancient today than it would have to those living in the years before World War II. [31](#)

But small arms and artillery tell only part of the story. If one examines tank and aircraft shipments, one must conclude that the Soviet hardware employed by the Republicans was equal or superior to the equipment supplied to the Nationalists by their foreign allies, at least through the first nine months of Moscow's intervention. Moreover, Soviet matériel sold to the Loyalists was certainly the most advanced Moscow was able to send. Consider Soviet tank shipments. The main tank model sent by the Soviets to Spain was the T-26 (officially the T-26B1) light tank, a license-built, heavier copy of the British Vickers six-ton tank, updated with a Soviet turret and hefty 45-mm dual-purpose gun. Far from a surplus or obsolete tank crowding the Russian armor parks, the T-26 was the standard infantry tank employed by the Red Army during the 1930s, the same unit used against the Japanese at Lake Khasan in 1938, the Poles in 1939, the Finns in 1939-40, and even in the early stages of the war with Germany beginning in 1941. Compared to the machines supplied to the Nationalists during the same period by the Italians and Germans, the T-26 quickly emerged as the most formidable armored vehicle in the war. Its weight of nine tons made the T-26 three times larger than the Italian-made Fiat CV.3/35 tankette, and a third again as heavy as the six-ton German PzKpfw I. According to one recent and highly objective study, the T-26 was the most powerful tank available anywhere in the world in 1936. [32](#)



Postwar analysis aside, the forces on the ground opposing or observing the T-26 quickly learned to respect its capabilities. The Italians, in particular, suffered grievously from the mismatch in mechanized battle. After seeing the T-26 in action near Guadalajara and Santander, Lieutenant General Ettore Bastico, commander of the *Corpo Truppe Volontarie*, appealed to Rome for the development of a heavier gun-armed tank and an improved armored car. [33](#) The regular Nationalist forces held the T-26 in high enough esteem to actively attempt intact captures, and cash payouts of five hundred pesetas were promised to any rebel soldier who brought one in. This policy had no inconsiderable impact on motivation in the field, and T-26s were rapidly added to the rebels' mechanized companies. According to one Nationalist officer, the rebels preferred the captured T-26s to the armor provided by the Germans and Italians. [34](#) By the end of the war, between thirty and sixty of the machines had been captured, forming at least two separate Nationalist tank companies. [35](#) It should also be pointed out that after-action reports summarizing the exploits of the T-26 in certain campaigns drew praise from foreign theoreticians planning the future employment of armor. [36](#)

None of this should imply that the T-26 did not have discernable shortcomings. Its armor was notoriously poor, easily penetrated by the widely employed German 37-mm gun; at Brunete, one of these anti-tank weapons was credited with a dozen T-26 kills. [37](#) The vision devices in the machine were also seriously flawed, and prevented both reliable navigation and accurate targeting. This uncorrectable problem led most crews to fling open the hatches, leaving themselves vulnerable to attack by Molotov cocktails. [38](#) Indeed, on their first day of action three T-26s were torched and destroyed by these simple gasoline bombs, their crews burned alive. [39](#) These weaknesses notwithstanding, the salient point concerning the T-26 cannot be overstated: it was both the finest tank in the Soviet arsenal as well as the strongest overall machine in the Spanish war.

20

The BT-5 fast tank, meanwhile—the only other Soviet tank supplied to the Republic—was a problematic machine for different reasons. Only fifty units of the BT-5 were ever shipped to Spain, arriving in a single package aboard the *Cabo San Agustin* in August 1937. At twenty

tons, the BT-5 was the heaviest and most powerful tank to see action in the war. Unlike the light T-26, an infantry-support machine, the BT-5 was intended for independent deep maneuvers. Held in reserve for several months after its arrival, the BT-5 did not debut until the October 1937 offensive at Fuentes del Ebro. This battle was a noted disaster, and saw the loss of nineteen out of the forty-eight Republican tanks that began the day. Based on the evidence of its performance at Fuentes del Ebro, in the intervening sixty-five years the BT-5 has often been roundly condemned. ⁴⁰ In fact, the principal cause of its notorious failure had more to do with poor planning and coordination with the infantry, and not necessarily a fatal design flaw. In any case, the BT-5 was, like the T-26, the best armor the Soviets could offer at the time.

One cannot accuse the Soviets of withholding the more advanced BT-7 or T-34 tanks; the former was still in its developmental stage through 1936 and 1937, and it did not enter the Red Army mechanized arsenal until 1938, a year which saw the production of fewer than 1000. The T-34, meanwhile, was first manufactured in 1940 and did not enter battle on a regular basis until the end of 1941. ⁴¹ It would not fully eclipse its forbears for another year still, and in the initial defensive campaign against Germany in June 1941, the overwhelming majority of tanks fielded by the Soviets were the same ones which they had earlier sent to Spain: the T-26 and BT-5. ⁴²



In terms of aircraft, six basic Soviet models saw action in Spain: the I-15 and I-16 Polikarpov fighters; the SB-2 Tupolev bomber; and the Polikarpov R-5 reconnaissance and light bomber, of which several variants also appeared in Spain: the R-Z (or R-Zet) and R5SSS, the latter known usually as SSS. The Polikarpov I-15, dubbed *Chato* by the Loyalists, was a plywood biplane fighter that had first debuted in 1933 and was subsequently modified over the course of the decade. The I-15 was a highly controllable aircraft, capable of speeds between 347 and 444 kmh at 3,000 meters (depending on the year and model) and able to climb to an altitude of 5,000 meters in 6.7 minutes. The plane's agile maneuverability was impressive for the era: the I-15 could complete a 360-degree turn in eight seconds. ⁴³ The I-15 fighter was also considered to be well armed, possessing four synchronized 7.62-mm PV-1 machine-guns.

