The Soviet Union and the Outbreak of the Spanish Civil War

A Thesis

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by

William K. Wolf, B.A.

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The Ohio State University

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Master's Examination Committee: Approved by
Allan K. Wildman
John Rothney
Michael Hogan

Adviser
Department of History
VITA

July 23, 1958 ......... Born, Chateauroux, France

1982. ............... B.A., Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio

FIELD OF STUDY

Major Field: Russian History
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INTRODUCTION

The Soviet Union developed the reputation in the years leading up to the Second World War of being the only major power which consistently resisted the aggressive designs of fascism, particularly those espoused by the Nazi German leader Adolf Hitler. In this regard, the Spanish Civil War represents perhaps the clearest example of Soviet commitment to anti-fascism. For while Italian troops and German pilots joined ranks with Spanish General Francisco Franco's fascist army to overthrow the democratically elected government of Spain, both France and Great Britain remained officially neutral in the dispute. Only the Soviet Union came to the aid of the Spanish Republic, both in the diplomatic arena and in a material sense. Indeed, the large-scale covert shipment of arms from the Soviet Union to democratic Spain became an open secret that garnered worldwide admiration for the USSR from the Left and even from political moderates.

A closer examination of Soviet policy in Spain, however, casts doubt upon the consistency of Soviet anti-fascism. Surprisingly, at the outbreak of civil war in Spain, the USSR failed to support the Republic or to call for collective security measures in response to the crisis. The Soviet Union simply remained silent in the opening weeks of the Civil War, apparently having no Spanish policy. Thus an important opportunity to implement the collective security strategy was lost, and the great powers all developed policies independently of Soviet input. Later the Soviet Union joined the French-proposed international embargo of arms to Spain, an ill-conceived and unenforceable scheme, about which the Soviets had serious misgivings from the beginning. Soon after signing the French
acord, the Soviets unilaterally decided to violate it. Only after having implemented the decision to send arms to Madrid, two to three months after the outbreak of war in Spain, did the Soviet Union begin to espouse publicly the principle of collective security and criticize indirectly the policies of Britain and France toward Spain. If indeed these criticisms were genuine Soviet attempts to achieve a united response against fascism in Spain, then they were far too late to effect any changes. British policy had been unshakably neutralist from the first days of the Civil War, and the French, who did seriously consider selling arms to the Republic at first, had soon thereafter subordinated their foreign policy to that of the British and thus also were to remain rigidly neutral. In any event, the Soviet Union never brought much pressure to bear on France or Britain to change their Spanish policies. Above all else the Soviet Union feared diplomatic isolation and avoided alienating the two nations by direct criticisms of their neutralist policy. Despite the fact, then, that the Soviet Union eventually began direct arms shipments to Spain, and in so doing averted a fascist victory there for nearly three years, Soviet policy toward Spain was not consistent with the principles of collective security, the very cornerstone of Soviet foreign policy in the middle and late 1930s. In a very real sense, the outbreak of civil war in Spain represented a serious lapse on the part of the USSR in the implementation of collective security principles as a response to fascist aggression. This paper, then, will attempt to account for this lapse, as well as to explain why the USSR later dramatically reversed its policy with covert arms shipments to the Loyalists. In the process, a fundamental flaw in the collective security policy itself will be demonstrated.
CHAPTER I

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL DISCUSSION

Historical literature regarding the Soviet Union's involvement in the Spanish Civil War exists in abundance, yet many of the crucial issues on this subject remain mired in controversy due to the lack of hard sources and documentary evidence. Such is the case for the rationale behind Stalin's policy toward Spain at the outbreak of the Franco rebellion. The explanation for the Soviet Union's switch from a policy of neutrality to active intervention on behalf of the Spanish Republic is subject to differing interpretations.

According to Istorii vneshnei politiki SSSR (1966), a standard Soviet diplomacy text, the Soviet Union joined the Non-Intervention Committee, a French creation, in good faith and only because her French ally requested her to do so. Only after continued violations of the non-intervention agreement by Germany and Italy, which were secretly supplying the Nationalists with arms and troops, and after British and French acquiescence in those violations, did the Soviet Union decide to supply military hardware and technical advisors to the defenders of the Spanish Republic. Thus, from the Soviet point of view, the Spanish Civil War provides an early example of the failure of collective security against fascist aggression.

Although there is some truth to the Soviet account, there is considerable distortion as well, the worst being that a very complicated issue is reduced to black and white. In fact, Soviet support for Republican Spain, though substantial, was often lukewarm. The Republicans, were constantly complaining about the limited nature and poor
quality of Soviet supplies, and the military aid the Soviets rendered Spain was paid for with gold from the Spanish Treasury, much of which was transferred to Moscow for "safekeeping." In all fairness to the British, it should be borne in mind that by remaining neutral they were not favoring Franco as much as they were denying support for the Loyalists, among whose ranks they correctly saw not only republicans, but anarchists and communists as well. The British government favored neither side in the Civil War but thought that a fascist government in Spain was preferable to a communist one or, if the anarchists prevailed, to none at all.3

As for the French, Socialist Premier Leon Blum's sympathies clearly lay with the Republicans. Blum allowed French aid to cross the Pyrenees at the war's onset, but his policy was effectively vetoed by the fragility of his government's coalition (the staunchly anti-communist Radicals were opposed to intervention) and by British insistence on strict neutrality by France. Since France's security was becoming increasingly dependent upon British support, Blum was in no position to pursue the policy he desired. It is hard to imagine Stalin shedding tears over the fate of his Spanish comrades, but according to Louis Fischer, Blum literally wept when he had to refuse fellow Socialist and Spanish Minister of Finance Juan Negrin's requests for military aid.4

The Soviet claim that the USSR joined the Non-Intervention Committee (NIC) in good faith in an attempt to achieve collective security is a bit disingenuous. From the start it was clear that the NIC had no power of enforcement and this made it little more than a formalized "gentlemen's agreement." As such, it can hardly be labeled as a serious effort for collective security, for, in the words of Soviet Foreign Commissar M.
Litvinov, "One cannot struggle for the collective organization of security without adopting collective measures against breaches of international obligations." For the French, and especially the British, the NIC was designed more to prevent the conflict in Spain from expanding into a general European war than to actually prevent Germany or Italy from supplying Franco's rebel forces. And the Soviet Union was aware of this. But by stressing the very real failures of Britain and France to resist fascist aggression in the Spanish Civil War, Soviet historiography purposely draws attention away from the defects in Soviet policy of the same era.

Emigre and unofficial accounts are more engaging than the Soviet sources, although their reliability is open to question. W.G. Krivitsky (I Was Stalin's Agent, 1939) claims that Stalin intervened in Spain only after he was sure Franco would not get a quick victory. Less plausible in his assertion that Spain was to be made a Soviet satellite in the course of the war. Once in control of Spain, Stalin would be in a better position to secure an alliance with France and Great Britain or even to make a deal with Hitler—Stalin's most coveted goal, according to Krivitsky. As fantastic as it sounds, it cannot be dismissed out of hand. Krivitsky's revelation that Stalin was secretly scheming to reach an understanding with Hitler in early 1937 (the Kandelaki mission) was scoffed at in the beginning, but the captured German war documents have subsequently vindicated Krivitsky. Still, the idea of Spain as a Soviet satellite sounds far-fetched, even given Russian attempts to control affairs in the Republican government and military during the civil war. Soviet policy ostensibly was non-revolutionary in Spain in accordance with the Popular Front strategy and also, apparently, because Stalin
feared that a Soviet-backed communist regime in Spain might have caused Britain and even France to reach some sort of agreement with Germany and Italy on the basis of containing the Bolshevik menace.

Although widely held to be a forgery, Maxim Litvinov’s *Notes for a Journal* (1953) contains considerable material later proven to be accurate.\(^9\) Regarding Stalin’s Spanish policy, many tantalizing fragments are to be found. For example, Molotov, Voroshilov, and Comintern-head Dimitrov are said to have favored intervention—apparently to counter "Trotskyite propaganda" in the Comintern, whereas Stalin is said to have preferred strict neutrality.\(^10\) Further Politburo deliberations on the subject are described and Stalin is said to "vacillate," which was unusual for him, according to 'Litvinov.'\(^11\) Unfortunately these accounts are impossible to verify and, because of their dubious provenance, cannot be accepted as a legitimate historical source.

Considerable literature on this subject has been produced by Western historians, but only one monograph exists which is fully devoted to Soviet foreign policy during the Civil War period. David T. Cattell’s *Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War* (1957) was a groundbreaking work and remains the standard source in this area thirty years after its publication. Though a competent work, Cattell’s account often lacks imagination. His interpretation at times too closely corresponds with official Soviet history. Accordingly, in Cattell’s view, the Spanish Civil War represents the Soviet Union’s most consistent attempt to achieve collective security in the face of the fascist threat.\(^12\) Little credence is given to the idea that Stalin wanted to conclude an agreement with Hitler before 1939. Instead, the Soviet Union is shown to have earnestly preferred better relations with France and Great Britain.\(^13\)
Surprisingly, domestic considerations affecting Soviet foreign policy are almost entirely neglected. Even more incredibly, the purges are ignored, but Cattell does speculate that the Soviet industrialization drive required so many resources and so much of the personal attention of the leadership that Stalin was reluctant to intervene in the Spanish war at first. Only after France denied aid to the Republicans, Cattell speculates, did Stalin make the decision to intervene, hoping his act would cause the French to follow suit.¹⁴

Max Beloff’s interpretation, even more than Cattell’s follows the official Soviet version. In The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia 1923–1941 (1949), Beloff suggests that the initial Soviet adherence to the Non-Intervention Agreement was based on the policy of cooperation with France, the Russian ally. But German and Italian noncompliance forced the Soviet Union to intervene also. The Soviets, then, aided Spain because France and Britain failed to. Stalin is said to have expected that the latter two powers would eventually realize that their interests as well were threatened by fascism in Spain and they would begin sending aid themselves. When such aid was not forthcoming, however, by early 1937, Russian aid was reduced. Moscow eventually refused to do Britain and France’s work.¹⁵ So Beloff, like Soviet historians, sees Spain as another example of Western retreat before fascist aggression and interprets Soviet intervention as an attempt to awaken the West to that danger.

