


[Email this citation](#)

- Introduction
- I. Diplomacy
  - 1. Pre-July 1936
  - 2. Civil War
  - 3. To Moscow
- II. Solidarity
- 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

## 16. Success and Failure of Operation X

1

As we have observed, the scope of the Soviet military contingent's intended operations in Spain was ambitious indeed, for these operations extended across the entirety of the Loyalist war effort. In their wide-ranging activities, Soviet personnel achieved more than a few notable accomplishments, and at several critical junctions may well have saved the Republic from premature annihilation. But on the whole, the work of Soviet advisors and direct combatants in Spain did not proceed smoothly; on the contrary, Operation X was a resounding, if protracted, failure. More often than not, the Soviets' assignment in Spain was a struggle against major obstacles, many of which often rendered their work ineffective or counterproductive. The factors contributing to these difficulties were numerous, and included the corrosive attitude of Soviet advisors and diplomats towards the Republic's political leaders, personal conflicts between the Soviets themselves and with the Spanish officers and recruits they were intended to advise or instruct, unbridgeable cultural and social differences between the Russians and their hosts, personal shortcomings in the abilities of the advisors themselves, and finally, the inability of the Defense Commissariat and the Kremlin to provide full support to their men in the field and issue timely and constructive orders. We will now turn to an investigation of the broader causes of the failure of Operation X.

### I. Conflict and Poor Performance Among the Soviet Advisors

Productive work within the Popular Army was greatly hindered by the inherent weaknesses of the young institution itself. In terms of operational and tactical preparation, the army received low marks from many of its Soviet advisors. Discipline was in some quarters very poor, and troops often had no previous military training, a lamentable predicament that is amply documented in the secondary literature. <sup>1</sup> Moreover, the army was heavily politicized and thus influenced by the same cleavages that divided the whole of the Republic. The sharp divisions within the army's leadership often took the Soviet advisors' attention away from operational functions and forced them to serve as peacemakers. On one occasion, Shtern complained to Voroshilov that the Soviet advisors "are carrying out the peculiar role of mediator so that all elements of the army will direct their efforts towards the task of victory." <sup>2</sup> Of course, this is a somewhat disingenuous assessment, since in fact it was the presence of the advisors themselves that was often the source of internal Loyalist disputes.

Otherwise, problems arose from the frequent personal conflicts running through the officer corps, both among the Soviet personnel themselves and between Moscow's men and the Spaniards. In early 1937, Gorev alerted his superiors to "a very unhealthy atmosphere of unfriendly work" among the advisors in Bilbao:

They all blame each other of thousands of mortal sins, gather facts, even the smallest ones, about each other, and accuse one another of interference in what is not their affairs and of an absence of effort at friendly work... All of this has a direct negative effect on matters and does nothing but compromise us in the eyes of our "friends." <sup>3</sup>

5

The advisors also experienced frequent conflicts with their Spanish counterparts. Many Republican officers refused to follow the recommendations of the foreign advisors. "They treat our specialists with suspicion," Antonov-Ovseenko reported to Moscow in November

1936, referring to unionized industrial workers. <sup>4</sup> The problem was particularly acute among more senior officers whose commissions predated the Republican army (i.e., members of the pre-1931 Spanish monarchical army). According to Ribalkin, it was common for senior officers to refuse to work with a Russian of inferior rank. <sup>5</sup> This was not surprising, given that the junior Soviet advisor was often contemptuous. A classified report from the field relayed the problem thus:

I happened to witness scenes like this: our young worker is giving long and tedious, hackneyed lectures and exhortations, talking as if to a pupil. But in fact they are frequently seasoned officers who are honored in this country and well known in the army.... <sup>6</sup>

One need not search long for specific examples of the lack of cooperation between Soviet advisors and the Republican brass. Hugh Thomas recounts an episode from the Málaga campaign, where the ranking Loyalist officer, a Colonel Villalba, had been paired with a Soviet advisor:

A Russian colonel, who went under the name of "Kremen," sat in Villalba's office trying to give him orders, but these were unwelcome, and the communication between the two was slight. <sup>7</sup>

Personal ambitions could also be detrimental to relations between the two groups. The case of Malinovskii, who was appointed advisor to Enrique Lister, is instructive. Lister had a wide reputation as a brave, competent, and hands-on Spanish Communist commander, but according to some accounts he insisted on doing everything himself and could not tolerate outside interference, much less regular advice. Given Lister's alleged temperament and independent predisposition, Malinovskii's attempts at working with him were often rebuffed, and in the end the Soviet was able to issue advice only occasionally, and then with some caution:

I always tried to spare his ego and gave my advice in such a manner that no one else could witness it, and I never exceeded his authority. He made all decisions on his own, and when he had some special military task before him, I was never at his side. <sup>8</sup>

Another personality who long vexed the Soviet advisors was the Republican prime minister Largo Caballero. Despite the pleasantries of his letters to the Soviet leadership, Caballero was rarely a willing collaborator. In a report to Moscow on 12 December 1936, Berzin complained bitterly of the rigmarole to which the prime minister routinely subjected the advisors:

Not a single operation is permitted to proceed before receiving permission from Caballero, and when his sanction is received, we must ourselves attend to the ordering of equipment, weapons and transport, and then send Caballero's supply orders to the staff at the front and other groups, etc. Operations, as a rule, are thus delayed and carried out without much effect. <sup>9</sup>

Cultural differences were also part of the rocky relations between Soviet advisors and Spanish officers. It was observed in Chapter Seven that attempts by Moscow to forge ties with Spaniards in the early 1930s were frequently encumbered by the fundamental differences in the *weltanschauung* of the two peoples. The dissimilarities between Communist Slavs and Republican Spaniards at this stage in their respective histories—differences which included the most elemental building blocks of national identity, such as

language, religion, ideology, etc.—were not suddenly overcome by the perfunctory goodwill which characterized Russo-Spanish relations in the early months of the war.

Though the Kremlin was alerted early on of the central importance of interpreters to the success of Operation X, too few were ever dispatched, despite concerted efforts, including the establishment of a linguistic training school. Throughout the war, the linguistically ill-equipped Russians were at a severe disadvantage when compared with their counterparts working for the rebels. Mussolini's men spoke a language that, if not mutually intelligible with Castilian, was close enough for military collaboration. More important, many of the German advisors had passable if not fully functional Spanish. <sup>10</sup> By contrast, a strikingly small number of Soviet advisors or personnel sent to the Republic appear to have had any real facility for foreign languages. Among the exceptions were Gorev, who spoke both English and Spanish; the Latvian tank commander Arman, a genuine polyglot; and the consul Antonov-Ovseenko who, alone among all Soviets, and despite his short tenure, came quite close to mastering Catalan. The rest were forced to improvise as best they could, usually with poor results.