A similar if better fighter was the all-metal monowing Polikarpov I-16, known to Loyalists as the *Mosca*, to the Nationalists as the *Rata*. Though faster and possessing greater firepower than its cousin, the I-16's lifespan overlapped closely with the I-15, its line production running between 1934 and 1941. The newer fighter, equipped with a 1000 CV motor, was capable of speeds up to 462 kilometers per hour. The I-16's main improvements were the more reliable low-wing design and the addition, alongside a pair of machine-guns, of two 20-mm cannon.

Both of these Soviet fighters were faster than the rivals they faced in the first year of the war. The fabric-covered Fiat CR.32 had a top speed at level flight of only 375 kilometers per hour, though the Italian fighter enjoyed a higher ceiling and heavier armament, and according to some pilots had better maneuverability. ⁴⁴ The I-15s and I-16s were generally

considered to be superior to the Condor Legion's biplane Heinkel-51 and Heinkel-111, ⁴⁵ but the arrival of the faster Messerschmitt-109 in spring and summer 1937 put the Soviet fighter contingent at a serious disadvantage.

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The Soviet bomber and reconnaissance aircraft contribution to the Spanish Republic was more uneven. The all-metal monowing Tupolev SB-2 fast bomber (*Katiuska* to the Republicans, *Sofia* to the Nationalists) was the most powerful aircraft of its kind to fly in Spanish skies during the war, more advanced generally than its main German rivals, the He-111 and Do-17. Its high speed allowed the plane to easily elude Italian and German fighters, while its voluminous hold permitted a sizable number of bombs to be dropped during each sortie. ⁴⁶ For most of the war, however, the SB-2 accounted for only one-third of the Republican bomber fleet, and even those that were deployed often turned in unimpressive performances, with their accuracy in high-altitude bombing a general disappointment. ⁴⁷

The remaining Soviet planes shipped to Spain were the lighter dual-use R-5, R-Z, and SSS wooden biplanes, which were deployed for light bombing, attack, and reconnaissance service. These three models, though possessing some differences in wingspan, engine size, and load capacity, were quite similar in appearance. The R-Z was known to the Loyalists as the *Natasha*, the R-5 as the *Rasante*. The SSS, withdrawn after a brief appearance, may not have served long enough to acquire a nickname. Despite claims of robust versatility, in the Spanish arena the R-5 and its variants were regarded by some advisors as obsolete, and in any case were far inferior to the Soviet-made fast bomber and fighter aircraft. In a report to the Defense Commissariat from early September 1937, chief Soviet advisor Shtern suggested that the Red Army reconsider the continued use of the R-Z:

Against 130-150 modern German bombers the Republic has at its disposal 44 R-Zs, 8 SSSs and 28 SBs. In reality, just 28 SBs. On the basis of vast experience working with the air force in Spain, we conclude that the use of the R-Z and SSS in the face of the enemy's powerful fighter aircraft is hopeless. The R-Zs are slow, highly vulnerable aircraft which are defenseless against fighters and excellent targets for anti-aircraft fire. They cannot go anywhere without a major fighter escort, which takes the latter away from defending our troops from enemy bombers. Indeed, we must deploy the R-Zs in the following manner: The entire R-Z group flies in tandem with an escort of 30-35 fighters. Appearing at the battlefield, they drop all their bombs on the specified targets and then quickly disappear. ⁴⁸

One final aspect of Soviet equipment deliveries is worth nothing. Whereas the Kremlin held back no significant armor then available in its arsenal, Moscow did not send to the Republic sorely needed transport aircraft, paratrooping supplies and units, or its main heavy bomber, the TB-3. The Soviets have often been criticized for these omissions, for the matériel in question was available and integrated into the Red Air Force during the Spanish Civil War. In a request for matériel made by Largo Caballero in December 1936, the Loyalist premier specifically asked for sixteen heavy bombers accompanied by trained crews, but none were sent. ⁴⁹ Similarly, in a September 1937 letter to Voroshilov, Pascua requested the immediate dispatch to Spain by air of two or three commercial transport aircraft. The ambassador appealed to Voroshilov to expedite the request, so that the larger planes might

allow the Republic to reestablish aerial communication lines and eventually evacuate personnel from northern Spain, whose fall was imminent. ⁵⁰ Within a month, the northern zone had fallen to the Nationalists; no Soviet transport aircraft were ever delivered. ⁵¹ Yet it is rarely pointed out that in the late 1930s the Soviet transport air units were the weakest link in the Red Air Force. The newer Tupolev transport and passenger planes had not fared well in trials, and the basic transport craft of the World War II era, the LI2, was still in the blueprint stage. ⁵² Moreover, the larger size of the available TB heavy bomber fleet presented problems in disassembly and transport that may have militated against their use in Spain.

Meanwhile, it is appropriate to also note that ground transport vehicles, though not in the same class as military hardware, were in short supply in Spain and were never sent from the Soviet Union. Ehrenburg recalled drinking tea on a cold night with Brigade Commander M. P Petrov, who complained to the journalist, "So little equipment! There are never enough lorries to send the infantry forward, and as a result we are stuck there." ⁵³

30

It need hardly be underlined that military strength cannot be wholly calculated from a simple inventory of weapons, or solely from objective comparisons of the quality of opposing arsenals. It is axiomatic that no comparative chart can account for all of the qualitative differences between the diverse weapons featured on the field of battle, or the degree to which each side effectively deployed their men and arms. The rebels enjoyed a slight numerical advantage in tanks and armored vehicles, but this was offset by the superior quality of the tanks provided to the Republic, and by the skill with which Soviet tankers used their equipment in action. ⁵⁴ Through the first nine months of Operation X, the Red Air Force owned the skies over Spain, but aircraft wastage and diminished resupply eventually shifted the advantage to the side of the Nationalists. Elsewhere, the Republic possessed a far greater portion of Spain's naval fleet, but they were unable to exploit the superior numbers to their advantage. ⁵⁵ According to Kuznetsov, by November 1936 the smaller rebel navy posed a serious threat in Loyalist waters, not least because the Republic's enlisted men had mutinied against their officers in the opening days of the rebellion. ⁵⁶ As we shall see below, the chief problem that vexed the Republic throughout the war was not a lack of weapons. Indeed, in several important areas, including rifles and cartridges, the Republic was far superior to the rebels (though again, with numerous caliber sizes in use, the Republican army was often hard-pressed to match its many cartridges with the correct small arms). It was in the deployment of weaponry that the Republic was at its weakest. This factor, more than any quantitative or qualitative differences, played the deciding role.