Hugh Thomas, who has written perhaps the best general account of the Spanish Civil War (The Spanish Civil War, 1961), expertly handles the diplomatic considerations as well. He basically agrees with Cattell and Beloff, but he emphasizes an additional factor— the Comintern. According
to Thomas, the Soviet policy of non-intervention in the summer of 1936 caused dissatisfaction in the world communist movement. Comintern circles were particularly sensitive to the Trotskyist argument that by staying aloof from the struggle in Spain, the Soviet Union was abetting Hitler and Mussolini. Thomas argues that Comintern pressures contributed to Stalin's decision to aid the Republic. Although the Comintern was Moscow's obedient tool by 1936 and as such was expected to unquestioningly follow policies dictated from the Kremlin, Stalin may have been unusually attentive to Comintern sensitivities at the time of the Zinoviev-Kamenev show trial. Even Stalin had to worry about political support at home and internationally.

Although domestic factors influencing Soviet policy toward Spain have been largely ignored in the literature, there are some notable exceptions. Robert A. Friedlander ("Great Power Politics and Spain's Civil War: The First Phase", 1965) explains Stalin's early policy of neutrality as a consequence of the Zinoviev-Kamenev trial. Claiming that "severe strains" existed in the Soviet leadership in the late summer of 1936, Friedlander reckons that the USSR was not about to take any risks internationally.

Adam Ulam (Expansion and Coexistence, 1974) is in basic agreement with Friedlander. Explaining the purges as Stalin's attempt to eliminate all potential rivals to his leadership in the event of a national calamity, such as an armed invasion, Ulam theorizes the Soviet regime felt more vulnerable to attack after 1936 because it believed its own political rhetoric. In Ulam's words:

If the initial motivation (for the purges) was a rational if cruel decision to destroy any latent opposition that
might raise its head in the case of war, then the vicious
circle of terror could not but end in persuading the
regime that it was in fact in the presence of a
widespread all-pervasive network of treason and
subversion.\textsuperscript{18}

Ulam claims the delayed response of the Soviet Union to aid the Spanish
Republic was the result of the caution inherent in Soviet policies during
this period of increased 'vulnerability'.

Louis Fischer (\textit{Russia's Road from Peace to War}, 1969) takes an
opposite view of the show trial's effect on foreign policy. Fischer
reasons that Stalin could not eliminate 'fascist spies' at home without
fighting fascism abroad as well.\textsuperscript{19} Thus the Zinoviev-Kamenev trial of
August 1936 may have been a factor \textit{contributing} to the Soviet decision to
intervene in Spain.

But perhaps most intriguing is the interpretation of George Kennan
\textit{Russia and the West Under Lenin and Stalin}, 1960). Kennan speculates
that the decision to intervene in Spain was reached in mid-September at a
Central Committee meeting from which Stalin was absent. With Stalin
vacationing in the Caucasus, Bukharin supposedly was able to get a
majority of the Central Committee to agree to militarily support the
Spanish Republicans. Although this decision is said to have infuriated
Stalin, the fact that it was implemented is cited as proof that he
acquiesced in it. Apparently Kennan maintains that Stalin's authority,
even as late as 1936, was not yet absolute.\textsuperscript{20}

The idea that Bukharin represented a faction of the Party leadership
opposed to Stalin's policies has its origin in emigre Menshevik Boris
Nicolaevsky's "Letter of an Old Bolshevik".\textsuperscript{21} Nicolaevsky claims the
"letter" to be an accurate reflection of Bukharin's sentiments on the
intra-party struggle of the 1930s. If true, then indeed the leadership
was deeply divided on foreign policy questions as late as 1936. Stephen F. Cohen (The Last Bolshevik, 1973) elaborates on this subject by demonstrating that Bukharin led a group unalterably opposed to any form of cooperation with Nazi Germany. This alleged 'moderate' or humanist faction objected to Hitler on moral grounds and championed collective resistance to fascism.22 On the other hand, Cohen continues, Stalin had no such ideological objections to Hitler (Bukharin is said even to have argued that under Stalin the USSR had become a fascist state in all but name). In fact, Stalin is said to have favored the resumption of the USSR's "special relationship"23 with Germany, and in this regard he was supported by his own faction, headed by Molotov and Kaganovich. Hoping to reach some sort of political understanding with Hitler, then, Stalin is said to have refrained from open support of Republican Spain in order not to alienate the German leader. Only after a mutiny of sorts in the Soviet party leadership did the Soviet Union send arms to Spain.24

This version of events is reflected in other writings on Soviet policy in the Spanish Civil War as well. Robert M. Slusser's article "The Role of the Foreign Ministry" is just one well known example.25 But documentary evidence to support this theory is lacking. In fact, there is no record from the official Soviet sources that the Central Committee actually met in September 1936, casting considerable doubt upon the entire theory. When George Kennan was asked to substantiate his writings concerning the September Central Committee plenum, he forthrightly admitted that he did not know and could not discover their source (he had lost his research notes connected with Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin).26
Fortunately both Cohen and Slusser’s works are well footnoted and the sources, it turns out, for their accounts are one and the same—Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov’s *The Reign of Stalin* (1953). Thus the entire theory turns out to be based solely on the memoirs of a Soviet emigre. No other sources acknowledge the existence of a September 1936 Central Committee meeting or connect the decision to intervene in Spain with the anti-Stalin party leadership. All of this, of course, casts doubt upon the theory. But it is Avtorkhanov’s writing itself which renders this version of events completely untenable.

Avtorkhanov was neither present at the alleged Central Committee meeting, nor did he learn of it at second hand. He was merely convinced that such a meeting must have taken place because of "indirect evidence".27 When asked to substantiate his assertion in *The Reign of Stalin* that the meeting occurred, Avtorkhanov replied

> I am now in a position to confirm and illustrate every page and every major fact in my book with evidence based either directly on quotations or the implication of these statements. The only assertion in my book which I am unable to document without access to the Central Committee archives... is my statement concerning the September plenum... 28

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of *The Reign of Stalin* is that it was written as if it were an eyewitness account—not a scholarly speculation as Avtorkhanov later admits it to be. The alleged Central Committee meeting is described in minute detail, as for example when Avtorkhanov notes the Comintern representatives present: "In the loge reserved for the diplomatic corps Dimitrov was to be seen, Ercoli (Togliatti), Rakosi, Kuusinen, Pieck, Anna Pauker, as well as a Pole, a Japanese and two Chinese..."29 If Avtorkhanov gives an honest and
accurate account, why does he embellish it with details about which he could have no knowledge and which are not important in and of themselves?

A further disturbing aspect of Avtorkhanov's Central Committee meeting description are his frequent historical inaccuracies. For example, Avtorkhanov claims Yezhov replaced Yagoda as head of the NKVD before the September plenum, when in fact, Yezhov was not appointed to his new post until weeks after the alleged meeting. Also, Stalin is present at the Central Committee plenum described by Avtorkhanov, but in reality, Stalin spent the entire month of September vacationing near the Black Sea.

Avtorkhanov loses further credibility because of the clearly biased and emotionally charged nature of his 'memoir'. Describing Yezhov at the plenum, Avtorkhanov uses the following language: "... a little man with the receding forehead of a degenerate, the greedy eyes of a hyena, and the hoarse voice of a consumptive." Given Yezhov's proven record as a ruthless killer, one would not expect to read kind descriptions of him by those with whom he came into contact. But Avtorkhanov's strong language here show that he has an ax to grind and is out for blood. In defense of The Reign of Stalin, Avtorkhanov has commented

Since my writings are primarily memoirs rather than scholarly research, they may, of course, contain errors of detail, but the fundamental facts and conclusions have been validated by events.

Unfortunately for historians, Avtorkhanov's account of the September Central Committee meeting is an example neither of scholarly research nor a memoir. Since the theory that Soviet intervention in Spain was ordered by a rebellious Central Committee rests on only one piece of evidence and the validity of that evidence has been called into question on several
grounds, the theory must be discarded. This is not conclusive proof, however, that this version of events did not in fact transpire, but in the absence of other supporting evidence the theory has no credibility and will not be incorporated into the research findings which follow this historiographic discussion.

The present study differs from the historical literature in a number of ways. As the primary leitmotif, emphasis is placed throughout the study on the idea that Soviet policy at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War not only was not in accordance with the collective security strategy, it represented a real failure to implement that policy. In particular, a careful examination of Soviet policy in the first days of the Spanish rebellion - a period largely ignored by historians - clearly reveals the Soviet failure to implement collective security measures. In general terms, this study differs from previous ones in that it takes a comprehensive approach to the problem. Although Soviet diplomacy is the focus, domestic political and ideological factors, when appropriate, will be considered in describing Soviet policy. In particular, the relationship of the Great Purges to Spanish policy will be discussed, where possible. Finally, this study, unlike previous works, will emphasize the idea that Soviet intervention in Spain was the result of a cautious and gradual escalation of Soviet support for the Spanish Republic.
Bibliographical Discussion


2Ibid., pp. 302-303.


7Ibid.


9Bertram Wolfe has presented detailed evidence that the "Diary" was written by Gregory Bessedovsky, a Soviet diplomat during the 1920's who defected to the West. See Bertram D. Wolfe's "The Strange Case of Litvinov's Diary" in Strange Communists I have Known (New York: Stein and Day, 1965), pp. 207-222.

10Maxim Litvinov, Notes for a Journal (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1955), pp. 239-240. Throughout the mid-thirties Trotsky claimed Stalin had abandoned the cause of revolution and became increasingly reactionary. He constantly compared Stalin's reign to the 'Thermidor' of the French Revolution. By not supporting the 'revolutionary' forces in Spain at the outbreak of the Civil War (i.e., the Spanish left-Socialists and Communists which supported the Popular Front government), Stalin was even more vulnerable to Trotsky's criticism, especially since they were reflected in Comintern circles.

11Ibid., p. 240.


13Ibid., pp. 36-37.

14Ibid., p. 34.


20Fischer, p. 273.


24The 'special' relationship was born in the years immediately following the Versailles Treaty when both the Soviet Union and Germany were international pariahs. Transforming their community of fate into mutual advantage, the two nations signed the Rapallo Pact in April 1922. This agreement called for economic cooperation and led to a mutually beneficial military collaboration. Only after Hitler came to power in Germany more than ten years later did the military collaboration end. Despite the increasingly hostile attitude of the anti-communist Nazi government, however, strong economic ties remained between the two nations throughout the 1930s.