15

A telling example of the problem is highlighted in the memoir of Walter Gregory, a British volunteer with International Brigades. On the one occasion when Gregory found himself at the dinner table with a Russian advisor, he was unable to communicate or learn anything from the man, "who spoke neither Spanish nor English." <sup>11</sup> At the Archena tank school, Soviet instructors attempted fruitlessly to teach with hand signals alone, a practice that contributed in no small measure to the poor preparation of the Loyalist armor specialists and led to a minor disaster when the cadres saw their first action at Seseña. <sup>12</sup> Among advisors to the Loyalist air force, the consequences were similarly negative, and occasionally deadly. <sup>13</sup>

The fact that Moscow sent over 200 interpreters and translators to Spain—indeed, translators composed one-tenth of the entire Russian contingent—and that the Soviets authorized the creation of an (albeit unsuccessful) instruction program, indicates that the Kremlin on some level appreciated the critical importance of eliminating the language barrier. Very few reports from the field neglected to highlight the issue. In one of his first detailed reports, issued on 16 October 1936, Gorev told Voroshilov that "[i]t is very desirable that these people know the language. ... Without Spanish there cannot even be any thought about starting work." <sup>14</sup> In early March 1937, Comintern advisor Marty issued a very brief warning on the problem, which had not been alleviated after six months of intensive Soviet activity: "In general the cadres in Spain are good. Unfortunately, there is a tremendous obstacle, highly inconvenient from the military point of view: language." <sup>15</sup>

In the event, no effort was ever made to give the advisors even rudimentary instruction in Spanish. Gorev later abandoned any hope that his men would learn the language, and entreated Moscow to instead send a translator with each new advisor. <sup>16</sup> This request was unrealistic and was never acted upon, and leads us to conclude that, although the Kremlin understood the importance of Spanish in its Iberian adventure, it lacked the expertise and personnel to effectively resolve the linguistic deficiency. Throughout the war, language-related hindrances between the advisors and the Republican army persisted. Over time, the Defense Commissariat appears to have simply ignored the incessant calls to remedy the problem.

In September 1937, a political worker declared not only that "there are not enough translators," but that many are "unreliable." <sup>17</sup> A nearly identical assessment was issued in a report the following month, this time the officer declaring the crisis "acute." <sup>18</sup> The matter was never addressed. In December 1937, for example, a field report to a Brigade

Commander indicated that the international advisors in command of Spanish troops "as a rule do not command the Spanish language and consequently cannot bring about the proper contact with the soldiers." <sup>19</sup> Loyalist officials also lamented the communication gap; one commissar assigned to a training school in Albacete issued a protest to the his superiors, who agreed that in the future Russian instructors possessing a *lingua franca* would be more profitably engaged. <sup>20</sup> None, however, were to be found. In Korol Sverchevskii's 1938 report to Voroshilov, he issued a strong condemnation of the linguistic shortcomings of the advisory staff:

It seems to me that we ought to increase pressure for studying the Spanish language by our comrades. It is really awkward when some workers stay there up to a year and more and still cannot take a single step without a translator. Meanwhile, if they had had the desire [to do that], they could, and should, have been able to converse with the Spanish without outside help. Study of the language ought to be obligatory and be taken into account in their references for the value of comrades and their attitude toward the job. <sup>21</sup>

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Despite these warnings, Moscow never succeeded in narrowing the culture gap, and it remained a debilitating impediment to the work of the advisors.

The individual abilities of the Soviet men sent to Spain would also be a determinant of the overall effectiveness of the advisory apparatus. The chief Soviet commander in the field had every reason, it would seem, to report favorably to Moscow on the caliber of his men. Shtern often informed Voroshilov of the competence and high level of training of the Russians under his command, and—perhaps understandably—tended to exaggerate their accomplishments. He asserted, for example, that "the creation of the Republican aviation, tank, armored vehicle and anti-aircraft artillery units is nearly entirely the work of our people." <sup>22</sup> In the secondary Soviet literature Soviet advisors are typically portrayed as disciplined and highly skilled. As recently as 1991, Tolmachaev could claim without qualification that the advisors who served in Spain were "the best of the best." <sup>23</sup>

Despite such accolades, and Section X's careful attempts to send only highly competent individuals to Spain notwithstanding, archival records indicate that Soviet performance and behavior in the field was not always exemplary. Moscow often warned Soviet commanders that poor performance would be punished, and these were not idle threats. <sup>24</sup> Indeed, throughout the war, advisors were frequently and suddenly pulled from their posts and shipped home. This was often an example of Moscow's leadership flexing its muscles, though on occasion the removals appear to have been justified.

A surprisingly high number of Russians were accused by their superiors of being insufficiently tactful in their work with Republican officers; <sup>25</sup> others, of "rudely interfering with the operation instructions of commanders." <sup>26</sup> The advisor to an aviation unit was charged with "unethical behavior" and promptly relieved of his command. <sup>27</sup> Other dismissals resulted from conflicts within the Soviet apparatus itself, most often between military advisors and political commissars sent by the NKVD. The deportation of five Soviet advisors for political reasons indicates that the NKVD usually prevailed in these disputes. <sup>28</sup>

On more than a few occasions, Soviets were accused of drunkenness. In Gorev's first detailed report from the field, he was already admitting that one of the Soviet pilots was abusing alcohol. <sup>29</sup> Such reports soon came fast and furious. The advisor assigned to the XVIII Corps, Colonel Maksimov, was sent home for excessive drunkenness, <sup>30</sup> and a report by a political worker in September 1937 cites numerous similar examples. <sup>31</sup> A 1938 field

report accuses many of Moscow's men in Spain of conducting "research into the richness of the country's wine," <sup>32</sup> though of course the same could (and would) be said of Republican officers. <sup>33</sup> Elsewhere, the same Soviet report notes that a certain Yushkevich

25

sat for many months on the eastern front like a feudal lord and studied to perfection the quality of the vintages, but knew about the disposition of the units at the front mostly by map and their condition by hearsay. <sup>34</sup>

A tanker, meanwhile, developed the habit—fortunately, only when drunk—of declaring that "Spain is of interest to us only as a training ground and nothing more." The statement evidently offended a great number of Spaniards and undermined support for the Soviet presence. <sup>35</sup> Another Soviet advisor

began his activities by wasting many hours finding a melodious aristocratic name for himself—Montenegro—and a coat of arms, but did not show himself very well in the profession for which he was sent here. <sup>36</sup>

Other Soviets took advantage of their relative independence in Spain to indulge in a variety of material and sexual excesses. A few advisors were accused of taking concubines or illegally seizing large villas for their own lodging. <sup>37</sup> An assistant to Commander Gorev was charged with embezzling \$50,000. <sup>38</sup> So cavalier was the behavior of some of the Soviet workers that the Spaniards openly called them "petty tyrants." <sup>39</sup> For some advisors, the intense pace of the assignment was at times too much. Three high-ranking Soviet advisors allegedly suffered serious enough medical problems to warrant evacuation, <sup>40</sup> while another was so overcome he simply stopped working. <sup>41</sup> Finally, an apparently endemic problem was the sloppy and lax standard of dress and appearance among Soviets in the advisory apparatus. The issue was significant enough to merit a long digression in Sverchevskii's 1938 report on the work of Moscow's men in Spain:

It may be petty, but the vital factor that is hampering our rapprochement with the Spanish commanders is the slovenly appearance of the advisors. In our country we long ago made ever increasing demands for cultured appearance, and it is, therefore, very embarrassing and unpleasant to see in the background of the Spanish staff, close by the Spanish officers, who are generally following behind him, the slovenly, unshaven figure of our comrade in a shabby suit, often civilian, that is wrinkled in the extreme. <sup>42</sup>

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It is clear that the individual Soviet violations of tact, sobriety, and presentation can hardly be dismissed as fringe elements or exceptions to the rule. Nor can the personal condemnations by Soviet informers in the field be attributed entirely to the climate of fear and mistrust that permeated the Soviet armed forces in the late 1930s, an era when personal denunciations were common, and often fabricated. <sup>43</sup> Ribalkin suggests that cases such as these were not the rule, but rather evidence of poor choices by Section X and its inadequate preparation of the cadres who were sent to Spain. <sup>44</sup> The root cause of these examples of laxness was more likely a combination of factors, including the rigors of the assignment, the lack of adequate support in the field, the climate of terror in the Red Army during the period, and individual hubris.