If the total amount of weapons supplied to the Republic by the USSR is now clearer, there still remains the very important issue of how these weapons were distributed over the course of the thirty-two month conflict. A partial answer is the inventory and periodization of Soviet aid published in the 1974 *Istoriia vtoroi mirovoi voiny* [see Table IV-1]. These figures are largely supported and complemented by Ribalkin's research in Moscow's Defense and Military archives, and would thus be regarded as fundamentally reliable were it not for the recent work of Howson. Working from copies of RGVA documents, Howson slightly alters the 1974 official Soviet figures, reducing both total airplane and tank numbers [see Table IV-2]. A more precise periodization of the first year of the war is possible by comparing the weapons amounts listed in *Istoriia vtoroi mirovoi voiny* with documents in RGVA [see Table IV-3]. Data from the same archive also provide an accounting of weapons sent to Spain from October 1936 to July 1936 [see Table IV-4], as well as weapons earmarked for or deployed in Spain through the first month of Operation X [see Table IV-5]. Using the same sources again, it is possible to draw up a summary of the number of individual weapons shipments (*igreks*) over the course of the war [see Table IV-6]. Howson, it should be noted, also disputes the number of total *igreks*, claiming that as few as forty-eight but as many as fifty-nine may have reached Spain, the difference depending on whether or not

the last shipments ever reached their destination. [57](#)

Tables IV-1 to IV-6 confirm what many scholars have claimed for years: a substantial portion of all Soviet aid was delivered during the first ten months of Soviet assistance. In some weapons categories, no further shipments were made at all after the end of this initial period. Thus, while the Soviets shipped sixty armored vehicles to the Republic early in the war, no more were ever sent past this early phase. Table IV-5 indicates that by November 1936 all sixty of these vehicles were already in action. The data for tanks are nearly the same: 322 sent in the first ten months of the operation, but just 25 more over the rest of the war. Nearly a third of the total number of tanks was deployed within a month of the initiation of aid. No category of weapons saw an increase in delivery size after the first ten months. Obviously this pattern had far greater consequences in some areas than others; for instance, the Republic was never able to satisfactorily manufacture a tank or plane, and was thus almost entirely reliant on Soviet aid. Armored vehicles were more easily improvised, and thus were not requested after an initial delay in the conversion of selected factories. [58](#) Small arms and cartridges could, in principle, be manufactured in Spain, although some difficulties remained here as well. [59](#)

Tables IV-3 and IV-4 show that by April 1937 the volume of Soviet aid shipments had already begun to diminish. As indicated in Table IV-6, *igrek* numbers remained constant through the end of 1937; between September 1936 and December 1937, fifty-two of the total sixty-six *igreks* were sent to Spain, or about one shipment every nine days. But by late spring of 1937, the same number of shipments were providing fewer arms. According to Table IV-4, the number of planes delivered to Spain averaged over sixty per month in the first period (Oct.-Dec. 1936), but dropped to fifty per month by early 1937, and by August the average was just forty. [60](#) Monthly tank delivery averages reveal a similar pattern: fifty per month during the first period, then forty-five after December 1936, and finally just seventeen in the summer of 1937. These figures are somewhat offset by the increased numbers of rifles, machine-guns, and cannon with which the Soviet supplied the Republic. On the whole, however, one may say without further qualification that Soviet arms deliveries declined from an even earlier point than has often been acknowledged.

The decline in arms shipments was a source of great consternation among the Republican leadership. On 18 June 1937, the Spanish ambassador sent the first in a series of increasingly frantic appeals for arms to the Soviet defense commissar. In his letter, Pascua requested that Voroshilov "send with the greatest urgency the maximum number of airplanes" at his disposal. [61](#) In late July, having received no response either way, Pascua sent Voroshilov the following message:

The Prime Minister Monsieur Negrín requests that I inform you that in spite of the enemy's superior losses, we are experiencing a rapid decline in airplane numbers, such that it will be necessary to rapidly replenish lost aircraft with even greater quantities than those which have been predicted and announced. He has also asked me to alert you that the brigades do not possess the required number of machine guns. He believes that in light of the rebels' increasing superiority in war materials it is necessary to intensify and accelerate the aid from the USSR.... [62](#)

The letter did not move the Defense Commissariat to act. In a similar request, dated 21 October, Pascua stated that the Republic "needs all sorts of materials." [63](#) A week later, when it became apparent that no drastic increase in arms shipments was likely, Pascua applied for and received a personal audience with Voroshilov. According to Pascua's notes of the 29 October meeting, the ambassador repeated his earlier appeals, and the commissar promised to do all he could. As he prepared to depart, a revealing exchange took place:

Voroshilov: It is necessary to be optimistic—the people must stand tall and hold the flag high.

Pascua: Yes, but with machine guns and airplanes....

Voroshilov: You people are too pessimistic.

Pascua: We'll see. [64](#)

Neither this conversation, nor the above communiqués, nor even the classified reports sent to the Defense Commissariat from the chief Soviet advisor in Spain succeeded in winning immediate increased arms deliveries to the Republic. On this issue, one must take issue with Aleksandr Orlov's unconvincing defense of the dramatic slowdown in military supplies:

... the partial curtailment of military supplies to Spain, which had been ordered by Stalin, was more than made up for by the boundless courage and sacrifices of the Russian officers and men who had fought for Spain with no less devotion than for their own country. [65](#)

40

In fact, the several hundred pilots and tank crews present in Spain during the summer of 1937, however courageous, could do very little for their Republican allies without fresh equipment.

