

Candidate 1 evidence

Advanced Higher History Dissertation
Topic: 10 -Spanish Civil War 1936-1939

Was the weakness of the Republicans the main reason that
the Nationalists were able to turn a failed coup into a
successful war?

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Balance of armed forces

The prolonged fighting that meant a failed coup developed into a Civil War could potentially be attributed to a balance of armed forces. Neither the Republicans nor the Nationalists were able to deal a fatal blow to the opposition, as their fighting forces were generally balanced, especially after intervention from the international countries. From the outset of the coup the Republican government had access to weaponry, whilst it was less available to the Nationalists in the beginning. Foss and Gerahty comment 'It was arms in which the Government had the advantage.'¹⁵ The international intervention had great influence over both sides and their successes and failures, without it both the Nationalists and the Republicans would have suffered from poor equipment. Salvado highlights the urgency with which leaders searched for international aid 'as both sides lacked significant modern weaponry and any important armament industry, they rapidly looked abroad for diplomatic and military support.'¹⁶ International support was especially necessary for the Nationalists. Their strongest troops were in the form of the Army of Africa, however, they were initially stuck in Morocco with no way of getting into mainland Spain. They were reliant on Hitler sending transport planes, hence the urgency for international aid.

Despite the coup being led by Army officers and generals, many officers, soldiers and sailors remained loyal to the republic. In turn, this allowed for a more balanced fight. In towns that armed forces members remained loyal to the Republic, neither side was able to easily defeat the other, prolonging the fighting time and allowing a failed coup to be extended to a civil war. The Nationalist leaders failed to foresee the extent that incomplete forces support could set them back in their coup. Forrest comments that an 'unforeseen combination of internal and external setbacks robbed the military insurgents of outright victory against the Republic.'¹⁷ Stanley Payne agrees that the balance of arms was costly to the Nationalists, 'The only chance of victory lay with the elite troops, under Franco in Morocco, but they were bottled up by the Republican navy.'¹⁸

¹⁵ W. Foss and C. Gerahty, *op.cit.* (1938) p.275.

¹⁶ F.J.R. Salvado, *op.cit.* (2005) p.61.

¹⁷ A. Forrest, "The Spanish Civil War" (2000) p.56.

¹⁸ S.G. Payne, "The Spanish Civil War" (2012) p.81.

The Guardia Civil were present in most towns, and in most cases the side they supported in fighting won in that location. However, this was commonly a result because the Guardia Civil would wait in order to see which side would be successful in an area before they gave them their backing. Beevor recognises 'Like the general population, they were often unsure in their own minds, and only the most dedicated would fight when the battle was obviously lost from the beginning. They often hung back to see which way things were going before committing themselves.'¹⁹

A clear balance of arms between the two opposing sides enabled fighting to be prolonged; the Civil War could develop as neither could deal a fatal blow. Actions of the Nationalists and responses from the Republicans had the potential to strengthen or weaken them. Solely, this didn't necessarily develop the Civil War. Some historians have suggested that if Prime Minister Casares Quiroga was better prepared there would have been a shorter fighting period. Brennan observes 'he never seems to have foreseen the possibility of an invasion by the Foreign Legion and the Moorish troops. Had he done so, the key points of Seville and Cadiz could have been secured.'²⁰, thus indicating a prolonged war could have been avoided, had the government reacted and closed the ports. Following this argument a balance of arms can be seen as a prolonging factor after the war had began, as opposed to a contributing factor of its development from a failed coup; the balance of arms would've become unbalanced had each side been refused external aid.

¹⁹ A. Beevor, *op.cit.* (2006) p.65.

²⁰ G. Brennan, "The Spanish Labyrinth" (1974) p.56.