## II. Distrust, Reprimand, and Lack of Support from Moscow

The advisors' most thorny obstacle to productive work was not the Spanish language, their

own individual shortcomings, their incompatibility with short-tempered commanders in the Republican officer corps, nor even the enemy forces of Franco's army. The greatest source of distress among the advisors were decisions made by the Defense Commissariat 3500 kilometers away in Moscow. The first error of the Soviet leadership emerged early in the war and soon became standard operating procedure: the inefficient practice of pulling Soviet advisors from the field either after relatively short tours or at inappropriate times, even during the final stages of preparation for major operations. An instructive example is the experience of the artillery advisor N. Voronov, a seasoned veteran of the Russian Revolution and Civil War. Voronov had been instrumental in creating a new artillery school for the Popular Army, and was adept at both advising the Loyalists on the development of a local artillery industry and the deployment of Soviet-made matériel. Despite his involvement in multiple Republican operations in the first few months of 1937, which had made him a valuable and well-adjusted addition to the Soviet advisory corps, Moscow recalled him in May of the same year, just as he was completing operational plans for the artillery's participation in the Brunete offensive. [45](#)

In a similar fashion, the Soviet armor advisors were never permitted to remain in Spain long enough to put hard-won lessons into practice. Paul Arman, the polyglot tank commander who had made a strong impression during the first Russian armor battle experience at Seseña, was recalled in January 1937, barely three months into his tour. [46](#) His successor, D. G. Pavlov, participated with increasing effectiveness in the Majadahonda, Jarama, and Guadalajara operations, but was suddenly relieved of his command in May 1937. Regardless of his contributions or value to the war effort, very rarely did a Soviet advisor or instructor remain in Spain for more than six to eight months (usually less), and multiple tours were almost unheard of.

Equally damaging was the fact that assignments and pairings were often ordered with little regard to any probable effectiveness. The negative impact of these policies did not go unnoticed by advisors who were forced to confront their consequences. In a long denunciation of the practice, Sverchevskii implored Moscow to revise the recall procedures:

The departure of Com. Shtern, for example, which coincided with a crisis at the front, was taken by the Spanish command as a slackening of our country's attention to them, and there were even direct statements about his flight. ... [I]t seems to me that it would indeed be useful to have some sort of stable leading cadre in Spain. ... [O]ne ought to bear in mind that the advisor apparatus was, over the last few months, badly weakened by the departure of a number of comrades ... and the new ones require a significant amount of time while they are getting up to speed on matters. [47](#)

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Similarly, in a report to the Defense Commissariat, Malinovskii stated that:

In a period of half a year, five of our advisors served General Miaja—skilled and unskilled, successful and unsuccessful. I do not believe that anything can be won through this practice. In my 15 months of work I have been an advisor to six Spanish officers with different military qualifications (Líster is a militia officer, while colonel Menendez is a commissioned officer).... [48](#)

Malinovskii later commented that in some cases Soviet junior advisors whose rank was only lieutenant were assigned to work with Republican division commanders:

They are very good lieutenants, and excellent commanders of companies or squadrons, but they are not, of course, trained to lead divisions, and they certainly are not able and do not know how to advise the commander of one. [49](#)

The Soviet effort in Spain was also hindered by a chronic shortage of advisors and direct participants. Despite Nationalist propaganda that painted the Loyalist zone red, and references in much of the post-war pro-Republican historiography to the omnipresent Soviet presence in Spain, Russian military personnel were in fact thinly distributed and in short supply. A *brigadista* volunteer could complete a long tour, participate in numerous battles on several fronts, and come face to face with just a single Russian. <sup>50</sup> In all, apart from the direct participants and support staff, less than 600 Soviet advisors served in Spain—a far cry from the 10,000 or even 20,000 that were postulated by Franquista fantasists. According to Ribalkin's research in the RGVA, official sources indicate that 100 Soviet advisors served in Spain in 1936, <sup>51</sup> 150 in 1937, 250 in 1938, and 84 in January 1939. <sup>52</sup> Given the weaknesses of the Republic's forces, not least in the area of trained officers, these amounts were wholly insufficient.

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In numerous reports to Moscow, the head advisors in the field expressed frustration with the inadequate numbers of personnel available for deployment. At one point, for example, artillery units on the central front required forty-two advisors, but only ten were assigned. <sup>53</sup> On the northern front, meanwhile, where Loyalist defenders held on until late October 1937, the Soviets sent just a handful of advisors. <sup>54</sup> Over the whole of that year, just seventy-two Soviet military specialists were assigned to fifteen corps and divisions of the Popular Army. <sup>55</sup> Despite Gorev's early requests, few of the *escuelas populares de guerra* ever received a trained Russian instructor, though it was here, more than perhaps anywhere else, that their experience might have made a difference. <sup>56</sup> In a March 1937 report to Moscow, Gorev requested additional advisors for each section of the Soviet military group, including corps-level advisors and assistants, machine-gun and artillery instructors, military engineers, and signals advisors. In fact, Gorev implies in his report that the shortages of Soviet personnel were dragging down the Republican war effort: "Having received this quantity of people, it will be possible to successfully organize the army and to achieve fulfillment of any kind of operation task." <sup>57</sup> Similarly, in October of the same year, Shtern reported that:

The advisors are inadequate for corps, divisions and brigades. ... If one considers that in each corps, division and brigade there should be one advisor, then our men are provided in only 25-28% of all units. German advisors and instructors are assigned to each battalion: 1-2 German officers and 6-7 German under-officers. <sup>58</sup>

Particularly short-handed was the Republican navy, whose officer corps had been decimated in the early days of the uprising. Of all military service branches, the navy had the most critical need for Soviet advisors. A report to the Defense Commissariat on 14 February 1937 asserted that the Republican naval crews desperately required foreign specialists. "The shortage of specialists in our fleet," the report stated, "is giving the enemy a colossal advantage." <sup>59</sup> Despite frequent entreaties to Moscow from naval advisors in the field, just seventy-seven Soviets were appointed to the Republican fleet over the course of the war. <sup>60</sup> In the summer of 1937, when many Republican vessels still relied on Soviets to serve as commanders, a total of only twenty-nine advisors were engaged. <sup>61</sup> Indeed, at no time during the war were more than two or three-dozen Soviet naval advisors active in Spain. A report from October of the same year demanded that the replenishment of naval advisors "should be carried out urgently." <sup>62</sup> It never was.