What is the explanation for the marked decline in weapons shipments after the summer of 1937? Contrary to the assertions of some historians, the naval blockade initiated after the Nyon conference in September 1937 was probably only a minor factor in reducing Soviet military shipments. [66](#) Continued Italian attacks off the African coast, coupled with British and French warship patrols in the western Mediterranean, certainly rendered Section X's southern route virtually impassable to vessels ferrying arms. [67](#) As was discussed above, however, the limited access via the French frontier after July 1937 made the northern route through France a reasonable alternative to the Black Sea route. In fact, as one Russian scholar has pointed out, the blockade only had an effect on arms deliveries after the French frontier was fully sealed in June 1938. [68](#) Until that time—and again, according to several sources, including Kuznetsov, Maiskii, Pascua, and Shtern—an efficient if expensive system of bribes and kickbacks allowed weapons to pass through France.

The decline in supply was more likely due to several other factors, not least of which was the difficulty in maintaining the inordinately large shipments with which Operation X commenced. Given the state of Soviet military production and the rigors of the 3500-kilometer voyage to Spain, it would be difficult to imagine the Soviet Union continuing for more than several months the massive shipments of arms to the Republic that were sent in October and November [see Table IV-4]. Secondly, the exhaustion in March 1938 of the Republic's monetary credit with the Soviets meant that continued support would cost the Kremlin many millions of dollars, funds never likely to be reimbursed. International developments also played a role. In the summer of 1937, much of the aid that might have traveled west was sent east instead; the Soviets had begun to supply military aid to China and Mongolia, both of whom were being threatened by aggressive Japanese expansion. The last crisis, that of Munich in September 1938, forced the Soviets to consider the need for serious reinforcements on its western frontiers, as well as the abandonment of whatever hopes for collective security may have still lingered.

It would seem, then, that by late 1937 or early 1938 the Soviet Union had many reasons for decreasing—indeed, for discontinuing—its military support of the Republic. Western writers often accuse the Soviet Union of gradually slowing its military support to the Republic. Some variety of Soviet "abandonment," "effective abandonment," or "starvation" from early 1938 to the end of the war is central to nearly all narrative accounts of the war. In fact, this notion has long been taken as a given; it is almost never questioned. [69](#) In the

event, abandonment is not quite what happened. Although greatly reduced by Moscow or prevented from passing by France, Soviet aid to Spain did indeed continue to the end of the war.

In December 1938, the Loyalist premier Juan Negrín sent the Republic's aviation commander Hidalgo de Cisneros on a special mission to Moscow to urgently request more arms. According to Cisneros, he personally submitted to Stalin a detailed request for a large supply of munitions, including 250 aircraft, 250 tanks, 4,000 machine-guns, 650 artillery guns, and other weapons in large quantities. Although the Republic's credit with the Soviets had long since run out, Cisneros claimed that Stalin immediately agreed to the request and dispatched seven ships to Spain. ⁷⁰ "With only my signature as guarantee," Cisneros boasted in his memoirs, "the Soviet Union gave Spain over \$100 million." ⁷¹ Cisneros reported that very few of the arms aboard these ships ever reached the Republic's army; their passage through France was delayed by French officials, and the weapons arrived either too late or not at all.

45

For many years, scholars have disputed Cisneros' account of his trip to Russia and the subsequent decision made by Stalin. Chief among his detractors is Burnett Bolloten, who devotes considerable effort to refuting Cisneros' claims. Bolloten's objections may be summarized as follows: 1) Given the Republic's recent difficulty in acquiring credit and arms from the Soviets, Cisneros would not have been able to win so expensive a cache of arms with only his signature as guarantee, and; 2) no reliable proof exists of a large amount of Soviet arms reaching Spain in January 1939. ⁷² Other scholars have raised separate objections. Armando Llera doubts that the ships contained even half of the arms that Cisneros claimed. "If the first six ships (October 1936) carried 50 tanks and 100 planes to Spain," Llera asserts with no proof whatsoever, "the last seven vessels would not have brought more." ⁷³

RGVA materials and Russian-language secondary sources now permit a more thorough assessment of the veracity of Cisneros' much-contested account. It appears that, while Cisneros' numbers are inflated, the essential contours of his story can be substantiated. In a report issued in December 1938, Defense Commissar Voroshilov summarized his meeting with the impassioned Spaniard as follows:

Cisneros convincingly requested a speedy consideration of his request ... and that an answer be given.... In his words, the Spanish army literally and most urgently requires weapons. They have no rifles. Whole battalions are going to the front without rifles. They have no artillery, missiles, and little or very worn out aviation equipment.... Except for our country, says Cisneros, no one will sell them anything. ⁷⁴

In fact, the Soviet leadership did not require the visit of a personal representative of Negrín to be assured that the Republic's means to resist had all but run out. As had been the case since the July 1936 uprising, the Soviets were well informed of the state of the Republic's defenses. Even as Cisneros was presenting his case, a detailed summary of the Republic's military capabilities arrived at the Defense Commissariat. The 23 December 1938 report, authored by weapons advisor M. Nedelin, portrayed the Republic as incapable of fully realizing its production potential. ⁷⁵ While munitions and small arms manufacture had been modestly successful—shell production was quite extensive in Catalonia, and some rifle factories in that province were turning out up to 1000 guns daily—far fewer large weapons, trucks, planes, or tanks were being issued. Artillery production could be measured in hundreds, rather than thousands, and armored vehicle output was stalled. For example, between August and November 1938, just forty-five heavy armored trucks were produced. Of these, only ten could be fitted with proper machine gun cockpits; the rest were

considered unfit for military deployment. ⁷⁶

It appears, therefore, that the Soviet leadership was already convinced of the Republic's dire need for weaponry, though perhaps further moved by Cisneros' presentation. Archival documents indicate that the Soviets quickly dispatched to the Republic a shipment of weapons valued at \$55,359,660. These arms included 40 T-26 tanks, 134 aircraft of various types, 15 torpedo boats with 30 torpedoes, 359 artillery guns with 1,382,540 shells, 3,000 machine guns, 40,000 rifles with 100 million cartridges, and 1,350 tons of gunpowder. ⁷⁷ M. S. Shumilov, a Soviet advisor who oversaw the reception of the arms in France, confirms Cisneros' claim that the transfer was carried out by seven ships, and that all of these sailed from Murmansk via the North Sea to French ports. ⁷⁸