25Cohen, p. 368.


28Avtorkhanov was convinced that Stalin intended to arrest and try Bukharin and Rykov immediately after the August show trial in which they were implicated. But since both were candidate members of the Central Committee, it was not legally possible to try them without expelling them first from the Party— and expulsion required the approval of two-thirds of a Central Committee plenum. Therefore, according to Avtorkhanov, Stalin had to call a meeting of the Central Committee in September 1936. — Avtorkhanov, "A Few Questions Concerning the 'Great Purge' (An Answer to My Critics)," *Slavic Review* 26 (December 1967): 667–668.
Ibid., p. 666.


Ibid., p. 42.

Ibid., p. 47.

Ibid., p. 44.

Avtorkhanov, "An Answer to My Critics." p. 672. Avtorkhanov believes his account to be "validated" by the fact that 70% of the 1936 Central Committee (CC) members were liquidated in the purges. But even Nicolaevsky, who in general accepts the idea of a serious Party opposition in the mid-1930s, does not agree with Avtorkhanov’s account of a CC mutiny in September 1936. Nicolaevsky’s "Letter" does, however, claim that "under pressure of some members of the Politburo, an announcement was made rehabilitating Bukharin and Rykov." (Power and the Soviet Elite, p. 63). But this is described by Nicolaevsky as a minor episode— not a direct challenge to Stalin's authority but rather a personal matter concerning few high Party leaders. The most plausible explanation for Avtorkhanov's alleged September CC plenum is that he is confusing it with one that took place February-March 1937, where Bukharin was arrested after several confrontational meetings.
CHAPTER II
INITIAL HESITATIONS

The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War (July 18, 1936) was the first test of the sincerity of the Soviet Union's policy of collective resistance to fascist aggression. Initially at least, the Soviet Union failed this test. Unlike the Rhineland affair, the Spanish Civil War presented the Soviet Union with a situation where ostensible adherence to collective security principles entailed great risk. And faced for the first time with such risk, the Soviet Union delayed before acting. It was a fatal hesitation. On March 7, 1936, when Hitler's troops reoccupied the Rhineland, the Soviet Union acted decisively the very same day. While warning of the dangers of condoning the German action, Moscow offered France Soviet support in whatever measures she might take to counter the German move.\(^1\) The Soviets also immediately notified the British of their position.\(^2\) Within days, however, it became clear that France would not resist this flagrant German violation of the Versailles Treaty and the value of France as a military ally, as well as France's ability to defend her own borders, was considerably diminished. Later it was learned that French resistance to Hitler's demands had been effectively vetoed by the British policy of appeasement--a precedent which established a pattern of events whose end product was world war.

Soviet conduct in the Rhineland episode, however, was unimpeachable—in complete accord with the policy of collective security. Such was not the case when civil war erupted in Spain the following July. Of the five great powers in Europe in 1936, only one, the Soviet Union, failed to develop a coherent strategy towards Spain during the first days of
civil war there. Germany and Italy reacted quickly to support the rebels, sending airplanes for use as troop transports.³ Britain early on officially embarked upon a policy of strict neutrality toward the conflict in Spain, while the Popular Front government of France, whose natural sympathies lay with the Spanish Republic, by July 25 had publicly announced a policy of non-intervention, the result of British and domestic pressures. (These policies, virtually without amendment, were continued by the four powers until the end of the Spanish conflict three years later.) Only the Soviet Union refrained either from declaring openly its position or intervening privately. For more than two weeks after the fascist uprising, while the rebels consolidated their position and the Loyalists girded themselves for attack, the Soviet Government remained aloof from the events in Spain, a development that is surprising in view of the Soviets' subsequent heavy involvement in aiding the Republic. But given the Soviet Union's well publicized diplomatic campaign against fascism in the mid-1930s, including the advocacy of collective security and the support of Popular Front governments, its inactivity following a fascist rebellion against a Popular Front government is even more inexplicable.

A review of the Soviet press of the period, however, shows that the USSR did, at least, extend moral support to the defenders of the Spanish Republic by describing the events in Spain in sympathetic terms. In Soviet newspapers the rebels were repeatedly condemned as fascists trying to impose their will on the Spanish population after having lost power through free elections to the legitimate democratic government. In contrast, the Republicans were portrayed as engaged in a heroic struggle against fascism.
Surprisingly, though, given the serious nature of the Civil War, the Soviet press was not at all alarmist in its early reporting. Although daily accounts of German and Italian aid to the rebels began in Pravda and Izvestiia by July 26, descriptions of the actual fighting in Spain stressed by Loyalist successes and painted the war in positive, almost glowing terms. One can only speculate that this tactic was adopted to mitigate the disquiet felt by many over the lack of active Soviet support for the Loyalists. For while the Soviet press was clearly partial to the Republican cause, formal statements of support were noticeably absent. Though the fascists were condemned, no calls for aid to the Republic were made.

Officially, the Soviet press campaign against world fascism continued. A week after the Spanish mutiny a major editorial in Izvestiia carefully reviewed the events in Europe in the last two years. German advances were detailed and the lack of firmness on the part of France and Great Britain were decried. Similarly, a week later on the anniversary of the outbreak of World War One, a lead editorial pessimistically viewed the policies of Britain and France toward the fascists as making another world war more likely. The editorial sadly noted that "the descendants of Lord Castlereagh—once the arbiter of all Europe—today cringe before Hitler. How sleep the sons of England in the fields of Flanders?", the editorial went on to ask.

Conspicuously absent in these strongly critical editorials is any mention of events in Spain and the Western powers' response to them. Instead of chiding France and England for their inactivity in the face of a clear fascist threat, Soviet editorials studiously avoided all mention of the international implications of the Spanish conflict. No appeals
were made to involve the League of Nations in settling the dispute, despite the fact that this would have been entirely consistent with the established Soviet foreign policy line of the time. Moreover, during the first weeks of the Civil War in Spain, no offer was made by the Soviet government to provide arms to the Republic, though the Loyalists were desperately trying to purchase weapons abroad and international law did not prohibit such a transaction.

How can such restraint be accounted for? It may be that Stalin, who feared attack on the Soviet Union both in the east (from Japan) and in the west (by Germany) reacted to the Spanish war with great caution. It is reasonable to assume that he wanted to avoid measures which could antagonize Germany—especially the dispatch of Soviet arms to Spain. At the same time, the Soviets may have attempted to avoid estranging their skeptical French ally and adopted a hands-off policy toward Spain. Any show of tangible Soviet support for the Republic was likely to be interpreted by the conservative elements in France as an attempt to 'Bolshevize' Spain. In fact the German and Italian press from the very beginning of the Civil War repeatedly charged the Soviet Union with intervention on behalf of left-wing elements in Spain. The Soviets, in turn, made efforts to refute these accusations. In a private communication of July 31, a Soviet Foreign Ministry official informed an American diplomat that the "Soviet Government has carefully refrained from taking any action which might be considered as interference in Spanish affairs; no Soviet arms or other military equipment have been sent to Spain nor have Soviet ships or officials played any role directly or indirectly in the conflict." The same official went on to note that German and Italian charges of Soviet interference were simply used as
pretexts for their own aid to the rebels. It was further added that "the Fascist states are planning to render more assistance in the future if deemed necessary in order to ensure a victory for the reactionaries."8

This last statement tends to discount the theory that the Soviets early on refrained from aiding the Republic in the hope that their example would be followed by Germany and Italy, who would then lack justification for intervention. In fact it seems to indicate that the Soviet government suspected from the beginning that international fascist aid to the rebels would not easily be stopped.

On the other hand, it was apparent almost from the outbreak of civil war that the French could not be counted upon to supply the Republic with arms. Although Blum did not formally commit his government to non-intervention until August 8, already on July 25 the French Council of Ministers publicly prohibited all export of French war material to Spain.9 Two days later French Foreign Minister Delbos authorized his ambassadors in Europe (Moscow included) to make known "where you judge it opportune" that the policy of the French Government toward Spain was one of strict non-intervention.10

From the Soviet point of view French refusal to aid the Spanish Republic reduced the desirability of France as a military ally. French military resolve was already doubtful, given her inaction following Germany's remilitarization of the Rhineland in March 1936. If the Popular Front government of France could not come to the aid of her fascist beleaguered sister government in Spain, a country with whom she shared an undefended border, how sure could the Soviets be that France would come to their aid in the event of a German attack on Russia? Germany was a much stronger adversary than Franco's army and ideological
affinities simply did not exist between the French and Soviet governments. French inactivity in the Spanish conflict, then, seriously weakened the strategic position of the Soviet Union because it reduced the credibility of the Franco-Soviet Pact. And yet there is no evidence that the Soviets either publicly or though diplomatic channels tried to detach the French from the policy of non-intervention during the first weeks of the Spanish Civil War. Pravda and Izvestia register no Soviet complaint over French inactivity. Likewise, French diplomatic documents reveal no Soviet demarche on the subject. It seems clear that the Soviets carefully refrained from criticizing the French. Could it be that in the early phases of the conflict the Soviets were 'non-interventionists'? Given the fact that the Soviets rarely before or after this period refrained from attacking French policies they disagreed with, it seems likely that this was the case.

But a neutralist Realpolitik stance toward Spain by the Soviet Union was not without costs. Not to aid the Republican government of Spain, which in Marxist terms was seen as 'revolutionary' in that it was destroying the remnants of feudalism in Spain, could be seen as a betrayal of the Spanish workers and peasants. Not only did many communists in the Soviet Union feel this way, but this was the prevailing sentiment among communists worldwide as well. Stalin risked losing influence as the leader of the world revolutionary movement by a hands-off policy in Spain.