The major imbalance in the number of advisors available to each side put the Republic at a severe disadvantage. It also resulted in a near-constant crisis situation for the Soviet advisors themselves, who were spread too thinly across various fronts and units, a situation

that reduced their overall effectiveness. Shtern complained to Moscow that his personnel could simply not cover all of their obligations, especially in the smaller units of the Popular Army. <sup>63</sup> In order to prepare for any major operation, Shtern typically had to pull advisors from their separate assignments and gather them in one place, as the following telegram to Moscow attests:

[F]or the Brunete operation nearly all of our advisors in Spain were concentrated on the central front. In making the decision for the Aragon operation I was forced to remove a large portion of our advisors from down in Madrid and transfer them to Catalonia. <sup>64</sup>

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A report to Moscow in 1938 stated simply, "It is rare when one does not experience a shortage of valuable workers." <sup>65</sup>

Despite the perennial shortage of men, the Soviet leadership nonetheless believed that it could successfully supervise detailed aspects of the war from Moscow. Coded telegrams in the Defense Commissariat archive show that Voroshilov attempted to initiate and direct entire operations, and issued specific orders on the placement and movement of tanks and aircraft. <sup>66</sup> Very often the decrees sent to personnel in Spain were contradictory. It was observed above, for example, that in a 9 December 1936 telegram, Litvinov warned the advisors that "in no case should they alter the Spanish command" or otherwise act in any capacity beyond the role of advisor. More than once, however, Moscow cabled the chief military advisor with orders quite to the contrary. One cable read: "Dispense with the brains and show a little brawn so that the situation might reveal some light" <sup>67</sup>

Despite the incompatibility of many successive orders, advisors in the field were expected to carry them out to the letter. In the rigidly hierarchical Red Army, there was no room for personal initiative or debate at the commander level. The naval advisor Kuznetsov related a telling anecdote in his memoirs. Having arrived for the first time at the Loyalist port of Cartagena, Kuznetsov began assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the Republic's navy. He stayed for only a few days, however, before returning to Madrid; his orders were to communicate with Moscow before taking any action. <sup>68</sup> In short, with no exceptions, Moscow's orders required prompt implementation.

Other directives, it seems, were never received. Throughout the war, communication between Moscow and its men on the ground in Spain was hampered by unreliable or compromised connections. The Soviets had established a direct telephone link between Moscow and Madrid in mid-October 1936, but the line was never entirely effective. <sup>69</sup>

According to the recent research of Tim Rees, the Spanish station link was situated atop a safe house in a working-class neighborhood of Madrid, a placement that left it vulnerable to Nationalist artillery for much of the war. As a result of continuous bombardment, the radio link was often interrupted. <sup>70</sup> Many messages apparently never arrived, leading to much confusion and further infuriating the Kremlin. Similarly, within Spain itself Soviet communication systems were never efficient or adequately secure. Among the frequent lapses in protocol was the habit of some advisors of discussing operational and supply issues over open telephone lines. Once such incident prompted Gorev to angrily denounce the tank commander Krivoshein: "The guy has still not learned what can be discussed over the telephone and what is not permitted." <sup>71</sup>

Indeed, throughout the unpublished archival record as well as the memoir literature runs a consistent theme of communication breakdowns. At the very outset of Operation X, despite intense planning and the dispatch of advance logistical teams, Moscow's ability to direct operations was strikingly inept. The case of Kuznetsov is again instructive. The first

shipment of Soviet tanks, arriving in Cartagena on 12 October 1936, steamed into the port apparently without warning. The recently appointed naval attaché Kuznetsov hastily boarded a launch to meet the vessel off-shore, so as to oversee the ship's piloting to port and unloading of its cargo. Meanwhile, the ranking tank commander, Krivoshein, demanded proper documents before he released the hardware, but the naval attaché possessed nothing of the sort. Neither man had been informed of the eventual destination of the much-anticipated war matériel. After driving around the port searching for answers—not an easy task, given that none of the Soviet naval contingent knew a word of Spanish, and Gorev had yet to send an interpreter—local PCE officials instructed Krivoshein to transfer his equipment to Archena, some ninety kilometers inland. Even this seemed suspect to the bewildered Russian, who insisted on reconnoitering the locale before authorizing full delivery. In the end, the T-26 tanks arrived at their new base with little time for proper training or consultations with Spanish crew and commanders, and the resultant fiasco at Seseña two weeks later was an obvious consequence. [72](#)

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Whether these breakdowns in communications in the field were the result of technological deficiencies or a shortage of personnel, the Kremlin's frustrated response was to issue admonishments and threats to the Soviet advisors in Spain. Typical of the tone of Moscow's warnings to the operatives in the field was this November 1936 telegram from Voroshilov:

Notify Berzin, Kulik, Gorev, Meretskov and our other commanding advisors that not putting into practice the aforesaid directives [placement of military units and initiation of the Madrid offensive] will result in severe penalties for all of you... [73](#)

A more startling example of the menacing nature of Moscow's relationship to the contingent in Spain is this 4 December 1936 coded telegram from Voroshilov to Berzin:

The most conscientious and selfless work does not free any of you from the obligation of issuing communications that report on the implementation of assignments. This should be common knowledge to old Bolsheviks like you. I demand and will continue to demand timely answers to my telegrams, in many of which are written the high directives ordered in sessions [of the Politburo]. This is not to transform you into clerks, but is an indispensable element of organizing responsibilities in such difficult conditions. To take one example, on November 23 Litvinov and I telegraphed a directive categorically recommending that Caballero begin at once an offensive on the Madrid front.... Your answer was silence. Recall this once and forever, that neither I, much less our higher authorities can tolerate the slightest carelessness in either the execution of or reporting on assigned work. [74](#)

Given the climate of terror in the USSR during the years of the Spanish Civil War, it cannot be doubted that these threatening telegrams had a highly negative and unsettling psychological effect on Soviet personnel in Spain. None of the advisors in the field were ignorant of events taking place in Moscow. The show trials of the old Bolsheviks and senior Red Army officers were covered widely in the press, and newspapers of all varieties were readily available to Soviet advisers in Spain. The widely circulated Spanish Communist daily *Mundo Obrero*, for example, had its own correspondent, Irene de Falcon, in Moscow for the trials. [75](#) Moreover, as a further method of intimidation the Defense Commissariat took pains to directly inform Soviet advisors in Spain of the nature of the Moscow trials. In a 10 June 1937 telegram to Shtern, Voroshilov wrote plainly about the recent revelations of the alleged military conspiracy:

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The NKVD has revealed the existence of a military-fascist espionage organization within the Red Army, whose leaders include Gamarnik, Tukhachevskii, Iakir,

Uborevich, Eideman, Feldman, Primakov, and Putna. Tukhachevskii confessed in detail to his treasonous work for the German general staff since 1925, in which he passed our military secrets. All the others under Tukhachevskii's leadership were preparing for the defeat of the Red Army in the event of war with the Germans. Tomorrow all of these traitors (with the exception of Gamarnik, who committed suicide) will pass before military firing squads. I believe that all are deserving of this punishment. We are now radically purifying the Red Army from all this base rot. ... All enemies of the people will soon be destroyed. Convey this information in detail to all our people. [76](#)