50

By all accounts, only a fraction of these weapons made it to the last Republican resisters fighting in Catalonia. Maiskii claims that in late 1938 and early 1939, French officials refused to allow across the frontier a major shipment of arms purchased by the Republic, including planes, torpedo boats, a large number of artillery pieces, and other war materials. ⁷⁹ According to Meshcheriakov, of the arms dispatched from Russia, only 27 planes, 20 artillery guns, 40,000 rifles, 2,400 machine-guns, and a large quantity of ammunition reached Spain. ⁸⁰ The rest, claims Shumilov, if not destroyed or absconded with en route, were sent back to the Soviet Union. ⁸¹ Little is known about Moscow's reaction to the difficulty of transfer across French territory. A letter from Voroshilov to Stalin in mid-February 1939 expresses regret, though at this stage the question of additional supply is plainly unrealistic:

The latest request of the Spanish Government for the sale of arms, which was announced through Cisneros was, to a significant degree, met by us and if the Spanish Government could not agree with the French government about the timely transfer of these arms to Spain then we can only deplore that. To demand new deliveries of arms for Spain at the present time, when the weapons already supplied by us in enormous quantities are in the territory of France and risk falling into the hands of the French fascists as trophies is, at the very least, inopportune. ⁸²

But these sources do not conclusively resolve the issue. As Bolloten points out, the final shipments do not appear to be completely reflected in the weapons amounts listed in the third period (25.12.38-28.01.39) of Table IV-2. ⁸³ Figures for rifles and machine-guns in this table are quite close to those given in RGVA data, but no account is given of the airplanes, tanks, and artillery. Is it feasible that the planes sent across the border in January 1939 and cited by Meshcheriakov were not the ones that left Murmansk in late December? If so, it is plausible that most or all of the aircraft and tanks dispatched in the last seven ships to Spain were eventually returned to the Soviet Union, and thus were not figured into the final lists of weapons sent. If, as some have claimed, the weapons fell into Franco's hands or were destroyed, one would still expect to find them included in official lists.

In any case, the documentary evidence is sufficient to refute the abandonment thesis. Weapons deliveries from Russia slowed from late 1937 on, but there is no denying that the Soviets later undertook a risky and costly relief effort at a time when every other state in Europe considered Franco's victory a *fait accompli*. Moreover, as was demonstrated in Chapter Six above, in late February 1939 the Soviets provided the Republic with humanitarian relief of 5 million francs, earmarked specifically for the refugees amassing on France's southern border. It appears that, if Moscow's military aid could not get through, the Kremlin was committed to at least play a role in caring for the beleaguered fighters and civilians who had escaped Franco's advancing troops.

Notes:

Note 1: See Eoin O'Duffy, *Crusade in Spain* (London: R. Hale, 1938), 7; and Elenore Tennant, *Spanish Journey* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1936), 10-98. A thorough analysis of these claims is presented in David E. Allen, "The Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War," Ph.D. diss. (Stanford, 1952), 90-117. [Back.](#)

Note 2: See Allen, "The Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War"; David Cattell, *Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957); Cattell, *Communism and the Spanish Civil War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955); Robert L. Plumb "Soviet participation in the Spanish Civil War," Ph.D. diss. (Georgetown, 1956). [Back.](#)

Note 3: Asher Lee asserts in *The Soviet Air Force* that, "In the summer of 1936, beginning in July, the first units of the Soviet Air Force, numbering some 200 pilots and between 2,000 and 3,000 ground personnel left Odessa by sea ... en route for the ... south-east coast of Spain"; Lee, *The Soviet Air Force* (New York: John Day Co., 1962), 40. More surprising is a 1995 review essay in which one historian, evidently drawing on fascist-era Italian propaganda, refers without qualification to "Soviet aid of late July [1936] to the Republic." Brian Sullivan, "Fascist Italy's Military Involvement in the Spanish Civil War," *Journal of Military History* 59:4 (Oct. 1995): 702. [Back.](#)

Note 4: Claude G. Bowers, *My Mission to Spain: Watching the Rehearsal for World War II* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954) 315-16. [Back.](#)

Note 5: Louis Fischer, for example, recounts the aggressive attempt by Soviet intelligence officers to destroy photographic evidence of the baptism of Russian tanks on the Madrid front in October 1936. See *Men and Politics* (London: Cape, 1941), 382-83. [Back.](#)

Note 6: See Javier de Mazarrasa, *Los carros de combate en la guerra de España, 1936-1939* (Valladolid: Quirón, 1998), vol. I: 53. [Back.](#)

Note 7: See Burnett Bolloten's account of his conversation with Ignacio Hidalgo de Cisneros in *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution in Spain, 1936-1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 107. [Back.](#)

Note 8: Juan Modesto, *Soy del Quinto Regimiento* (Barcelona: Laia, 1978), 235-36. [Back.](#)

Note 9: Juan García Durán, "Por qué y cómo interviene Rusia en la guerra civil española," *Tiempo de Historia* 5:51 (Feb. 1979): 17; Angel Viñas, "Gold, the Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War," in *Spain in Conflict*, ed. Martin Blinkhorn (London: Sage, 1986), 229. The chapter appeared originally in *European Studies Review* 9:1 (Jan. 1979), and is adapted from Viñas's two major studies, *El oro español en la guerra civil* (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Fiscales. Ministerio de Hacienda, 1976), and *El oro de Moscú* (Barcelona: Grijalbo, 1979). Viñas claims that the first transfer of arms was aboard the *Komsomol*, which, he says, arrived at Cartagena on 15 October. He is off by three days. [Back.](#)