By the end of July the Soviet press began reporting movements in Western Europe which were openly declaring support for the Loyalists and which called for an end to the French embargo. But the Soviet position did not change. The British embassy in Moscow on July 29 quoted the
Soviet press as saying, "The Spanish Government has never asked (the) Soviet Union for assistance and we are convinced that they will find in their own country sufficient forces to liquidate this mutiny of Fascist generals acting on orders from foreign countries."12

Likewise, the Comintern maintained officials' silence on the events in Spain. While many of the national communist parties organized popular gatherings in support of the Republic of Spain, no central Comintern policy appears to have been developed. In the absence of formal instructions, some organized on their own initiative to aid the Loyalists. Willi Muenzengerger, a free-thinking Comintern agent based in Paris, helped organize volunteers from all over Europe to fight the rebels in Spain, long before the International Brigades were organized.13 Similarly, French athletes at the Workers' Olympics in Barcelona at the outbreak of the Civil War volunteered spontaneously to fight in defense of the Republic.14 In the face of official silence from the Soviet Government and the Comintern, many felt the Spanish Republic was being sacrificed to Russian diplomatic interests.

Whether or not it was a concession to revolutionary agitation is unclear, but on August 3 a dramatic shift in the Soviet Union's Spanish policy was made evident to the readers of the Soviet press. Pravda's headline declared that workers' meetings had been held in Moscow and Leningrad to express "solidarity with the Spanish people". This was the first open and direct acknowledgment of Soviet support for the Republic.15 The next day, Pravda's headline was even more dramatic:

The mighty voice of the people of the great Soviet Union thunders across the entire world:
- Hands off free democratic Spain!
- Damn the fascist mutineers— the most evil enemies of the Spanish people!
The Workers of the Soviet land carry out the resolution to deduct 1/2% of their monthly wages for a fund to help the fighters, with weapons in their hands, defending the Spanish Democratic Republic.16

So the rebels and their supporters were condemned in the most unequivocal terms, but even more significantly, the Soviet Union announced its intention to aid the Republic financially as a humanitarian gesture. The money collected was to be given to Spain for the purchase of food. Despite the fact that the Spanish Republic, with one of the largest gold reserves in the world, was in desperate need of arms, which were under embargo, and not grain, which it could freely purchase on the world market, the Soviet aid campaign was a major but cautious demonstration of support for the embattled Republic.

An abrupt change in Soviet tactics regarding Spain was also evident in the editorial pages of Izvestiiia. For the first time, Great Britain and France were criticized, although gently, for their inactivity in the face of the Franco rebellion. On August 4 Karl Radek, after complaining about the susceptibility of the London Times to the unfounded German accusations of Russian involvement in Spanish affairs, warned the British that the struggle in Spain was "also a question of your own skins". He added, "The louder the German fascists shout about Bolshevik or French intervention in Spain, the plainer it becomes that they are preparing for serious action not only against Spain, but against France also."17 This editorial represents the first Soviet attempt, however restrained, to link the Spanish conflict to the general theme of collective security—a full seventeen days after the outbreak of rebellion. This was not a direct call for collective action, but it was a clear reference to the notion that peace was indivisible, and that a threat to one nation was a
threat to all— a fundamental tenet of the doctrine of collective security.

But the new Soviet policy was destined to be short-lived. On the same day that the fund drive was announced and Radek’s editorial was printed, French Foreign Minister Yvon Delbos instructed his European ambassadors to make known to their accredited governments the French desire that all European powers adhere to the principle of non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War.\(^{18}\) The next day this request was conveyed by the French embassy in Moscow to the Soviet Government. That same day, August 5, the French Chargé d’Affaires was informed by Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs N.N. Krestinsky that the USSR adhered “in principle” to non-intervention and that it was ready to participate in the accord proposed by France.\(^{19}\) (Formal Soviet acceptance of the French proposal, however, did not come until August 23.) Within twenty-four hours the massive pro-Spain press campaign, which for four days had been characterized by outspoken headlines and front page photographs of workers meeting to express solidarity with the Spanish Republic, was unceremoniously discontinued. On August 6 Pravda simultaneously announced the Soviet agreement in principle to non-intervention and the results of the Spanish fund drive: 12,145,000 rubles were reported to have been collected by Soviet workers and the amount was ordered converted to francs and put at the disposal of the legal government of Spain.\(^{20}\) Beginning August 7 all mention of Soviet fund raising or public demonstrations for the Republic ceased.

Why the Soviets so readily accepted the French non-intervention proposal is not clear, especially since this contradicted their recent shift of policy to a more active defense of the Spanish Republic. Six
weeks later foreign Commissar Maxim Litvinov publicly implied that Soviet agreement was obtained under duress:

The Soviet Government associated itself with the declaration on non-intervention in Spanish affairs only because a friendly country feared than an international conflict might otherwise ensue. It did so in spite of its opinion that the principle of neutrality does not apply in a case where mutineers are fighting against a lawful government and (which) contradicts the principle of international law...21

Clearly the "friendly country" Litvinov refers to here is France. He insinuates that the French coerced the Soviet Union into adopting a policy it did not believe in. The theory that non-intervention was forced on the Soviets by the French has its defenders.27 But hard evidence for it is lacking. The French Foreign Ministry documents give no indication of French coercion, nor do any of the many French diplomatic memoirs. Even Air Minister Pierre Cot, the staunchest defender of the Soviet Union in Blum's cabinet, had nothing to say on this subject. Also, the speed with which the Soviet Government accepted the French proposal (Soviet agreement came the same day as the French request) suggests the Soviets did not long ponder the issue or make much of a show of protest to the French.

Indeed, was French 'pressure' even a real possibility? What leverage did the French have on the Soviets? No source, Soviet or French, has suggested that the French threatened a renunciation of the Franco-Soviet Pact in the absence of Soviet cooperation on the French weapons control scheme. And this scenario hardly seems likely given the French fear of isolation before the German threat. After all, French and British ties were still strained in August 1936 following the mutual antagonisms that resulted from the Abyssinian and Rhineland affairs.23
The only documentary indication (and it is only indirect) that the French coerced the Soviets on this issue comes from Lord Chilston, the British ambassador to Moscow. Chilston reported to London that "he had reason to believe" that the Soviet announcement on August 6 of the 12 million rubles collected for Spain and the subsequent termination of publicity concerning the workers' levy was the result of "pressing representations" by the French embassy. The French allegedly were concerned that the collection drive would adversely affect their efforts to secure agreement to non-intervention from other European powers. Unfortunately, Chilston divulges neither the source of his information, nor the manner in which the French presumably convinced the Soviets to adopt a distasteful policy. In any event, this is far too slender evidence to base any firm conclusions upon and thus the idea that the Soviets were pressured into non-intervention by their French "ally" remains unsubstantiated.

But the British Ambassador's dispatch does shed light on another subject. Based on a deduction of one half of one percent of their monthly wages, Chilston calculated that the twelve million rubles raised in the Soviet workers' levy represented only about half of the revenue that should have been produced nationwide. This means, apparently, that only half of the allotted funds for Spain had been collected when the aid campaign was terminated. When foreign journalists queried Soviet authorities on this matter, they were answered not with an explanation, but "embarrassed silence". This is further evidence that the Soviet acceptance of the principle of non-intervention in Spain was a sudden and unplanned change in policy.
But if French pressure was not responsible for this shift, then what was? The answer may lie in policy differences among the Soviet leadership. To explain the sudden appearance in the first days of August of the pro-Republican rallies and fund drive in the Soviet Union a "responsible Soviet official" informed the American Chargé d'Affaires in Moscow that

... a number of Soviet officials charged with the conduct of Soviet foreign relations were opposed to sending funds to Spain since they felt that such action would be used by Germany and Italy to justify the aid given by themselves to the rebels. These objections were overruled, however, by those Soviet leaders who take the view that if the Soviet Union is to continue to maintain hegemony over the international revolutionary movement it must not hesitate in periods of crisis to assume the leadership of that movement.26

Similarly, in mid-August the French Air Attache in Moscow reported a fundamental split in the ranks of the Comintern. The moderate faction, which included Stalin, was said to want to avoid all forms of intervention so as to avoid provoking a German and Italian reaction. On the other hand, an extremist faction purportedly held that the USSR could not afford to remain neutral and must support the Spanish Republic. The Air Attache went on to claim that the extremists were accused of "Trotkyism" and were liable to suffer repressions, possibly even exile.27 Here those favoring intervention in Spain are linked with the so-called political 'Opposition' in the Soviet Union. Since the Spanish conflict began a mere month before the Zinoviev-Kamenev show trial, the event which inaugurated the period of the great purges, this linkage is significant. It must be remembered that even for those communists who accepted the premise of the Popular Front strategy, the real battle in Spain was not between fascism and the Republic, but between the forces of
reaction and revolution. Communist idealists essentially were not interested in defending 'democracy' but instead hoped to protect a nascent Marxist revolution. In other words, despite the 'bourgeois' connotations involved in supporting a Popular Front government, many Soviet communists were nevertheless able to maintain their revolutionary outlook with regard to the events in Spain.

Some sense of the revolutionary spirit that prevailed among those Soviets who advocated aid for the Republic is found in the Soviet press reports of the public demonstrations of early August. At an oil workers' rally in Baku it was noted that the majority of the speakers were older workers, participants in the (Russian) civil war. Some of the civil war veterans recounted stories from that period. One such worker was quoted as follows:

German and Italian fascism will not succeed in drowning in blood revolutionary Spain, just as the Russian counterrevolutionaries were not able to subdue the soviets. A broad wave of proletarian aid will capsize all the plans of the fascist scum.

There are at least two tendencies evident in these public demonstrations that were liable to have alarmed Stalin. First, the revival of the spirit of revolutionary Bolshevism that was evident at the workers' rallies must have been particularly unwelcome on the eve of the great purges, where Stalin systematically eliminated the old Bolsheviks, among others, from the Party structure. Secondly, the Marxist revolutionary rhetoric of the demonstrators was in clear conflict with the more moderate language that corresponded to the Popular Front strategy. Whereas the official Soviet press slogans in early August referred to aid to the Spanish people and the defense of the 'Spanish Democratic Republic', workers speeches often addressed themselves to the
Spanish proletariat and talked of saving the Spanish revolution. Such language made it harder for the Soviet Union to maintain abroad that it was not trying to 'Bolshevize' Spain.

The very nature of the Soviet aid campaign points to the conclusion that it was a compromise between the moderate and revolutionary tendencies of Soviet policy. While it openly called for support of the Spanish Republic— a nearly unanimous desire of the world communist movement— it limited itself to humanitarian aid. No mention of supplying the Republic with what it needed most of all— arms— was made or even hinted at. It may be, then, that the resurgence of revolutionary spirit the aid campaign evoked surprised or even angered Stalin. The French request to adopt non-intervention, under these circumstances, may have been greeted by Stalin as a welcome excuse to drop the whole fund raising scheme and its troublesome side effects.

