

GENERAL FRANCO AS MILITARY LEADER

By Paul Preston

READ 22 JANUARY 1993 AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WALES COLLEGE OF CARDIFF

BOTH during his lifetime, and after his death, General Franco was reviled by his enemies on the left and subjected to the most absurd adulation by his admirers on the right. As the victor in a bloody civil war which inflamed passions throughout the world, that is hardly surprising. Leaving aside his personal political success in remaining in power for nearly four decades, his victory in the Spanish Civil War was his greatest and most glorious achievement, something reflected in the judgements of detractors and hagiographers alike. For the left, Franco the general was a slow-witted mediocrity whose battlefield triumphs were owed entirely to the unstinting military assistance of Hitler and Mussolini. For the right, Franco the general was the twentieth-century incarnation of Alexander the Great, of Napoleon and of the great warrior hero of Spanish legend, El Cid.

Beyond the propagandistic excesses of the Caudillo's wilder sycophants, however, what is altogether more remarkable is that both his wartime allies and the most sober judges from his own side have concurred in a generally critical view of his prowess as a military leader. The views of both Führer and Duce, for instance, could barely have been more hostile. Hitler commented at a dinner in 1942, 'Franco and company can consider themselves very lucky to have received the help of Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany in their first civil war ... The intervention of the German General von Richthofen and the bombs his squadrons rained from the heavens decided the issue'.¹ During the Civil War, Hitler's first diplomatic envoy General Wilhelm Faupel was frequently scathing in his dispatches about the painful slowness of Franco's military leadership.² The Italians were equally critical. In December 1937, outraged at Franco's apparent inability to press home the advantage of his superior forces, the Italian Foreign Minister Count Ciano wrote in his diary 'Franco has no idea of synthesis in war'.³ During the battle of the Ebro in 1938, the Duce himself protested about Franco's 'flabby conduct of the war', telling Ciano, 'Put on record in your diary that today, 29 August, I prophesy

¹ [Adolf Hitler], *Hitler's Table Talk 1941-1944* (1953), 569.

² See, for instance, *Documents on German Foreign Policy* Series D, III (1951), 408-10.

³ Galeazzo Ciano, *Ciano's Diary 1937-1938* (1952), 46.

the defeat of Franco. Either the man doesn't know how to make war or he doesn't want to. The reds are fighters, Franco is not.⁴

The views of Franco's German and Italian allies might be dismissed as ill-founded on the grounds of distance and lack of familiarity with Spanish conditions. However, equally negative, albeit more cautiously expressed, criticisms came from within the Generalísimo's own military establishment. Two such assessments of Franco as strategist emanated from the heart of the Nationalist high command—General Alfredo Kindelán Duany, the Chief of Franco's Air Force, and Colonel (later General) Jorge Vigón Suerodiaz, Chief of Staff first to the Army of the North and then to Franco himself. During the early stages of the war, Vigón wrote several letters to Kindelán, urging him to use his influence with the Generalísimo to bring about a change of strategy and an acceleration of operations. Kindelán wrote memoirs in the immediate aftermath of the war in which he revealed his own and Vigón's reservations about Franco's overall conduct of the war. Permission for their publication was withheld until 1945 and even then the criticisms of Franco as a strategist were cut from the text and not restored until the second edition which was published seven years after the Caudillo's death.

In relation, for example, to Franco's failure to seize the opportunity opened up by the fall of Bilbao in July 1937 for a rapid sweep through the north, Kindelán wrote: 'the enemy was defeated but was not pursued; the success was not exploited, the withdrawal was not turned into a disaster. *This was due to the fact that while the tactical conception of the operation was masterly, as was its execution, the strategic conception on the other hand was much more modest.*' The italicised passage was suppressed along with many others.⁵ In his own diaries, not published until 1970, it is possible to discern Vigón's frustration with those of Franco's military decisions which delayed major advances.⁶ Subsequently, the Francoist army's most distinguished official historians have also been discreetly critical of their Commander-in-Chief.⁷

What all these criticisms, whether German, Italian or Spanish, have in common is the belief that Franco could have speeded up the progress

⁴ Ciano, *Diary 37–38*, 148.

⁵ Compare Alfredo Kindelán, *Mis cuadernos de guerra 1936–1939* (Madrid, n.d. [1945], 86 and *Mis cuadernos de guerra 1936–1939* 2ª edición (Barcelona, 1982), 9, 127. All subsequent references are to the 2nd edition.

⁶ Jorge Vigón Suerodiaz, *Cuadernos de guerra y notas de paz* (Oviedo, 1970), 149–50, 212.