Note 10: TsAMO, f. 132, op. 2642, del. 83, l. 39. Cited in Iurii E. Ribalkin, "Voennaia pomoshch' Sovetskogo Soiuzu ispanskomu narodu v natsional'no-revolutsionnoi voine 1936-1939," Ph.D. diss. (Institute of Military History, Moscow, 1992), 87. The issue of when Soviet arms first arrived in Spain has been much debated in the scholarly literature. Historians have relied on conflicting eyewitness testimonies, several of which, perhaps coincidentally, are actually confirmed by hard archival data. In the present study, no purpose could possibly be served by analyzing the many dates and places suggested and

rejected in the past by scholars of this topic. The meticulous research of Ribalkin in the Defense Archive should finally close the book on this debate. Gerald Howson's research concurs; see *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Murray, 1998), 278-79. [Back.](#)

Note 11: M. T. Meshcheriakov, *Ispanskaia respublika i Komintern: Natsional'no-revoliutsionnaia voina ispanskogo naroda i politika kommunisticheskogo internatsionala, 1936-1939 gg.* (Moscow: Mysl', 1981), 52. The precise date of the *Komsomol's* arrival has never been agreed upon, but for our purposes the Soviet authority will prevail. A recent Spanish-authored study confirms the date as 12 October. See Antonio J. Candil, "Aid Mission to Republicans: Tested Doctrine and Equipment," *Armor* (March-Apr. 1999): 32. Howson is in agreement on the fifty T-26s but not the forty armored vehicles (*Arms for Spain*, 279). Even Aleksandr Orlov's much-maligned account, though off by a week or so, essentially agrees with the mid-October arrival date. See Orlov, "Answers to the Questionnaire of Prof. S. G. Payne" (unpublished, 1968), 4. [Back.](#)

Note 12: Academy of Sciences of the USSR, *International Solidarity with the Spanish Republic, 1936-1939* (Moscow: Progress, 1974), 329-30. [Back.](#)

Note 13: *Istoriia vtoroi mirovoi voiny* (Moscow: Voennoe izdat. Ministerstva Oborony SSSR, 1974), vol. II: 54. [Back.](#)

Note 14: J. Salas Larrazábal, *Intervención extranjera en la guerra de España* (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1974), 429. [Back.](#)

Note 15: The estimate of Miguel Sanchis is quoted in Armando Llera, "Armas rusas en la guerra civil," *Historia* 16 75 (July 1982): 14-15. [Back.](#)

Note 16: Ibid. The Italian historian is identified only as Alberto Petrucci. [Back.](#)

Note 17: Ibid. The Frenchman cited is Laureau. [Back.](#)

Note 18: Ibid. [Back.](#)

Note 19: Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War*, 204-5. [Back.](#)

Note 20: George Soria, *Guerra y revolución en España, 1936-1939* (Barcelona: Grijalbo, 1978), vol. I: 285. [Back.](#)

Note 21: M. T. Meshcheriakov, "Sovetskei Soiuz i antifashistskaia voina ispanskogo naroda (1936-1939)," 31. The issue of some plans assembled in Spain never being put into service due to equipment shortages is taken up in Lennart Andersson, *Soviet Aircraft and Aviation, 1917-1941* (London: Naval Institute Press, 1994), 94. [Back.](#)

Note 22: The Russian figures in Table IV-1 are taken primarily from Iurii E. Ribalkin, *Operatsiia "X": Sovetskaia voennaia pomoshch' respublikanskoj Ispanii (1936-1939)* (Moscow: "AIRO-XX", 2000), 44. He claims to have compiled it from a number of sources, though primarily from (for the Soviet figures, at least) *Istoriia vtoroi mirovoi voiny*, vol. II, 54. Other sources used include: ; Academy of Sciences of the USSR, *Solidarnost' narodov s Ispanskoi respublikoi, 1936-1939* (Moscow: Progreso, 1973), 6-7, 255-56; M. T. Meshcheriakov, "Sovetskei Soiuz i antifashistskaia voina ispanskogo naroda (1936-1939)," 31; GARF, f. 4459, op. 12, del. 30, l. 18; TsAMO, l. 16, op. 3148; del. 5, l. 28; Pierre Broué and Emile Témime, *The Revolution and Civil War in Spain* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), 349; *New York Times*, 24 Feb. 1941. The German and Italian figures come principally from Howson, *Arms for Spain*, 19 and 118; and Brian Sullivan, "Fascist Italy's Military Involvement," 718. All of these numbers are approximations and must be used cautiously. In general, I have opted for conservative estimates. Howson, for example, estimates that German aircraft deliveries to the

Nationalists were between 621 and 732 (19), while Italy's contribution was between 632 and 642 (118). [Back.](#)

Note 23: Table IV-2 appears in Howson, *Arms for Spain*, 142. Where the total amount is indicated by a range of numbers, the difference lies in whether or not one includes weapons sent from third countries. Thus, according to Howson, the Soviets supplied 15,008 machine guns, but 2,430 of these did not originate in the USSR. For artillery pieces, Howson breaks the category into field guns, howitzers, mine-throwers, anti-aircraft guns, infantry-support guns, and anti-tank guns. For the sake of convenience, I have grouped these together under the generic "artillery guns." [Back.](#)

Note 24: *Istoriia vtoroi mirovoi voiny*, vol. II, 53. These have appeared in many sources since their first publication. Ribalkin finds them reliable (*Operatsiia "X,"* 45). [Back.](#)

Note 25: Compiled from RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 870, ll. 278-279, 311. *Istoriia vtoroi mirovoi voiny*, vol. II, 53. [Back.](#)

Note 26: RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 833, l. 314. This material is used in V. A. Tolmachaev, "Sovetskii Soiuz i Ispaniia: Opyt i uroki internatsional'noi pomoshchi (1936-1939)," Ph.D. diss. (Leningrad, 1991), 212-13. [Back.](#)