### III. The Fate of the Advisors

It need hardly be underscored that, when so many loyal Soviet officers were being executed in Moscow, an advisor in Spain already admonished for insubordination or dereliction of duty had great cause to fear for his safety. These fears were entirely justified. The Soviet contingent in the civil war suffered enormous losses at the hands of Stalin's executioners in Moscow, often immediately upon returning from Spain. Among those who perished were two of the three chief military advisors of Operation X, Berzin and Shtern, as well as Gorev, the military attaché and hero of the Madrid resistance; Uritskii, Berzin's replacement as head of the NKVD and the architect of Operation X; Smushkevich, advisor to the Republic's general staff; Butyrskii, deputy chief advisor; the advisor Simonov; and three of the Soviets' leading Red Army aviation advisors, Pumpur, Ptukhin and Rychagov. In addition, most of the Soviet diplomatic officers who served in Spain perished upon their return, including both ambassadors, Rosenberg and Gaikis, and the consul Antonov-Ovseenko. Among Soviet civilians who served in Spain, the most prominent to die in the terror was Mikhail Kol'tsov. [77](#)

There is no clear explanation for the execution of so high a percentage of the Soviets who served in Spain. It is plausible that the liquidations were connected with the coming alliance with Germany, which was signed less than six months after the end of the Spanish Civil War. Stalin may have believed that Soviet officers and military specialists who had fought against the Germans in Spain would oppose the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. This is the general thesis of Boris Nicolaevsky, who writes that, "[a]s a rule, the fate of any one person in the years of the Great Purge is a true indication of his sincerity as regards this policy [collective security]; with few exceptions, all of its sincere supporters were liquidated." [78](#)

In this regard, it is noteworthy that the higher-ranking Soviet officers who both served in Spain and survived the purges went on to be cautious opponents of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Former tank advisor D. G. Pavlov, for example, became commander of the Soviet Western Military District in 1940. In the first months of 1941 he lobbied the Soviet leadership in vain for increased frontier defenses in advance of a German offensive. [79](#) Kuznetsov, the naval attaché to the Republic and later Soviet Naval Commander, was shocked that German reconnaissance aircraft were permitted to conduct sorties over Soviet Baltic ports in March 1941. Kuznetsov's orders that Red Navy fighters intercept the German planes were personally revoked by Stalin. [80](#) Less than two weeks before Germany invaded, Kuznetsov won a private audience in the Kremlin, but even then the admiral could not convince Stalin to prepare the navy for action. [81](#) Another exception to Nikolaevsky's rule was Ilya Ehrenburg who, unlike fellow journalist Kol'tsov, survived the bloodbath of the late 1930s. Ehrenburg's anti-German novel about the fall of Paris was banned during the heyday of the Nazi-Soviet entente, but Stalin allowed its publication once Operation Barbarossa commenced. [82](#)

On the other hand, the Soviet veterans of the Spanish war may well have been destroyed regardless of the final disposition of Soviet-German relations; indeed, they were likely

doomed the moment they stepped ashore in Spain. In the paranoid world of Soviet military security, the advisors' tours in Spain; their extended contact with republicans, renegade communist exiles, or Trotskyist sympathizers from Europe and the Americas; and their short, unsatisfactory reports and occasional silences far from the totalitarian controls of the Soviet Union all marked them as suspect. For Stalin, their destruction was ordered not based on solid evidence or any tangible fear of later complications, but out of sheer ignorance and uncertainty. In short, they were destroyed because the Soviet leadership did not understand the full range of their experiences fighting for the Republic.

60

Then again, the solution to this question may be far less complex: Did Stalin destroy the officers who served in Spain because they allowed the Republicans to lose the war? The foregoing documentary evidence strongly suggests that the Soviet leadership made concerted efforts to win the war. Witness the supply to the Republic of the Soviets' most modern military equipment and distinguished personnel, the continuous stream of strongly-worded telegrams advising decisive action, the unprecedented decision to train thousands of Spaniards and other foreigners in Soviet military institutions, and the desperate eleventh-hour dispatch of arms shipments to the Republic. Until additional archival materials appear which suggest otherwise, one must conclude that Stalin's primary objective in Spain was a Republican victory. The inability of Soviet advisors to bring about this outcome unleashed upon them Stalin's anger. In a discussion of this problem, the aviation designer A. S. Iakovlev asserted, "Stalin experienced failure in Spain painfully. His dissatisfaction turned him against those who just recently were claimed heroes and showered with honors." <sup>83</sup>

#### IV. The Soviet Advisors Assessed

Historians and eyewitnesses have sharply disagreed on the net value of the Soviet advisory and training apparatus. The thesis put forward by Burnett Bolloten is that the considerable advantages of Soviet military assistance—including weapons, advisors, and instructors—were far outweighed by the more costly surrender of the Republic's political independence. Not a few observers have signed on to this interpretation, among them Luis Bolín, who maintains that all Republican forces were fully under Moscow's sway. <sup>84</sup> Elsewhere, positions vary. While one scholar has written of the "powerful Russian influence" on the Popular Army, <sup>85</sup> Michael Alpert, the researcher with perhaps the most experience studying the archives of the Republican army in the Servicio Histórico Militar, largely dismisses this theory as propaganda and exaggeration:

Soviet aid was primarily advisory, and these advisors do not appear to have exceeded this function, with the exception of very specialized assignments. Although Soviet control of the armor and air force prevented the development of an integrated strategy, it is improbable that the Red Army's tactical point of view influenced the Spanish General Staff. <sup>86</sup>

Not all observers agree that the Soviet influence was necessarily harmful. Bill Alexander, a British volunteer who trained with Russian instructors, came away with a wholly favorable view of the Soviets—perhaps too favorable, in light of recent declassifications. Alexander writes of competent, well-prepared officers who were expert weapons technicians and effective instructors. <sup>87</sup> Many other participants who worked with instructors or advisors agreed that the training and advisory program was a considerable success for the Republic. Various data and reports from archival sources, however, only partially support this conclusion. Some internal Soviet military reports concluded that the program had greatly improved the Loyalist war effort in several important areas, most notably aviation, armored vehicles, motor-mechanized units, and anti-aircraft forces. <sup>88</sup> It has already been noted that the tank training program at Archena allowed the Republic to install local crews in all

T-26 machines by the end of 1937. [89](#)

Opinion on the matter among many leading Spanish Socialists was also favorable. Julián Zugazagoitia, editor of *El Socialista* and later Minister of the Interior, maintained that the military advisors hurled themselves into their work enthusiastically, put in long hours at the front, and generally were outdone by no one in their dedication to the Republic's war effort. "They were not here as tourists," Zugazagoitia frankly concludes. [90](#) Largo Caballero, hardly the most Soviet-friendly of the Republic's leaders, was unequivocal in his praise for the personnel sent by the Soviets, at least in official correspondence with the Kremlin. A 12 January 1937 letter to Stalin, Molotov, and Voroshilov expressed uncharacteristic appreciation:

Comrades, those whom you sent in response to our request have rendered us great service. Their wide experience has been greatly useful to us and appears to be an effective measure in the defense of Spain against fascism. I can assure you that they fulfilled their responsibilities with full enthusiasm and unparalleled courage. [91](#)

65

These sentiments were echoed in a 2 November 1937 letter from Victor Rojo, head of the Republic's general staff, to Soviet military attaché Gorev. "I will never forget," Rojo wrote, "those who were my collaborators and direct instructors, since all the success ... belongs to them." [92](#) To show his appreciation for the assistance, in May 1937 Republican Minister of the Air Force Prieto sent fifty-seven wristwatches to Soviet officials and instructors who were involved in the training of Spanish pilots in the USSR. [93](#) In a report issued in mid-1938, Sverchevsky agreed:

Nearly everyone, including the Spaniards, has recognized the sum value of the work of the advisory apparatus as very important and positive. Above all else, the role of our comrades [the Soviets] has brought about an acceleration in the tempo of the general construction and organization of the Republic's military power. The fact that the Popular Army in the course of two years has put up successful resistance to the enemy, and now possesses technical abilities in modern methods of battle ... is by and large the result of the work of our comrades.... [94](#)

Hidalgo de Cisneros, head of Republican aviation, cabled Voroshilov in January 1938, announcing that the training program in the USSR had produced capable Spanish pilots. "If the Spanish air force is now strong," Cisneros wrote, "it is only because of the selfless work of our [Soviet] comrades." [95](#)

Not everyone, however, concurred that the Spanish air force was indeed strong, or that the trainees were capable. In his September 1937 after-action report summarizing the causes of the fall of the North, Chief Military Advisor Shtern lay much of the blame for the debacle on the Spanish aviation students who had studied with the Soviet specialists. According to Shtern, "the main cause of the delay in beginning the Republic's [defensive] operation was the unpreparedness of the air force ... in particular the Spanish pilots trained in the USSR." [96](#) The resultant shortage of pilots was so acute during the Brunete and Zaragoza operations that a large part of the Republican air force was grounded. At Brunete, the Republic fielded only fifty fighters; at Zaragoza, only forty-five. [97](#)

70

Whereas Shtern betrayed a marked lack of enthusiasm for the results of the pilot training program, the trainees themselves expressed quite the opposite opinion. Indeed, the most enthusiastic appreciation of the preparation of Spanish airmen came in a 1 December 1937

letter to Voroshilov from fifty-three graduating pilots of the 20th Military School in Giyanzha. To be sure, the text looks suspiciously like standard Soviet hyperbolic boilerplate, but it is nonetheless worth quoting:

We, the Spanish trainees, delegates of the Popular Front, came to the USSR to attend a course of instruction. Completing the training course at the 20th School for Pilots, we extend our thanks to you and our great appreciation for the excellent instruction we received at the school. For 4 months we have been stationed at the school and may now certify the exceptionally sincere and amicable relations we have had with all training personnel. During this period we studied piloting on the most modern fighter aircraft and we will take this knowledge back to Spain, where we will carry out our duty to ... liberate our people.... While living with you, we have experienced ... great attention and affection on the part of the entire staff of the 20th School. ... We will never forget ... the enthusiasm of our instructors, thanks to whom we are now pilots. ... We will never forget that at the time of our most sorrowful days we received your magnificent aid.

Long live the union of the Spanish and Soviet peoples! Long live the best friend and helper Stalin and the great Marshal Voroshilov! Long live our Red Army! [98](#)

Some of the most energetic critics of the advisors' work were the Soviets themselves. Sverchevskii, who had praised the work of Moscow's men as generally positive, also cited numerous examples of counterproductive or even destructive Soviet contributions, and in a 1938 report he detailed "the many disappointing operational blunders committed by the [Soviet] advisors." [99](#) Indeed, Sverchevskii's catalogue of Soviet errors included (in addition to the myriad personal excesses, acts of insubordination, and public drunkenness) the Casa del Campo debacle of May 1937, during which the Republic sustained heavy losses; the Brunete defeat of that July; and the reversal at Teruel from December 1937 to February 1938.

In sum, while the Soviet advisors and combatants who served in the war could point with pride to their success in specific areas, on the whole, neither pride nor success characterized the advisory and combatant apparatus of Operation X. Understaffed, under-supplied, linguistically alienated, and terrified of the consequences of failure, Soviet military personnel deployed in the Spanish theater spent the bulk of the war attending to one crisis after another, many of which they or their superiors had created. The defense of Madrid, the Russians' finest hour, had come and gone in the first weeks of their participation. For the balance of the war, their position, like that of the Republic, rarely rose above the level of stoic resistance—sometimes effective, but most often not. Instead of proper support from Moscow they received only contradictory messages and menacing, undisguised threats. Their fate sealed by conditions far beyond their own exceedingly limited control, the Soviets participated in, though they hardly presided over, the slow and inexorable defeat of their side.

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## Notes:

**Note 1:** Compare, for example, the following: N. G. Kuznetsov, *Na dalekom meridiane*, 3rd ed. (Moscow: Nauka, 1988), 126; Alfonso Bullón de Mendoza and Diego de Álvaro, *Historias orales de la guerra civil* (Barcelona: Ariel, 2000), 48-49. The latter sums up succinctly the essential shortcomings: "...la mayor parte de los testimonios de los propoios veteranos republicanos apuntan hacia la impericia, falta de preparación, en algunas ocasiones ineptitud, y en las más desorden e indisciplina de las propias filas" (48). [Back.](#)

**Note 2:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 961, l. 172. [Back.](#)

**Note 3:** Report of Gorev, 23 Mar. 1937. Secret Archive (15). Reproduced in Mary Habeck and Ronald Radosh, *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 456-58. [Back.](#)

**Note 4:** Secret Archive (8), Antonov-Ovseenko to NKID, [illeg] Nov. 1936. Quoted in Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 137. [Back.](#)

**Note 5:** Ribalkin, "Voennaia pomoshch' Sovetskogo Soiuzu ispanskomu narodu v natsional'no-revoliutsionnoi voine 1936-1939," Ph.D. diss. (Institute of Military History, Moscow, 1992), 107. [Back.](#)

**Note 6:** Memorandum of Colonel Sverchevsky, undated [1938]. RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1149, l. 236. [Back.](#)

**Note 7:** Hugh G. Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 3rd ed. rev. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 567. [Back.](#)

**Note 8:** R. I. Malinovskii, "Gnevnye vikhri Ispanii," in *Pod znamenem Ispanskoi respubliki: Vospominaniia sovetskikh dobrovol'tsev-uchastnikov* (Moscow: Nauka, 1965), 158. [Back.](#)

**Note 9:** RGVA, f. 35082, op. 1, del. 6, l. 5. Cited in Ribalkin, *Operatsiia "X": Sovetskaia voennaia pomoshch' respublikanskoi Ispanii (1936-1939)* (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 2000), 55. [Back.](#)

**Note 10:** According to José Llordes, *Al dejar el fusil* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1968), 185. [Back.](#)