⁷ It is remarkable, for instance, that Franco is a shadowy figure in the seventeen-volume set of *Monografías de la guerra de España* produced by the Spanish Army's Servicio Histórico Militar under the direction of Colonel José Manuel Martínez Bande, (Madrid, 1968–1985). See also the critical comments on Franco's generalship to be found throughout Generals Ramón & Jesús Salas Larrazábal, *Historia general de la guerra de España* (Madrid, 1987).

of his war effort at several crucial moments. The basis of this view was Franco's dilatory decision-making style in general and his readiness, at Brunete and Teruel in 1937 and at the Ebro in 1938, to divert large numbers of troops to the strategically meaningless and usually costly task of recovering territory captured by the Republic in diversionary attacks. The Generalísimo's apparent propensity to lose sight of major strategic goals on these occasions, together with his readiness to ignore several opportunities to conquer a poorly defended Catalonia, has led to the conclusion that he was lacking in vision. Certainly, it cannot be denied that, as his one-time superior officer, General José Sanjurjo, commented in 1931 'he is no Napoleon'.⁸ It is probably an understatement to suggest, with Hitler and Mussolini, with Kindelán and Vigón, that he was deficient as a military strategist. However, it is the contention of this paper that to judge Franco in terms of his capacity to elaborate elegant and incisive strategy is to miss the point. He won the Spanish Civil War in the way in which he wanted to win it and in the time within which he wanted to win it. Most importantly of all, he derived from his victory that which he most wanted, the political power to remake Spain in his own image, unimpeded either by enemies on the left or rivals on the right.

In both form and content, Franco's strategy pursued a long-term political agenda rather than immediate battlefield objectives. That this should have been the case derives in part from a personality in which instinctive caution coexisted with almost unlimited ambition. Even more crucial was his military education and training between 1907 and 1910 at the antiquated Infantry Academy in Toledo and his formative experiences in Spain's savage colonial wars in Morocco. In one important respect, his personal experiences and the ethos of the Toledo Academy were to come together and determine the central plank of Franco's military style during the Spanish Civil War. Deeply traumatised as a child by the infidelities of his pleasure-loving and free-thinking father, he identified with his pious and conservative mother. Throughout his life, he would reject all those things which he associated with his father, from sexual dalliance and alcoholic drink to the ideas of the left. His childhood coincided with the lowest ebb of Spain's political fortunes, and, over time, he came to associate his personal difficulties with those of his country. In 1898, Spain suffered humiliating defeat at the hands of the United States and lost the last remnants of her empire. When the fourteen-year-old Franco entered the military academy in 1907, he found an atmosphere of fetid hostility to liberal politicians who were held responsible for the imperial disaster of 1898. Throughout

⁸In a conversation with the Minister of War, Manuel Azaña, on 20 July 1931—Manuel Azaña, *Obras completas* 4 vols (Mexico D.F., 1966–1968), IV, 35.

his life, he would blame his nation's disasters on men who were uncannily like his father.⁹ During the Civil War, his objective was not speedy victory but the long-term eradication from Spain of such men and their influence.

The Infantry Academy taught Franco little by way of contemporary strategic thinking or of technological developments in warfare since the Franco-Prussian war. No lessons were drawn from the guerrilla struggle in Cuba. The emphasis was on rigid discipline, an idealised military history of Spain's past glories and a set of moral virtues of which unthinking bravery and unquestioning obedience were the highest. Spain's current international difficulties were blamed on the poisons of liberalism and leftism. By way of compensation for the battlefield failures of the military, great stress was placed on the army's position as moral and political guardian of the nation. It was axiomatic that the army had the right to rise up against any government which tolerated either social disorder or the activities of the regional autonomy movements which challenged national unity. Franco left the Academy with little applicable military science but thoroughly imbued with these assumptions.¹⁰

In practical terms, the formative experience for Franco the soldier was as a junior officer in Spain's Moroccan protectorate. Arriving in Morocco in 1912, he spent ten and a half of the next fourteen years there and learnt much about warfare against hostile civilians. As he told the journalist Manuel Aznar in 1938, 'My years in Africa live within me with indescribable force. There was born the possibility of rescuing a great Spain. There was founded the idea which today redeems us. Without Africa, I can scarcely explain myself to myself, nor can I explain myself properly to my comrades in arms.'¹¹ By dint of cold-blooded bravery and an assiduous attention to the detail of logistics and map-making, he began his meteoric rise through the ranks which would take him from Second Lieutenant in 1912 to Brigadier General a mere fourteen years later. A war concerned with the pacification of bitterly hostile warrior tribes could hardly have been more brutal. However, the savagery of the occupying forces reached new heights in August 1920 with the formation of the Spanish Foreign Legion or *Tercio de Extranjeros*, a mercenary force in which Franco would serve as second-in-command. As a matter of policy, the Legion would commit atrocities against the Moorish villages which they attacked.