The implication here is that Stalin by 1936 was opposed to foreign revolutions, but the truth is likely not that simple. Milovan Djilas is probably closest to the mark in noting that Stalin only conditionally opposed revolutions, that is, to the extent to which they did not coincide with the interests of the Soviet state. And clearly in the case of Spain, from Stalin's point of view, revolution was not to be desired. A communist takeover in Spain, whether supported by the Soviet Union or not, would only serve to increase the distrust felt by the British and the French toward the USSR and thus make Soviet isolation in the face of the German threat more likely. Indeed, the Soviet Union throughout the Spanish Civil War made every possible effort to disclaim all revolutionary intentions in Spain. And later in the war when Soviet
influence war paramount in Spain, Stalin held to his promises. Even with Spanish communists dominating the Republican cabinet, government policy was decidedly moderate. 32

While the Soviet Union was quick to agree "in principle" to the French proposal for non-intervention in Spanish affairs (August 5), formal Soviet acceptance of the idea was achieved only on August 23, after protracted negotiations with the French. Although Italy and Germany did not sign the French accord until August 21 and 24 respectively, their hesitations are more understandable given their policy of supplying the rebels. The Russian delay was less predictable because the Soviet Union was already scrupulously observing non-intervention, as the discontinuation of the Republican aid campaign demonstrates. The course of the French-Soviet negotiations, however, indicates that Stalin was already having second thoughts about the non-interference policy.

The first source of disagreement between the two nations came over the wording of the formal declaration of non-intervention the French proposed. Apparently, the Soviets felt their revolutionary as well as anti-fascist credibility would be compromised if they agreed to a Spanish arms embargo because, as the French draft put it, they "deplored the tragic events in Spain" and were "animated by the will to avoid all detrimental complications to maintain good relations among the peoples." 33 Such language had the unmistakeable ring of appeasement. The Soviet negotiator proposed such "general statements" be dropped from the formal declaration, disingenuously claiming that this action would make the proposal more acceptable to the governments that were aiding the insurgents. 34 The French were not moved by this argument, however.
As the negotiations dragged on the Soviets began to voice concerns that a non-intervention agreement would be abused by "other powers" - an apparent reference to Germany and Italy. Further, it became clear to the Soviets that the non-intervention proposal was a joint French-British undertaking and that Soviet input was not sought. In this sense, the Soviet Union was treated like a second rank power in the negotiations and this the Russians evidently resented.

Another sticking point in the negotiations may have been the question of Comintern aid. It is possible that the French asked the Soviet Union to agree also to prohibit the Communist International from aiding the Spanish Republic. It is certainly true that both Germany and Italy were calling for such a measure. But no ground was given by the Soviets on this issue, for it was long-standing Soviet policy to disavow all ties between the Comintern and the Government of the USSR.

Interestingly, Stalin himself appears to have been involved in the negotiating process. The French Chargé in Moscow noted that in the course of the discussions "officials of the Foreign Office showed even more diffidence and less willingness than usual to take responsibility. Litvinov himself found it necessary to refer the most insignificant points to his government." Given Litvinov's usual free rein in negotiating sessions, his limited authority in this case likely points to the uncertainty of the Soviet leadership on the wisdom of joining the non-intervention agreement.

Despite these hesitations, however, the Soviet Union gave its formal agreement to the French proposal on August 23 and on August 29 issued a decree forbidding the export of arms to Spain. One can only speculate why Stalin finally gave his assent. Soviet sources are not helpful in
this regard. An Izvestiia editorial of August 26 clearly showed the ambiguity of the Soviet position in its contradictory commentary:

It must be stated frankly that a declaration of neutrality in connection with events such as those taking place in Spain is not our idea, but a special type of innovation in international theory and practice. Up to the present time there has been no precedent whereby a government of any country elected in accordance with its laws and recognized by all powers is put on a level both juridically and in practice with rebels.40

But then later in the same editorial:

The declaration of neutrality worked out by the French Government is apparently directed toward the cessation of this aid to the rebels and to the guaranteeing of the actual non-participation of other countries in Spanish affairs. For this reason, the motives which led the Soviet government to accept this declaration are understood...41

The illogic of this rationalization is self-evident. And apparently the passing years have not inspired Soviet historians to improve the quality of their rationale. A 1962 Soviet monograph on the Spanish Civil War explains the Soviet decision to agree to non-intervention as follows:

Although it is clear the French proposal contradicted the international rights of nations, a categorical rejection of it by the Soviet Union would have been pointless—this action would only have been used against the Spanish Republic.42 The author does not elaborate.

Stalin’s true motives remain unclear. One can speculate that he agreed to non-intervention, reservations notwithstanding, because not to do so would have meant diplomatic isolation for the Soviet Union and would have been interpreted by the other powers as a strong indication that the Soviet Union was already aiding the Spanish Republic. For all the support this action would have garnered internationally among the Left, it was bound also to alienate further anti-Bolshevik conservatives
and moderates, the latter group being an integral part of the Popular
Front government of France. 43 By refusing to adhere to the
French-British non-intervention plan, Stalin would have risked estranging
those powers, possibly resulting in an anti-Soviet coalition of all four
of the remaining European great powers (England, France, Germany and
Italy), or at the very least, French and British indifference to future
German aggression toward the Soviet Union. So from this perspective, at
least, the Soviet Union cannot be criticized too harshly for agreeing to
a hypocritical non-intervention policy in Spain. It simply had no viable
alternative. Less forgiveable, however, is the Soviet hesitation to
develop a strategy to come to the aid of the Spanish Republic in the
first weeks of the war. By limiting itself to the role of passive
spectator during this crucial period, the Soviet Union lost all
opportunity to help shape the international response to the Spanish
crisis. Had the Soviets resolutely called for international support of
the besieged Republic, the French non-intervention plan may somehow have
been circumvented. As it was, Soviet silence only contributed to the
mood of resignation and defeatism in the face of fascist aggression which
gave rise to the non-intervention protocol.
Chapter 2 Notes
Initial Hesitations

1 This assurance was given by the Soviet Ambassador (Potemkin) in Paris to the French Foreign Minister, Flandin (Beloff, The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia, 2:50). Jonathan Haslam, however, claims that an unambiguous statement of Soviet support for France did not come until two days later (March 9) when Litvinov informed Flandin through Potemkin that "he can count on my full support at Geneva." Haslam, The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe 1933-39 (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 98.

2 Ambassador Maisky to Lord Cranborne, British Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs (Beloff, The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia 2:50).

3 The Italian government agreed to support the rebels on July 21 and two days later Hitler promised German aid. Thirty Junkers 52 transport aircraft were immediately dispatched to Morocco to carry Franco's army across the Strait of Gibraltar. Thomas, pp. 218, 228-9.


5 Izvestiia, August 1, 1936, p. 1.

6 In an interview of March 5, 1936 with the American newspaperman Roy Howard, Stalin was asked where the next war was most likely to begin. Stalin answered, "In my opinion there are two centers of war danger, the first in the Far East, in the Japanese zone ... The second danger spot is in the German zone. It is difficult to say which is the more threatening. Both are there, and both are active." Jane Degrass. Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 3:168.


8 Ibid.


10 Ibid., no. 36, p. 64, dated July 27, 1936.

11 See, for example, Pravda, July 27, 1936, p. 5.

12 DBFP 2d ser., vol. 17, no. 32, p. 36, dated July 29, 1936. But the Soviet statement begs the question whether the Republic would have accepted Russian arms if offered. Especially if shipped covertly, it seems likely the hard-pressed Loyalists would have welcomed Soviet military aid. The Republic was so desperate to purchase arms, even private German manufacturers were solicited.

Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, p. 239.


Pravda, August 4, 1936, p. 1.

Izvestiia, August 4, 1936.


Ibid., no. 89, p. 139, dated August 6, 1936.

Pravda, August 6, 1936, p. 1.

Maxim Litvinov, Against Aggression (New York: International Publisher Co., 1939), p. 56.

Cattell writes that although the reaction of the Soviet leadership to the non-intervention proposal is not known, from the "seemingly ambivalent attitude of the Soviet Union it is possible to conclude that her acceptance of the agreement was owing primarily to the pressure and needs of her ally, France." Soviet Diplomacy in the Spanish Civil War, p. 17.

France refused to support British sanctions against Italy during the Ethiopian war and the British declined to promise assistance to France against Germany after the Rhineland was remilitarized by Hitler.


Ibid.


Pravda, August 5, 1936, p. 2.

Ibid.

Indirect evidence that Stalin found such 'unauthorized' language discomfiting is that sharply revolutionary rhetoric was noticeably absent when a second aid drive for Spain was begun in mid-September. See page 38 for an elaboration.

32 Thomas, p. 365.


34 Ibid., no. 113, p. 163, dated August 9, 1936.


36 Ibid.

37 FRUS 1936, vol. 2, pp. 491-492, dated August 18, 1936. Evidence for this is not found in the French diplomatic documents, however.


40 Izvestiia, August 26, 1936.

41 Ibid.


43 Key ministerial posts were occupied by the moderate and anti-communist Radical Party in Blum's cabinet—among which was the Minister of Foreign Affairs—Yvon Delbos.
CHAPTER III
TOWARD INTERVENTION: STEP BY STEP

While the diplomats haggled over the terms of the farcical non-intervention agreement throughout August, the war in Spain continued unabated, with the Nationalists making significant gains. On August 14, the Spanish border town of Badajoz fell to the rebels, allowing the fascist forces in the north and south of Spain to link up for a united assault on Madrid. The capture of Badajoz on the Portuguese border allowed the Nationalists to obtain supplies directly from Lisbon on a secure overland route. The rebels thereafter advanced steadily to the east and by September 3 Talavera, the last major town before Madrid, was under Franco's control. The Republican capital braced for the inevitable assault.