**Note 11:** Walter Gregory, *The Shallow Grave: A Memoir of the Spanish Civil War* (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 1996), 93. [Back.](#)

**Note 12:** S. Krivoshein, "Los tanquistas voluntarios en los combates por Madrid," in *Bajo la bandera de la España republicana* (Moscow: Progreso, 1967), 323-25. [Back.](#)

**Note 13:** M. Iakushin, "En la primera batalla contra el fascismo," in *Bajo la bandera*, 345. [Back.](#)

**Note 14:** See Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 69. [Back.](#)

**Note 15:** See Marty's report entitled "The Spanish Question," submitted to the EKKI on 7 March 1937. As with many other documents, the report was deposited both in the Comintern and Military archives. See RGASPI, f. 495, op. 18, del. 1179; and RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 991, ll. 27-39. Excerpts are reproduced in Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 144. [Back.](#)

**Note 16:** Report of Gorev, 23 Mar. 1937. Secret Archive (15). Reproduced in Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 458. [Back.](#)

**Note 17:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 961, ll. 207-220. Reproduced in Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 464-76. [Back.](#)

**Note 18:** Intelligence report to Voroshilov, 22 Oct. 1937. RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1033, ll. 174-183. Reproduced in Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 481. [Back.](#)

**Note 19:** Letter to the Brigade Commander of the 11th International Brigade from an unnamed Division Commander, 11 Dec. 1937. RGVA, f. 35082, op. 1, del., 92, l. 3. The report continues thus: "Imagine yourself in the place of the Spanish soldiers and you will easily understand that the Spanish soldiers must have the impression that their national

pride has been hurt. And perhaps rightly so, for these are the same Spaniards in whose land we are taking part in our struggle." [Back.](#)

**Note 20:** Michael Alpert, *El ejército republicana en la guerra civil*, 2nd ed. (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno, 1989), 171. [Back.](#)

**Note 21:** Memorandum of Colonel Sverchevskii, undated [1938]. RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1149, l. 239. [Back.](#)

**Note 22:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 961, l. 171. [Back.](#)

**Note 23:** V. A. Tolmachaev, "Sovetskii Soiuz i Ispaniia: Opyt i uroki internatsional'noi pomoshchi (1936-1939)," Ph.D. diss. (Leningrad, 1991), 112. [Back.](#)

**Note 24:** For example, a communication from Voroshilov stated that, "if any comrade disgraces the honor of the Soviet people or the name of the Red Army officer staff, the party organization will insist that that comrade be dispatched home." RGVA, f. 9, op. 29, del. 462, l. 301. [Back.](#)

**Note 25:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1149, l. 172. [Back.](#)

**Note 26:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 835, l. 64; f. 9, op. 29, del. 315, l. 70. [Back.](#)

**Note 27:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1033, l. 70. [Back.](#)

**Note 28:** RGVA, f. 9, op. 29, del. 462, l. 301. The dismissed included A. T. Shatolov, V. T. Maslov, E. F. Abramov, A. V. Lakshin, and N. P. Ivanov. [Back.](#)

**Note 29:** See Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 69. [Back.](#)

**Note 30:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1081, l. 47; f. 9, op. 29, del. 315, ll. 13-14. [Back.](#)

**Note 31:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 961, ll. 207-220. Reproduced in Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 464-76. [Back.](#)

**Note 32:** Memorandum of Colonel Sverchevskii, undated [1938]. RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1149, l. 237. [Back.](#)

**Note 33:** In Louis Fischer's account, for example, Lister is accused of drinking in the field. See *Men and Politics* (London: Cape, 1941), 383. [Back.](#)

**Note 34:** Memorandum of Colonel Sverchevskii, undated [1938]. RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1149, l. 233. [Back.](#)

**Note 35:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1149, l. 234. [Back.](#)

**Note 36:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1149, l. 234. [Back.](#)

**Note 37:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 961, ll. 207-20. Reproduced in Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 464-76. [Back.](#)

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

**Note 39:** Ibid. [Back.](#)

**Note 40:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 893, l. 188. The claim of a medical evacuation must be approached with some caution, as this was standard Soviet shorthand for unofficial ostracism. Note that Gorev, the attaché, was among those removed for reasons of health. [Back.](#)

**Note 41:** This was Colonel Chusov (a.k.a. Murillo), the Soviet advisor to the general staff of the Army of Catalonia. RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 893, l. 62. [Back.](#)

**Note 42:** Memorandum of Colonel Sverchevskii, undated [1938]. RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1149, ll. 235-36. Reproduced in Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 494. [Back.](#)

**Note 43:** Thus in Gorev's report of 23 Mar. 1937, the commander accused the advisor of the Santander corps of being "weak, somewhat crude, and not always tactful." Secret Archive (15). Reproduced in Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 458. Habeck and Radosh suggest that denunciations such as these may quite possibly have been a defensive measure to curry favor with the Soviet leadership; see 431-33. [Back.](#)

**Note 44:** Ribalkin, "Voennaia pomoshch'," 152. [Back.](#)

**Note 45:** N. Voronov, "La artilleria de la España Republicana," in *Bajo la bandera*, 125-26. [Back.](#)

**Note 46:** See Zapis' *priema ut. Voroshilova 16 ianvaria 1937g.*, (Yale RSMAC; Box 9); cited and discussed in Steven J. Zaloga, "Soviet Tank Operations in the Spanish Civil War," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 12:3 (Sept. 1999): 139. [Back.](#)

**Note 47:** Memorandum of Colonel Sverchevskii, undated [1938]. RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1149, l. 237-239. Reproduced in Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 494. [Back.](#)

**Note 48:** RGVA, f. 35082, op. 1, del. 40, l. 78; cited in Ribalkin, *Operatsiia "X,"* 55. [Back.](#)

**Note 49:** Ibid. [Back.](#)

**Note 50:** See Walter Gregory, *Shallow Grave*, 92-3. [Back.](#)

**Note 51:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 870, l. 344; cited in Ribalkin, *Operatsiia "X,"* 57. [Back.](#)

**Note 52:** RGVA, f. 35082, op. 1, del. 15. l. 47-49. Ribalkin claims that, in addition to the 84 advisors who were present in January 1939, an additional 11 arrived before the end of the war, bringing the total number for the entire war to 595. Ribalkin, *Operatsiia "X,"* 57. [Back.](#)

**Note 53:** RGVA, f. 35082, op. 1, del. 43, l. 355. [Back.](#)

**Note 54:** The consequences of the shortage in the period leading to the eventual fall of Gijón is recounted in José Fernández Sánchez, *Rusos en el Frente del Norte (1937)* (Gijón: Ateneo Obrero de Gijón, 1996). [Back.](#)

**Note 55:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 961, l. 170. [Back.](#)

**Note 56:** See Michael Alpert, *El ejército republicana en la guerra civil*, 171. Gorev had raised the issue with Voroshilov in the report of 16 October 1936. See Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 68. [Back.](#)

**Note 57:** Report of Gorev, 23 Mar. 1937. Secret Archive (15). Reproduced in Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 458. [Back.](#)

**Note 58:** RGVA, f. 35082, op. 1, del. 21, l. 19. [Back.](#)

**Note 59:** CC PCE. Tesis y Manuscritos. 19/10, no. 7, 56. The original document is in RGVA, f. 35082, op. 1, del. 297, ll. 9-21. [Back.](#)