⁹ On the relationship between Franco's personal life and his political ideas, see Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography* (1993), 3–9, 72.

¹⁰ On Franco's time at the Toledo Academy, see Preston, *Franco*, 8–13.

¹¹ 'Declaraciones de S.E. a Manuel Aznar', 31 December 1938, *Palabras del Caudillo 19 abril 1937—31 diciembre 1938* (Barcelona, 1939), 314.

The decapitation of prisoners and the exhibition of severed heads as trophies was common.¹² Franco encouraged the brutal violence of his men in the knowledge that their grim reputation was itself a useful weapon in terrorising the colonial population.

By the time that Franco returned to the Peninsula in 1926, he had fully developed two of the central features of his war effort during the three years of Civil War—an unflinching ruthlessness in the use of terror against civilian populations and an unwavering belief in the army's right to impose its political views. By 1936, he would also have acquired the conviction that he was the best person to define those views. His growing belief to his own patriotic mission was confirmed by his period from December 1927 to June 1931 as director of the Academia General Militar in Zaragoza. There, assisted by a staff chosen from among his *Africanista* comrades, he educated a generation of officers, who would fight by his side during the Civil War, in the brutal arrogance of the Foreign Legion and the idea of the army's right to determine the nation's political destinies.¹³

The coming of the democratic Second Republic in 1931 was something of a set-back for Franco. To his intense chagrin, the Zaragoza Academy was closed and he was left for eight months without a posting until, in February 1932, he was made military governor of La Coruña. Neither that posting, nor his promotion one year later to be military commander of the Balearic Islands, diminished his hostility to the democratic regime. His fortunes changed, however, with the coming to power of the increasingly conservative Radical Party backed by the votes of the Catholic authoritarian party, the Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas (CEDA). The Radical Minister of War, Diego Hidalgo, not only promoted him to Major General but also chose to use him as his unofficial personal adviser on military matters. In October 1934, convinced that fascism was about to be imposed in Spain, the workers of the northern mining districts of Asturias rose in protest at the entry of the CEDA into the government. Diego Hidalgo informally placed Franco in charge of the repression of the uprising. The declaration of martial law effectively transferred to the Ministry of War the responsibilities for law and order normally under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior. Diego Hidalgo's total reliance on Franco effectively gave him control of the functions of both

¹²José Martín Blázquez, *I Helped to Build an Army: Civil War Memoirs of a Spanish Staff Officer* (1939), 302; Herbert R. Southworth, *Antifalange: estudio crítico de < Falange en la guerra de España: la Unificación y Hedilla > de Maximiano García Venero* (Paris, 1967), xxxi–xxxii; Guillermo Cabanellas, *La guerra de los mil días*, 2 vols, (Buenos Aires, 1973), II, 792.

¹³On Franco's time at the Zaragoza Academy, see Carlos Blanco Escolá, *La Academia General Militar de Zaragoza (1928–1931)* (Barcelona, 1989) *passim*; Preston, *Franco*, 56–61.

Ministries, a control which he exercised with notable ruthlessness.¹⁴ It was an intoxicating and addictive taste of real politico-military power for Franco, confirmation of the central ideas on the role of the military in politics which he had absorbed as a cadet in the Toledo Academy. It was a profoundly formative experience, deepening his messianic conviction that he was born to rule and to command Spain's armed forces in the battle against the pernicious ideologies of liberalism and the left.

Despite such inflated views of his own importance, Franco was slow to commit himself to the military uprising plotted in the course of the spring and early summer of 1936. When he finally did so, a mere five days before the Civil War broke out, it was to take over the most efficacious units on the rebel side—the Spanish Moroccan Army. He found a depressing situation when he flew into Morocco from the Canary Islands where he had been military commander since March. The Moroccan Army was trapped on the wrong side of the Straits of Gibraltar, blockaded by the Spanish fleet whose crews had mutinied against their right-wing officers and declared for the Republic. In response to this daunting problem, Franco displayed what were probably his most valuable and inspirational qualities as a military leader—his glacial *sang froid* under pressure, his unshakeable resolve and his infectious optimism. In speeches, harangues and broadcasts, he repeated his catch-phrase 'blind faith in victory' and his mere presence with the rebels was a boost to their morale.¹⁵