Note 27: Compiled from *Istoriia vtoroi mirovoi voiny*, vol. II, 54; RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 893, l. 231. [Back.](#)

Note 28: The list of contributors to this thesis are numerous, and include Jesús Hernández, Enrique Delgado, Walter Krivitsky, Aleksandr Orlov, Gustav Regler, Valentín González ("El Campesino"), and many others. Even the recent work of Javier de Mazarrasa alleges that some of the Soviet hardware was "pura chatarra," "pure scrap metal." See his *Los carros de combate en la guerra de España, 1936-1939* (Valladolid: Quirón, 1998), vol. I: 77. For a discussion of the trend, and a compelling refutation, see Santos Martínez Saura, *Memorias del Secretario de Azaña* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1999), 550. [Back.](#)

Note 29: See Howson, *Arms for Spain*, 138-40. [Back.](#)

Note 30: Michael Alpert is quite reliable on this issue; see his *El ejército republicana en la guerra civil*, 2nd ed. (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno, 1989), 248-54. See also Armando Llera, "Armas rusas," 15. [Back.](#)

Note 31: See Harry Fisher, *Comrades: Tales of a Brigadista in the Spanish Civil War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 45, 114. [Back.](#)

Note 32: José Luis Infiesta Pérez, "La unidad italiana de carros-artillería, los T-26 soviético y la batalla de Seseña," *Revista de Historia Militar* 44:89 (2000): 160. [Back.](#)

Note 33: See Brian Sullivan, "Fascist Italy's Military Involvement," 706-8. It is worth noting that the officer's recommendation went unheeded by the Italian high command, which instead ordered more of the woefully antiquated but inexpensive CV.3/35s. [Back.](#)

Note 34: Michael Alpert, *El ejército republicana en la guerra civil*, 248. [Back.](#)

Note 35: This is according to the research of Steven J. Zaloga, the leading expert on Soviet tank operations in the war. See "Soviet Tank Operations in the Spanish Civil War," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 12:3 (Sept. 1999): n. 72 The policy of Nationalist capture of the T-26 is also discussed in Javier de Mazarrasa, *Los carros de combate en la guerra de España, 1936-1939* (Valladolid: Quirón, 1998), vol. I: 60-61. [Back.](#)

Note 36: See, for example, Roberto Nayberg, "Les conséquences de la bataille de Guadalajara (mars 1937) sur la doctrine française d'emploi des chars," *Guerres Mondiales et*

Conflicts Contemporains 165 (January 1992): 23-32. [Back.](#)

Note 37: Cecil Eby, *Between the Bullet and the Lie: American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1969), 129-30. Cited in Zaloga, "Soviet Tank Operations," n. 36. [Back.](#)

Note 38: Zaloga, "Soviet Tank Operations," 156. [Back.](#)

Note 39: See Mikhail Kol'tsov, *Diario de la guerra Española* (Madrid: Akal, 1978), 175-79. [Back.](#)

Note 40: Two studies incorporating recent research are José Luis Infiesta Pérez, "La ofensiva sobre Fuentes de Ebro y el desastre de los carros BT-5," *Historia y Vida* 28:327 (June 1995): 70-79; and the aforementioned Zaloga, "Soviet Tank Operations." For a very negative review of the BT-5, see Javier de Mazarrasa's letter to *Historia y Vida* 28:317 (Feb. 1995): 44. [Back.](#)

Note 41: Martin Gilbert, *Second World War* (London: Holt, 1989), 238. [Back.](#)

Note 42: See Antonio J. Candil, "Aid Mission to Republicans: Tested Doctrine and Equipment," *Armor* (Mar.-Apr. 1999): 34; and Armando Llera, "Armas rusas," 15. [Back.](#)

Note 43: The best comparative treatment of Soviet aircraft during this period, and one to which I owe a considerable debt, is Lennart Andersson, *Soviet Aircraft and Aviation, 1917-1941* (London: Naval Institute Press, 1994). [Back.](#)

Note 44: For a comparison of the I-16 and the CR.32, see Brian Sullivan, "Fascist Italy's Military Involvement," 718-20. [Back.](#)

Note 45: For more comparisons, especially to German aircraft, see Armando Llera, "Armas rusas," 15-16, and Asher Lee, *The Soviet Air Force* (New York: John Day Co., 1962), 40-42. [Back.](#)

Note 46: Llera, "Armas rusas," 15; Sullivan, "Fascist Italy's Military Involvement," 720. [Back.](#)

Note 47: Robert A. Kilmarx, *A History of Soviet Air Power* (London: Faber & Faber, 1962), 146. [Back.](#)

Note 48: Archivo de la Comité Central del Partido Comunista de España (CC PCE), Tesis et Manuscritos, 19/10, no. 17,169. The report appears in RGVA as f. 33987, op. 3, del. 961, ll. 131-175. [Back.](#)

Note 49: RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 960, ll. 193-195. [Back.](#)

Note 50: AHN. Diversos. Marcelino Pascua, Leg. 2. Exp. 8. The letter is dated 1 Sept. 1937. [Back.](#)

Note 51: The northern front seems to have been considered a lost cause from the start. Though Loyalist resistance in the north lasted 460 days, only forty Soviet planes ever entered the war on that front, although the logistics of delivery and resupply were admittedly insurmountable. The matter is discussed in some detail in José Fernando Sánchez, *Rusos en el Frente del Norte* (1937) (Gijón: Ateneo Obrero de Gijón, 1996), 11-26. [Back.](#)

Note 52: For a discussion of the weaknesses in this airplane category, see Asher Lee, *The Soviet Air Force*, 40-41. [Back.](#)

Note 53: Ilya Ehrenburg, *Menschen, Jahre, Leben: Memoiren*. 3 vols. (East Berlin: Verlag

Volk und Welt, 1978), vol. II, 406. [Back.](#)

Note 54: George Hills, *Spain* (London: Ernest Benn, 1970), 220. [Back.](#)

Note 55: According to Howson, the Republicans started the war with twenty-seven warships, the Nationalists seventeen. See *Arms for Spain*, 30. [Back.](#)