In London, the formal by-product of French efforts to isolate the Spanish conflict—the Non-Intervention Committee (NIC), first met on September 9. Eight of the twenty-six member nations (Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Sweden, and Russia) met on September 14 to form a more manageable working subcommittee. How effective the Soviets thought this body would be in preventing Germany and Italy from sending arms to the rebels is not clear. In any case, the nominal Soviet NIC delegate, Ambassador to London Ivan Maisky, did not interrupt his seven week Caucasian vacation to attend the opening NIC sessions—he resumed his post only on October 12. But Maisky's deputy, Samuel Kagan, ably filled in and immediately called for an investigation into reports of Italian military aid to the Nationalists. The Italian
delegate, Dino Grandi, responded with charges that many nations were violating the non-intervention agreement, first among which was the Soviet Union. Thus the stage was set for the pattern of mutual recrimination which characterized the NIC throughout its long and ineffectual existence. And in all fairness to the Soviet government, the Russian delegate to the NIC was the only member of that body who fully and consistently came to the defense of the Republic of Spain. Britain and even France were wont to turn a blind eye even to flagrant German and Italian violations.

But the spectacle of a fastidiously dressed Soviet delegate very correctly protesting Italian violations to equally indifferent British and French representatives must have taken on a surrealistic quality to revolutionary socialists and communists throughout the world. The Spanish Republic needed arms, not diplomatic protests, and time was running out for the besieged Loyalists. There was a genuine feeling of betrayal among revolutionaries by the world's only socialist state. The emigre Menshevik journal *Sotsialisticheeskii vestnik* clearly reflected these sentiments:

The government of this nation (Soviet Union) does not have on its back a bourgeoisie that it has to take into account (in formulating its policy). But we have not heard from this government a single word with which it has declared its readiness to give the legal republican-democratic workers-peasant government of Spain the possibility to implement its undisputed right to purchase in the Soviet Union all that it needs for (its) defense from the attacks on it by the fascists bandits...\(^3\)

Exiled Bolshevik Leon Trotsky's journal claimed to see reason for optimism in the events of Spain. After lamenting the decline of the revolutionary movement under Stalin, an anonymous contributor to Trotsky's *Biulletin’ oppositsii* wrote
The events in France and especially the Spanish revolution indicate that a serious revitalization of the working classes has begun, a revitalization which as it develops will mean the end to Stalinism... His last hour will begin when in the West the proletariat is victorious.⁴

Even if Stalin could dismiss these words as empty rhetoric, the photograph which appeared on the last page of Trotsky's journal must have seemed ominous. The picture showed a group of socialist (POUM) militiamen in Spain kneeling in front of an armored car. Prominently painted on the vehicle were the words "Viva Trotsky!"⁵

How sensitive Stalin was to the feelings of the international socialist movement is not clear. Certainly under no circumstances would Stalin allow the interests of the Soviet state to be sacrificed for the promotion of world socialism, but all the same, Stalin strove to avoid alienating otherwise loyal foreign communists. The importance Stalin attached to the Comintern is shown by the fact that he apparently considered it more important to the defense of the Soviet Union than the alliance with France.⁶ And Stalin must have been aware that the widespread feeling of dissatisfaction with the Soviet Union for its failure to openly aid the Republic extended to the ranks of the normally well-disciplined Comintern as well.

What the world did not know, however, was that the Soviet Union had started to come to the aid of the Spanish Republic even before the formal signing of the non-intervention agreement on August 23. Soviet commitment to the Republic gradually increased over a two month period (mid-August to late October), starting with the dispatch of military advisors and culminating in direct but secret shipments of Soviet arms, including airplanes and tanks by October. Soviet aid was incrementally
increased during this period—it was as if the ever cautious Stalin slowly but deliberately increased Soviet support for the Republic, carefully watching the international reaction to each new Soviet move. The prudence of such a cautious approach to aiding Spain is evident. Sudden and open Soviet aid to Madrid would be a clear violation of the non-intervention accord, and France, as its sponsor, would take offense. The already fragile Franco-Soviet Pact would be further weakened. Also, Soviet aid could increase tensions between the Soviet Union and Germany, even to the point of risking war. And Stalin's attempt at a rapprochement with Hitler could be destroyed by the resulting antagonisms. All these factors contributed to a gradualist policy of support for the Republic, despite its precarious military situation and the impatience of most revolutionary socialists.

Why the Soviets reversed themselves and decided to actively intervene on the Spanish Republic's behalf is not clear. It is most likely that initial Soviet fears of the conflict in Spain widening to a European-scale war in which it would find itself fighting without allies were replaced by the realization that a fascist victory in Spain was also a serious threat to the security of the USSR. With Franco in control of Spain, France would be surrounded on three sides by fascist states and thus would have little value as a military ally for the Soviet Union. In the event of war, democratic France would have her hands full simply defending her frontiers against fascist attacks; no thought could be given to coming to the aid of her eastern allies—Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the Soviet Union. Further, a fascist victory in Spain might very well lead to a resurgence of fascism in France itself, and the memory of February 6, 1934 was still fresh at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil
War. A fascist government in France, from the Soviet perspective, could only too easily result in the formation of a hostile anti-Soviet coalition of the continental great powers. A more frightening scenario for Soviet defense planners is difficult to imagine. For this reason, inaction with regard to Spain probably came to be seen as risky policy for the Soviet Union to follow and a cautious plan of intervention to avert a Republican defeat may have been adopted.

In any event, Soviet aid to the Loyalists can be said to have begun with the mid-August decision to send a limited number of Soviet advisors to help organize the largely volunteer and undisciplined Republican militias. Although these advisors did not reach Spain until the last days of August when newly appointed Soviet Ambassador to Madrid Marcel Rosenberg assumed his post, Soviet Naval Commander N.G. Kuznetsov was called away from his Black Sea cruiser already on August 19, after having been designated Naval Attache to Spain. The Soviets at first seem to have had limited authority within the Republican military. Nevertheless, they took an active part in the Loyalist defense.

W.G. Krivitsky provides the details of the next phase of Soviet support. On August 30, 1936, as head of the NKVD in Western Europe, he received instructions to purchase and transport war materials to Spain. This date is important because it is only one day after the Soviet decree forbidding the export of arms to Spain as required by the non-intervention agreement. This is strong evidence that the Soviets from the very signing of the non-intervention accord had little faith that its terms would be enforced, either for Germany and Italy, or for itself.
Krivitsky was instructed not to implicate the USSR in any of the arms transfers. Fictional import/export firms were to be created and set up all over Europe to handle weapons purchases from private sources as could be arranged. Eventually arms were acquired in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Holland, France, and even Germany, but the shipments did not reach Spain until the middle of October.12

In the meantime political changes in Spain were facilitating closer cooperation between Moscow and Madrid. On September 4 the liberal Republican government of Jose Giral fell, a victim of Loyalist military defeats and its inability to win international aid for the Republic. Giral's successor as Premier was Francisco Largo Caballero, a left-wing socialist who insisted upon the participation of the communist party in his government. The Spanish communists balked at the offer, not wishing to be compromised by association with a non-communist party. But instructions were received from Moscow to accept Caballero's offer and two communists assumed posts in the new Spanish cabinet. This was the first instance of communist participation in a Western government and it opened the way to greater Russian influence in Republican affairs.13

A dramatic change in Moscow's public stance toward Spain occurred a week later. For the first time since early August another public fund drive was organized in the Soviet Union to aid the Spanish Republic. On September 12, a page-one Pravda article bore the headline "We Will Help the Children and Mothers of the Spanish Workers". Citing the need of the Spanish workers for help in their struggle against black fascism, female workers of a Soviet factory were reported to donate fifty rubles for the purchase of foodstuffs to be sent to Republican Spain for the women and children of the workers there.14 In the next few days reports of further
donations appeared and the aid collection became a national effort, as well as a dominant news event.

The cautious nature of this open declaration of support for the Spanish Republic is self evident. By stressing the fact that Soviet aid was being organized by Soviet women to buy food for Spanish women and children, one might almost forget that a war was in fact being waged in Spain. Here Stalin was clearly trying to reconcile the divergent Soviet policy interests: on the one hand, the Soviet Union wanted to blunt criticisms from the Left that it was not coming to the aid of the Republic. But at the same time, the Soviets were careful not to be seen as violating non-intervention. In this fashion France and Great Britain would not be offended and fuel would not be added to the fire of German propaganda regarding alleged Soviet military aid to Spain. In this regard it is interesting to note that French policy and non-intervention in general were not directly criticized or even mentioned in the opening weeks of the aid campaign.

It is tempting to see a connection between anti-Soviet German actions and the resumption of open Soviet aid to Spain. The same day that Pravda inaugurated the fund drive, Hitler gave perhaps his most vehement verbal attack on Bolshevism at the Nazi Party Congress at Nuremberg. Hitler went so far as to imply that one day Germany would control all of the Ukraine and conquer all of the Soviet Union as far as the Urals.15 Though these ideas were plainly stated in Hitler's blueprint for Nazism, Mein Kampf, the explicit public reiteration of them at Nuremberg was sensational. One might expect that Stalin's hopes for a rapprochement with Germany were temporarily dimmed by this event and thus
he would have been less worried about offending Germany by actively supporting Spain.

But the connection between the two events evaporates when one realizes that Hitler spoke hours after the Soviet aid campaign was first announced in the Soviet press. Further, the Soviets through trade envoy David Kandelaki pressed the Nazis for a continuation of the stalled German-Russian economic negotiations only days after the Nuremberg diatribe. Moreover, German Ambassador Count Werner Friedrich von der Schulenburg, returning to Moscow in mid-October, expected a frosty reception in response to Hitler's speech but found to his surprise that he was "most amiably received everywhere." In fact, he noted, "... wherever I have come into contact with Soviet authorities they have behaved as though nothing whatever had happened and have been almost more amiable than usual." Clearly the Soviets had not given up, even temporarily, their efforts to come to terms with the Germans.