**Note 60:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1143, l. 127. On the small number of Soviet naval advisors sent to Spain, see Juan García Durán, "La participación rusa marítima," *Tiempo de Historia* 4:47 (Oct. 1978): 35; and Academy of Sciences of the USSR, *International Solidarity with the Spanish Republic, 1936-1939* (Moscow: Progress, 1974), 328. [Back.](#)

**Note 61:** CC PCE. Tesis y Manuscritos. 19/10, #17, 178. [Back.](#)

**Note 62:** Intelligence report to Voroshilov, 22 Oct. 1937. RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1033, ll. 174-183. Reproduced in Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 481. [Back.](#)

**Note 63:** TsAMO, f. 132, op. 2642, del. 82, ll. 190-191. Cited in Ribalkin, *Operatsiia "X,"* 58. [Back.](#)

**Note 64:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 961, l. 170. [Back.](#)

**Note 65:** Memorandum of Colonel Sverchevskii, undated [1938]. RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1149, l. 239. [Back.](#)

**Note 66:** TsAMO, f. 132, op. 2642, del. 173, ll. 23-24; del. 192, ll. 1-3. Cited in Ribalkin, "Voennaia pomoshch'," 108. [Back.](#)

**Note 67:** This translation is a rough approximation. In the original the order reads: "shevelit mozgami i proiavliat koe-kakuuu voliu, shtoby obstanovka vygliadela v drugom svete." TsAMO, f. 132, op. 2642, del. 192, l. 15. Cited in Ribalkin, "Voennaia pomoshch'," 108. [Back.](#)

**Note 68:** Kuznetsov, "Con los marinos españoles en su guerra nacional-revolucionaria," in *Bajo la bandera*, 138. [Back.](#)

**Note 69:** *Izvestiia*, 16 Oct. 1936. [Back.](#)

**Note 70:** See Tim Rees, "The highpoint of Comintern influence? The Communist Party and the Civil War in Spain," in *International communism and the Communist International, 1919-1943*, eds. Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe (Manchester, England: University of Manchester Press, 1998), 150. [Back.](#)

**Note 71:** Gorev to Voroshilov, 16 Oct. 1936. See Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 69. Krivoshein would not have learned that this was unacceptable from Kuznetsov, the advisor who initially greeted him upon arrival at Cartagena. As we have seen, the future admiral was by his own admission in the habit of announcing arms deliveries on unsecured lines. See Kuznetsov, "Con los marinos," in *Bajo la bandera*, 175. [Back.](#)

**Note 72:** Parts of this episode are recounted in Kuznetsov's multiple memoirs, and also rapidly summarized in 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): 161-63. In his report to Voroshilov, dated 16 Oct. 1936, Gorev makes several references to the naval advisors at Cartagena that betray the lack of direction and his own failure to ensure proper support. That the entire debacle delayed deployment from Archena to the front is also apparent, not least in the chief advisor's statement that "[t]he senior man [Krivoshein] has still not come to me, but it is obvious that the situation he is in hasn't quite sunk in." See copy of the report in Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 69. [Back.](#)

**Note 73:** TsAMO, f. 132, op. 2642, del. 192, l. 32. Cited in Ribalkin, *Operatsiia "X,"* 56. [Back.](#)

**Note 74:** TsAMO, f. 132, op. 2642, del. 182, ll. 22-23. Cited in Ribalkin, *Operatsiia "X,"* 56. [Back.](#)

**Note 75:** See Mundo Obrero, 18-24 Aug. 1936. [Back.](#)

**Note 76:** TsAMO, f. 132, op. 2642, del. 192, ll. 44-46. Cited in Ribalkin, *Operatsiia "X,"* 86. [Back.](#)

**Note 77:** For a more comprehensive examination of the fate of the Soviet advisors, see Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution in Spain, 1936-1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 319. [Back.](#)

**Note 78:** Boris Nikolaevsky, *Power and the Soviet Elite* (New York: Praeger, 1965), 89. [Back.](#)

**Note 79:** Martin Gilbert, *Second World War* (London: Holt, 1989), 158. [Back.](#)

**Note 80:** Ibid., 163. [Back.](#)

**Note 81:** Ibid., 191. [Back.](#)

**Note 82:** Ibid., 177. [Back.](#)

**Note 83:** A. S. Iakovlev, *Tsel' zhizni: Zapiski aviakonstruktora* (Moscow: Izd-vo polit. lit-ry, 1987), 126. [Back.](#)

**Note 84:** Luis Bolín, *Los años vitales* (Madrid: Espasa Calpa, 1967). [Back.](#)

**Note 85:** Robert A. Rosenstone, *Crusade of the Left: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1969), 156; cited in M. V. Novikov, *SSSR, Komintern i grazhdanskaia voia v Ispanii 1936-1939*, 2 vols. (Iaroslav: Iaroslavskii gos. pedagogicheskii universitet, 1995), vol. II: 58. [Back.](#)

**Note 86:** Michael Alpert, *El ejército republicano en la guerra civil*, 257. To compare, the original Spanish: "La ayuda soviética constiitio en asesores, que no parecen haber excedido esa función, excepto en puestos altamente especializados ... y, aunque su control de los tanques y la aviación impidió el desarrollo de una estrategia integrada, es improbable que sus puntos de vista táctica influyeran en el Estado Mayor español." [Back.](#)

**Note 87:** Bill Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty: Spain, 1936-1939* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1982), 76. [Back.](#)

**Note 88:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 912, l. 158; del. 961, ll. 170-171. [Back.](#)

**Note 89:** Academy of Sciences of the USSR, *Solidarnost' narodov s Ispanskoi respublikoi, 1936-1939* (Moscow: Progreso, 1973), 252. [Back.](#)

**Note 90:** Julián Zugazagoitia, *Guerra y vicisitudes de los Españoles* (Buenos Aires: La Vanguardia, 1941), 128. [Back.](#)

**Note 91:** Dolores Ibárruri, et al., *Guerra y revolución en España 1936-1939*, 4 vols. (Moscow: Progreso, 1966-1971), vol. I: 421. [Back.](#)

**Note 92:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 961, l. 226. [Back.](#)

**Note 93:** Pascua to Voroshilov, 15 May 1937. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. Marcelino Pascua, Leg. 2. Exp. 8. [Back.](#)

**Note 94:** Memorandum of Colonel Sverchevskii, undated [1938]. RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1149, l. 227. [Back.](#)

**Note 95:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1142, l. 4. [Back.](#)

**Note 96:** CC PCE. Tesis et Manuscritos, 19/10, no. 17, 155. The report appears in RGVA as f. 33987, op. 3, del. 961, ll. 131-175. [Back.](#)

**Note 97:** CC PCE. Tesis et Manuscritos, 19/10, no. 17, 170. [Back.](#)

**Note 98:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1149, ll. 7-8. [Back.](#)

**Note 99:** Memorandum of Colonel Sverchevskii, undated [1938]. RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1149, l. 231. [Back.](#)

### [Stalin and the Spanish Civil War](#)