Note 56: Kuznetsov, *Na dalekom meridiane*, 128. Louis Fischer concurs; see *Men and Politics* (London: Cape, 1941), 353-54. [Back.](#)

Note 57: Howson, *Arms for Spain*, 278-301. [Back.](#)

Note 58: On armored vehicles, Javier de Mazarrasa insists that the Republic's creation of the Comisaria de Armamento y Municiones on 18 December 1936 resolved the shortage of some hardware, including the earlier need to import the Soviet-made FA-1 armored car. See *Los carros de combate en la guerra de España, 1936-1939*, vol. I, 147-49. To be sure, not all observers agreed that the Republic's own armored vehicles were entirely adequate. [Back.](#)

Note 59: The difficulties associated with the local munitions industry, and Soviet activities therein, will be discussed in Chapter Fourteen. [Back.](#)

Note 60: To support this periodization, one could cite the observations of the Soviet artillery advisor Voronov, who noted in his memoirs that as early as January 1937 the fascist states were outpacing the Russians in importing arms to Spain. See "La artillería de la España Republicana," in *Bajo la bandera de la España republicana* (Moscow: Progreso, 1967), 119-20. [Back.](#)

Note 61: Pascua to Voroshilov, 18 Jul. 1937. AHN. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2. Exp. 8. [Back.](#)

Note 62: AHN. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2. Exp. 8. The letter is dated 25 July 1937. [Back.](#)

Note 63: Pascua to Voroshilov, 21 Oct. 1937. AHN. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2. Exp. 7. [Back.](#)

Note 64: AHN. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2. Exp. 8. [Back.](#)

Note 65: Aleksandr Orlov, "Answers to the Questionnaire of Prof. S. G. Payne," 25-26. [Back.](#)

Note 66: Broué and Témime, *Revolution and Civil War in Spain*, 371-72. Concurring with the French historians is Ribalkin, "Voennaia pomoshch'," 92. [Back.](#)

Note 67: While Nyon was intended to deter fascist aggression in the Mediterranean, Italy managed to escape without serious consequences, and maintained its presence along the Soviets' southern route. Italy's reaction to Nyon is discussed in Brian Sullivan, "Fascist Italy's Military Involvement," 716-17. [Back.](#)

Note 68: M. V. Novikov, *SSSR, Komintern i grazhdanskaia voina v Ispanii 1936-1939*, vol. 2: 53. [Back.](#)

Note 69: The abandonment thesis is laid out meticulously in Bolloten's multiple accounts, and repeated ad nauseam throughout the literature. See, for example, John W. Long, "Soviet Intervention in the Spanish Civil War," in *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History*, ed. J. L. Wiczynski (New York: Academic International Press, 1984), vol. 37: 25; Fernando Schwartz, *La Internacionalización de la Guerra Civil Española* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1999), 258; and Luis Araquistain, "La intervención de Rusia en la guerra civil española," *Cuadernos* 24 (1958) 8, among many others. Among the few Western

historians who steadfastly disagree with the abandonment thesis is Angel Viñas, who remarked in an interview in 1979 that, "despite the tensions suffered by the USSR's foreign affairs, Stalin maintained his aid until the end, and near the end even increased it when, in reality, it was already too late." Interview with Ricardo Dessau, *Tiempo de Historia* 5:54 (May 1979): 9; and, begrudgingly, Mary Habeck and Ronald Radosh, *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001). [Back.](#)

Note 70: Ignacio Hidalgo de Cisneros, *Memorias 2: La República y la Guerra de España* (Paris: Librarie du Globe, 1964), 445-56. [Back.](#)

Note 71: *Ibid.*, 448-49. [Back.](#)

Note 72: Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution in Spain, 1936-1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 990-93. [Back.](#)

Note 73: Armando Llera, "Armas rusas," 15. [Back.](#)

Note 74: RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1259, l. 22. [Back.](#)

Note 75: Archivo de la Comité Central del Partido Comunista de España (CC PCE), Tesis et Manuscritos, 19/11, no. 29, 427-433. These documents are copies from RGVA in Moscow, and appear in that archive as f. 35082, op. 1, del. 233, ll. 1-4. [Back.](#)

Note 76: CC PCE, Tesis et Manuscritos, 19/11, no. 29, 427-433. [Back.](#)

Note 77: RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1259, ll. 85-105. [Back.](#)

Note 78: M. S. Shumilov, "Poslednie dni Ispanskoi respubliki," in *My internatsionalisty: Vospominaniia sovetskikh dobrovol'tsev-uchastnikov natsional'no-revoliutsionnoi voiny v Ispanii*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Izdat. Politicheskoi literatury, 1986), 331-32. [Back.](#)

Note 79: Ivan Maiskii, "Natsional'no-revoliutsionnaia voina ispanskogo naroda i Sovetskii Soiuz," in *Pod znamenem Ispanskoi respubliki: Vospominaniia sovetskikh dobrovol'tsev-uchastnikov* (Moscow: Nauka, 1965), 57. [Back.](#)

Note 80: M. T. Meshcheriakov, "Sovetskei Soiuz i antifashistskaia voina ispanskogo naroda (1936-1939)," *Istoriia SSSR* 1 (Jan.-Feb.1988): 31. [Back.](#)

Note 81: M. S. Shumilov, "Poslednie dni Ispanskoi respubliki," 331-32. [Back.](#)

Note 82: Voroshilov to Stalin, 16 Feb. 1939. RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1266, l. 6. Reproduced in Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 512. [Back.](#)

Note 83: Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War*, 992-93. On the related issue of the total number of shipments, Bolloten asserts that the Soviets sent a total of only fifty-eight ships carrying arms to Spain, and just three of these between 25 December 1938 and 28 January 1939. This amount is similar to Howson's high estimate of fifty-nine, but lower than Ribalkin's claim of sixty-six. [Back.](#)

[Stalin and the Spanish Civil War](#)