Domestically the renewed fund drive can be seen as positive evidence of Stalin's consolidation of power in the wake of the Zinoviev-Kamenev show trial. The September aid campaign, as represented in the press, was much more in accordance with Stalin's general line than the pre-trial August campaign. Noticeably absent in all the press slogans connected with the Soviet women's aid collection were revolutionary overtones. In sharp departure from the August newspaper accounts, individual worker's statements carefully avoided revolutionary rhetoric and dwelt instead on a popular Stalinist theme of the time— that life had become "more joyous". Workers' 'spontaneous' remarks were expressed in characteristically wooden phrases, a clear reflection of the official
Stalinist ideology. For example, a female worker at a fund rally was quoted as follows:

When we were going hungry in the years of the civil war, the workers of various countries helped us then. Now, when life for us is blossoming and we live happily and joyously, it is our turn to help the heroic women of Spain and their children, to help in the struggle against fascism for the people's freedom and happiness.\textsuperscript{18}

The September campaign differed from the August effort also in that the money collected was not simply handed over to the Republican government, but was used to purchase food and clothing, which was then shipped from the Soviet Union to Spain. The first Soviet transport, the Neva, was dispatched September 18 with a consignment of butter, sugar, canned goods and margarine.\textsuperscript{19} Apparently it carried additional cargo as well—the first direct Soviet military aid. The Neva arrived at Alicante on September 25, where a harbor official informed a German agent that the transport was unloaded at night with the harbor closed off. Reportedly material for uniforms was included in the ship's hold along with "1360 crates (approximately 125 centimeters long) labeled 'stockfish' in Spanish and containing rifles, and over 4000 crates marked 'pressed meats' in German and containing ammunition."\textsuperscript{20}

Further confirmation that Soviet war materials arrived in Spain before October 1936 comes from Turkish records. Having regained sovereignty over the Straits (the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles) at the conference at Montreaux in July, the Turks apparently were able to inspect passing Soviet transports. The Turkish records for September indicate three Soviet transports sailed the Straits—this number corresponds precisely with the officially dispatched Soviet transports carrying humanitarian aid to Spain in late September: the Neva, the
Kuban, and the Volga. According to these records, the three ships between them carried 500 tons of "war materials" and 1000 unspecified units of ammunition.

In October, Soviet military aid shipments increased dramatically and by the end of the month, airplanes, tanks, trucks, and artillery pieces had been delivered to the Republic. Undoubtedly the timely arrival of these weapons helped prevent the fascist takeover of Madrid, which was besieged throughout the autumn of 1936. But because of their high visibility, Russian tanks and airplanes were clearly recognized as Soviet made, both by the Republicans and the Nationalists. As a result, Soviet intervention became common knowledge. Even the unloading of tanks from Soviet transports could not be concealed from the public or fascist agents. Because of the publicity which accompanied the arrival of Soviet airplanes and tanks in Spain, it has often been wrongly assumed, even in the historical literature, that Soviet military aid did not begin until October 1936, with some even claiming that the aid did not arrive until the middle or the end of the month. This idea has been buttressed by the diplomatic maneuvers of the Soviet Union that same month, for it was only in October that the Soviets first publicly implied that they might begin arms shipments to Spain.

The late September arrival of Soviet arms in Spain, however, is consistent with the careful nature of Soviet policy. With hindsight it is apparent that the renewed humanitarian aid campaign in mid-September was little more than a cover for the covert arms shipments. Since Stalin knew that Soviet transports could not pass undetected to Spain, especially in light of their necessary passage through the Turkish Straits, the food shipments gave the Soviet Union an unimpeachable
rationale for their sudden appearance at Constantinople and in the Mediterranean, where they would be vulnerable to attack by the Italian navy. It must be remembered that the Soviets in 1936 still had no military presence in the Mediterranean. The initial shipments of rifles and ammunition concealed on food transports probably served as a 'testing of the waters' for the entire arms shipment program. When it became clear that the Soviet transports would not be challenged by the Italian fleet, Stalin may have been emboldened to send even more effective (and less concealable) aid, in the form of airplanes, tanks and other major military items. But the key point is that the Soviets moved slowly and with caution. The airplanes which were flying over Madrid by the beginning of November were the result of a carefully planned incremental escalation of Soviet aid which spanned a period of more than two months.

The exact timing, though, of the decision to send direct Soviet military assistance to Spain is not known. If indeed the September humanitarian aid campaign was designed primarily as a cover operation for Soviet arms shipments, then the decision to intervene logically would have preceded September 12, the date the Soviet press first reported the female factory workers' fund drive. But direct intervention may even have been approved as early as the end of August, at the same time Krivitsky in Western Europe was ordered to begin planning indirect arms shipments to Spain. Since Stalin left Moscow in late August for a month-long vacation on the Black Sea coast, this hypothesis seems most plausible. It is unlikely that decision of such importance would have been made in Stalin's absence. In either case, it appears that the Soviet decision to intervene was made even before the first meeting of the NIC subcommittee on September 14, and this calls into serious doubt...
the Soviet contention that the USSR signed the non-intervention agreement in good faith, only to be disillusioned by later events. Apparently from the very beginning, the Soviets had little faith in the NIC as a means to achieve collective security.

Diplomatically the Soviets maintained their critical posture in the Non-Intervention Committee throughout September and October, only to be met with hostility and indifference by the other delegates. But the first direct appeal by the Soviet Union since the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War for the implementation of collective security did not come until September 28. At the League of Nations assembly Foreign Commissar Litvinov unequivocally condemned the League for its inaction in the past year, citing its ineffective response to the Abyssinian question and the continual delaying of finding solutions to the Rhineland and Danzig questions. In the face of "dangerously aggressive" countries, Litvinov accused some governments of seeking to avoid war by a policy of neutrality (an allusion to Great Britain), and he noted that others claimed devotion to collective security but did nothing but exhort the aggressive nations to change their policies, instead of taking real collective action and using effective force (an allusion to France and the non-intervention agreement).24

But Litvinov did not openly link the Spanish question with the policy of collective security, nor did he suggest a new course of action be pursued by the League with regard to Spain. This is all the more noteworthy because the Spanish delegate called for an end to the international arms embargo. Instead of supporting the Republic on this issue, Litvinov took the middle ground and dissociated the Soviet Union from the non-intervention agreement, without calling for its termination:
The Soviet Government associated itself with the declaration on non-intervention in Spanish affairs only because a friendly country feared than an international conflict might otherwise ensue. It did so in spite of its opinion that the principle of neutrality does not apply in a case where mutineers are fighting against the lawful government and (which) contradicts the principle of international law, in which view it fully agrees with the statement made to us by the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs. It understands that the unjust decision referred to was thrust upon it by those countries which, though they consider themselves the mainstay of order, have created a new situation, fraught with incalculable consequences, as a result of which it is permitted openly to assist mutineers against their lawful Government.25

From such a statement it is clear that the Soviet Union was more interested in absolving itself of any of the blame for the failed non-intervention policy than calling for any specific measures to replace it.

If indeed the Soviets were dissatisfied with the non-intervention scheme, how can their ambivalent position at Geneva be accounted for? The explanation, once again, is to be found in Stalin's fear of diplomatic isolation. With the Locarno negotiations still in progress, Stalin could not be confident that a rapprochement between Britain and France on the one hand and Germany and Italy on the other was not a real possibility. British and French refusal to provide the USSR information on the Locarno discussions probably only served to increase Soviet anxieties.26 Under these circumstances Stalin would not risk driving a wedge between the Soviet Union and both France and Britain with an open attack on non-intervention before the League.

Nevertheless a dramatic change of Soviet policy, in rhetoric if not in practice, took place shortly after the League Assembly was convened. On October 7 the Soviet delegate to the NIC, Kagan, made a startling
announcement. In view of the Committee’s ineffectiveness in the face of repeated violations to the arms embargo, Kagan announced, "the Soviet Government is compelled to state that unless violations of the non-intervention agreement are immediately discontinued, it will consider itself free of the obligations arising from that agreement."27 And on the twenty-third of the same month, after no further action had been taken by the NIC, the Soviet delegate, now Ivan Maisky, declared the agreement to ban arms to Spain to be "an empty, torn scrap of paper", and stated his government’s willingness to restore to the Republic of Spain its right to purchase arms.28 Maisky concluded by noting that "in accordance with its statement on October 7 it (the USSR) cannot consider itself bound by the agreement for non-intervention to any greater extent than any of the other participants of the agreement."29 From this ambiguous phrasing it was not clear whether or not the Soviets actually planned to sell arms to Spain. When asked to elaborate, Maisky refused, by his own account, to avoid being caught "in some incautious words", which might have led "fascist and even many 'democratic' newspapers... into some kind of furious cannibalistic dance!"30 Clearly the Soviets were sensitive to the reaction of both Germany and the French and the British to their demarche.

Some have suggested that the Soviet NIC move was prompted in part by a desire to pressure France and Great Britain to abandon their policy of neutrality toward Spain. In this sense, the Soviet demarche is represented as a further attempt by the Soviet Union to achieve collective security by persuading the French to sell arms to the Republic. But given French and British indifference to fascist
violations of non-intervention in the first six weeks of the NIC's existence, it is hardly likely that the Soviets thought either power would reverse its policy. The notion that Soviet actions were linked to the policy of collective security is discredited further by evidence that the October 7 initiative apparently had been planned without Litvinov's knowledge.31 Moreover, rumors surfaced at this time that Litvinov himself was in disfavor for overestimating the possibility of a Soviet rapprochement with England and France, and because the Soviet Union found itself more isolated two years after the adoption of Litvinov's European policies. Talk of replacing Litvinov with a "less Europeanized" diplomat was reported.32

But even if the Soviet Union sensed that the French and British governments would not willingly change their Spanish policies, it is nevertheless possible that the Soviets hoped their NIC actions would find support among political groups within the two Western nations and that these groups would pressure their governments for a change of policy. Maisky emphasizes in his memoirs how much support the October 7 Soviet NIC declaration found at the British Labor Party Conference then being held in Edinburgh.33 But the situation was completely different in France where the French Communist Party (PCF), which was known for its subservience to Moscow, was careful in October to support the Blum coalition government and its policies because it feared a cabinet fall would bring in a more conservative government. A new cabinet would almost certainly be dominated by the anti-communist Radical Party, which was staunchly neutralist with regard to Spain. The labor strikes that the PCF had organized throughout September, in part to protest French
non-intervention, were replaced in October by a conciliatory policy toward the Blum government. Given these circumstances, it is difficult to interpret the Soviet NIC demarches as designed to put political pressure on Britain and France to change their policy of neutrality toward Spain.

The most plausible explanation for the Soviet volte face in the NIC during October derives not so much from diplomatic strategems as practical concerns. Once the Soviet arms were shipped to Spain it became only a question of time before the covert operation became public knowledge. Airplanes and tanks were especially difficult to conceal in transit. Therefore it was to the advantage of the Soviet Union to take the moral high ground and justify in legal terms its soon-to-be-revealed violation of the non-intervention agreement. Such an action would serve to mitigate the effects of the diplomatic protests which could be expected in the NIC when Soviet arms deliveries to Spain became known. Interestingly, though, at the same time the Soviet Union moved to justify its right, in principle, to send arms to Spain, it continued officially to deny making any such shipments. In this fashion Soviet policy once again took the middle ground between supporting 'revolution' and maintaining correct diplomatic relations with the Western democracies.

In fact, rather than attempt to change French policy toward Spain, the Soviet Union in October probably was more concerned with seeing to it that relations with France did not deteriorate further. French-Soviet relations, despite the formal alliance, were noticeably cool throughout 1936 and grew worse as fall approached. The French, apparently, were most upset by the August and September anti-government activities of the
PCF. Aware of the close connection between the Comintern and the PCF, French government officials were bitter over what they saw as Soviet interference in France's internal affairs. When French Premier Blum met with German Minister-Reichspräsident Hjalmar Schacht, rumors of a French-German rapprochement were heard. The strongly anti-Bolshevik British Ambassador to Berlin perhaps over-confidently reported that Schacht was told by Blum that he wished to dissociate himself from the PCF and that he was prepared to abandon the Franco-Soviet Pact if an agreement between France and Germany could be reached.35

In this context, the sharp reaction of the French to the Soviet NIC demarches of October 7 and 23 is less surprising. In Paris the Soviet Chargé d'Affaires was officially told that the recent Soviet actions represented the first instance of a "serious divergence" between French and Russian policy since the signing of the mutual assistance pact, and that the French Government believed the present policy of the USSR would lead to war.36 After being assured that France would not under any circumstances abandon neutrality for a policy of intervention in Spain, the Soviet Chargé was asked to relay a warning to his government: this disagreement on a major issue of policy might well affect the whole future of relations between France and Russia and of the working of the Franco-Soviet Pact.37 Here, then, unlike the previous August when the Soviets first agreed in principle to the policy of non-intervention, was a clear case of French pressure on the USSR. Since August, relations between Britain and France had become cordial and close, and the French no doubt were confident enough by the end of October to threaten the Soviet Union with abrogation of the Franco-Soviet Pact.
Though it continued to supply the Republic with arms, the Soviet Union did not abandon the Non-Intervention Committee and it moderated its position somewhat. Never again did the Soviet delegate threaten to quit the NIC; instead a policy of conciliation and even cooperation with Britain and France over the arms embargo was followed. The lukewarm support that the Soviet Union gave the Republic of Spain at the September League of Nations Assembly soon disappeared. In December Soviet Foreign Commissar Litvinov informed the British Ambassador to Moscow that he had "urgently discouraged" the Spanish Government from requesting a League Council meeting to discuss the Spanish question. Litvinov claimed that no good could come of such a meeting and he feared the League would simply suffer another discredit to the advantage of Italy and Germany. Litvinov even added that he wished the British Government also would have "strongly deprecated" the Republic of Spain's attempt to get a hearing in the League. Though the Soviet Union continued to support the Republic in the NIC, and Russian arms shipments were not interrupted, the belated and cautious attempts to link the policy of collective security with the events in Spain were discontinued.
Chapter 3 Notes
Toward Intervention: Step by Step

1I.M. Maiskii, Vospominaniia sovetskogo posla 2 vols. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo nauka, 1964) 1:293.

2Cattell, Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War, p. 21.

3Sotsialisticheskii vestnik, August 30, 1936, p. 3.

4Kulleten oppositsii, October 1936, p. 49.

5Tbid., p. 52.

6In an effort to improve French-Soviet relations, French Ambassador to Moscow Robert Coulondre initiated private talks with the Soviet leadership in October 1936. Coulondre was not pro-Soviet, but saw the Franco-Soviet Pact as vital to French defense. He warned the Soviets that unless Comintern meddling in French domestic affairs stopped soon, the pact would be effectively dissolved due to anti-Soviet French public opinion. Through a GPU intermediary, Coulondre suggested to Stalin that friendly relations with France could be restored by an act of good faith on the part of the Soviet Union: the Comintern could be disbanded, or its headquarters, at least, transferred out of Russia. Stalin declined this offer, candidly admitting that the Comintern was too important to the defense of the USSR to let control of it slip from his hands, especially in light of the German threat. Stalin informed Coulondre that all he wanted of France was for it to be "strong and resolute in the face of Germany." Franklin L. Ford and Carl E. Schorske, "The Voice in the Wilderness: Robert Coulondre," in The Diplomats, eds. Gordan A. Craig and Felix Gilbert (New York: Atheneum, 1968), pp. 557-559.

7February 6, 1934 was the day of violent riots in Paris that many, especially the Left, interpreted as a direct attack on the Republic by the Right; some even saw in the rioting a failed fascist coup attempt.

8N.G. Kuznetsov, Na dalekom meridiane (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo nauka, 1971), p. 11.

9For example, Kuznetsov was with the Republican fleet as it imprudently sailed to the North of Spain, allowing the Nationalist navy to win control of the Strait of Gibraltar in the Battle of Cape Spartel. Kuznetsov claims that he had no influence of the decision to sail north and went along despite his forebodings about the plan.

10W.G. Krivitsky, I Was Stalin's Agent, p. 100.

11Krivitsky is a controversial source. Although many accept him as, on the whole, reliable, others dismiss him out of hand. The rationale
for my citing him is as follows: I place little credence in his speculations about Stalin's ultimate motives in Spain since he is unlikely to have had first-hand knowledge of these. But as regards those events in which he was a direct participant. I assume he is trustworthy. This includes, naturally, his receipt of instructions from Moscow to organize the Spanish arms purchases.

12Krivitsky, pp. 104-105.
13Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, p. 269.
14Pravda, September 12, 1936, p. 1.
17Ibid., p. 1066, dated October 12, 1936.
18Pravda, September 13, 1936, p. 2.
22Ibid.
23Maxim Litvinov, Against Aggression, p. 46.
24Ibid., p. 47.
25Ibid., p. 56.
26See for example DBFP 2d ser., vol. 17, no. 259, p. 354, dated October 2, 1936.
27Jane Degas, ed., Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy, 3:212.
28Ibid., p. 213.
29Ibid.
30Maiskii, Vospomsnanii, p. 314.
31DBFP 2d ser, vol. 17, no. 281, p. 398. Litvinov's apparent non-involvement in the initiative is significant because he was generally considered the architect and principal spokesman for the collective security policy. (Through Blum, Eden notes that Litvinov at Geneva claimed the October 7 announcement had taken place without his knowledge.)
32Sotsialisticheskii vestnik, October 28, 1936, p. 16. The source is not identified. This information appears in the "From Russia" column.

33Maiskii, Vospominanii, pp. 315-316.


37Ibid., p. 476.

38DBFP 2d ser., vol. 17, no. 424, p. 610.

39Ibid.
CONCLUSION

In a real sense, the Spanish Civil War, following the Ethiopian and Rhineland crises, represents the first failure of the Soviet Union to attempt to implement collective security measures as a response to fascist aggression. By not developing a Spanish policy in the first weeks of the rebellion, the Soviet Union became a victim of its own inaction, and reluctantly joined the unworkable non-intervention agreement only because all alternatives seemed even less desirable. By not acting early, the Soviet Union contributed to the absence of a unified and effective response to a clear fascist threat with international implications. But once the Soviets realized inaction could be as dangerous for them as an active policy, they began to plan a careful and limited intervention. To accompany this policy, the Soviet Union made indirect appeals for collective security, but to no avail—the position of the French and the British was rigidly set. Soviet appeals for collective action were met with indifference, if not hostility, and the Soviets were forced to relent. The time for action had passed. By not reacting immediately to the Spanish mutiny, the Soviets lost all influence over the shaping of the international response to the Civil War. In this sense, Soviet diplomatic initiatives taken two to three months later were merely theatrical maneuvers, wholly lacking in effectiveness.

How can the Soviet failure to implement collective security measures in the first days of the Spanish conflict be explained, especially given the immediate and forceful responses of the USSR to earlier crises? The
answer probably lies in the fact that in the case of Spain, for the first time, Soviet appeals for collective security entailed very real risks for the USSR. Unlike the Ethiopian or Rhineland affairs, in the case of Spain, the Soviet Union could logically be expected to take forceful measures on its own in the event of British and French refusal to cooperate in collective security measures. For the first time mere rhetoric would not suffice to demonstrate the Soviet Union's commitment to fight fascism. In the case of Spain the Soviet Union was morally bound by its support for the Popular Front strategy to come to the aid of the Spanish Republic—whether or not Britain and France also acted. Faced for the first time with the real prospect of being expected to back up their strong words with action, Soviet leaders balked, refusing to make any appeals for collective security. In this fashion, the lack of sincerity on the part of the Soviet Union for the policy of collective security was clearly exposed.

But the Soviet Union should not be too harshly judged for its refusal to accept the risks involved in an aggressive pursuit of collective security at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. The USSR was certainly not alone in its fear to take unilateral action against militant fascism in the years before the Second World War. In the final analysis, the Soviet Union, like France or Great Britain, based its foreign policy on national interests, not ideology. The security of the Soviet Union clearly took priority over the crusade against fascism.

Perhaps this study is most useful for illustrating that the failure of collective security was due less to the shortcomings of individual nations, than to an inherent flaw in the strategy itself. Despite its rational formulation and practical benefits, the doctrine of collective
security is heavily steeped in idealism, for it often requires that nations risk war to protect distant states under attack. In other words, nations are expected to actively intervene against aggressors, often a very dangerous undertaking, even when their own immediate security is not threatened. Of course, in the long run, the policy is justifiable. But more often than not, nations ignore long range considerations when reacting to momentary crises. In the heat of the moment, the logic of collective security is ignored. And it is this tendency, very much in evidence in the Soviet Union's initial reaction to the Spanish crisis, which fatally flawed the collective security strategy.
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Soviet policy towards Spain in the first three months of the Spanish Civil War is described. External and domestic factors influencing Soviet policy are identified and scrutinized. Special emphasis is given to the fact that the Soviet Union had no stated policy toward Spain in the first weeks of the Civil War and this seems to contradict the Soviet policy of pursuing collective security and supporting Popular Front governments.