Franco's optimism and his ruthless determination to win were reflected in an historic interview which he gave to the American reporter Jay Allen in Tetuán on 27 July. Asked how long the killing would continue now that the coup had failed, Franco replied 'there can be no compromise, no truce. I shall go on preparing my advance to Madrid. I shall advance. I shall take the capital. I shall save Spain from marxism at whatever cost . . . Shortly, very shortly, my troops will have pacified the country and all of this will soon seem like a nightmare.' When Allen responded 'that means that you will have to shoot half Spain?', a smiling Franco said 'I repeat, at whatever cost.'¹⁶

In the meanwhile, he had to resolve the problem of the Republican

¹⁴Diego Hidalgo Durán, *¿Por qué fui lanzado del Ministerio de la Guerra? Diez meses de actuación ministerial* (Madrid, 1934), 79–81; Manuel Ballbé, *Orden público y militarismo en la España constitucional (1812–1983)* (Madrid, 1983), 371–2; General López Ochoa, *Campaña militar de Asturias en octubre de 1934 (Narración táctico-episódica)* (Madrid, 1936), 11–12, 26–9; José María Gil Robles, *No fue posible la paz* (Barcelona, 1968), 140–1; César Jalón, *Memorias políticas: periodista. ministro. presidario*. (Madrid, 1973), 128–31; Juan-Simeón Vidarte, *El bienio negro y la insurrección de Asturias* (Barcelona, 1978), 358–9.

¹⁵Joaquín Arrarás, *Historia de la Cruzada española*, 8 vols, 36 tomos, (Madrid, 1939–43, III, 80–2; Francisco Franco Salgado-Araujo, *Mi vida junto a Franco* (Barcelona, 1977), 165; José Antonio Vaca de Osma, *Paisajes con Franco al fondo* (Barcelona, 1987), 35–6.

¹⁶*News Chronicle*, 29 July, 1 August 1936.

blockade. He examined both the then revolutionary idea of getting his army across the Straits by air and, despite advice to the contrary from his staff, the bold notion of a convoy to break through the blockade.¹⁷ He believed contemptuously that the Republican sailors, without trained officers to navigate, oversee the engine rooms or direct the guns, would present little danger. The crossing on 5 August was an audacious risk which consolidated his standing on the Nationalist side. In the meanwhile, the few aircraft at his disposal ceaselessly carried troops across the Straits. This was converted into a full-scale airlift when both Hitler and Mussolini separately decided to help the Spanish Nationalists. Their decisions to do so were ultimately determined by considerations of their own interests. However, that they should both decide to target their assistance on Franco was a reflection not only of his manifest efficacy but also of the force of conviction with which he persuaded the representatives of both Fascist Italy and the Nazi *Auslandorganization* that he was the rebel to back. His rivals, General Emilio Mola in the north and General Gonzalo Queipo de Llano in the south could not match Franco's ability to secure foreign backing.¹⁸

Once he had his troops in Southern Spain, Franco's first operations drew on his experiences in Africa. The terrain, the arid scrublands of Andalusia, and the fact that his opponents were poorly armed civilians, recalled the colonial wars. Franco had already demonstrated his readiness to use Moroccan mercenaries in mainland Spain in October 1934. From early August, his African columns set out from Seville, initially making rapid progress on the first step of a hard-fought journey to Madrid. With Franco's knowledge and permission, the Legion and the Moroccan mercenaries of the *Regulares Indigenas* (indigenous regulars) functioned with terrible efficacy during their advance. Franco conducted the early stages of his war effort against the Spanish left as if it were a colonial war against a racially contemptible enemy. The Moors and Legionaries spread terror wherever they went, looted the villages they captured, raped the women they found, killed their prisoners and sexually mutilated the corpses.¹⁹ The use of terror, both immediate and

¹⁷ Kindelán's son claimed that the ideas both for the airlift and for a blockade-breaking convoy emanated from his father, 'Prólogo', Kindelán, *Mis cuadernos*, 45.

¹⁸ On Franco's role in securing Italian and German aid, see Renzo de Felice, *Mussolini il duce: lo stato totalitario 1936-1940* (Turin, 1981), 363; John F. Coverdale, *Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War*, (Princeton, 1975), 69-74; Ismael Saz Campos, *Mussolini contra la II República: hostilidad, conspiraciones, intervención (1931-1936)* (Valencia, 1986), 181-5; Angel Viñas, *La Alemania nazi y el 18 de julio 2ª edición* (Madrid, 1977), 264-342.

¹⁹ *The Times*, 26 August 1926; John Whitaker, 'Prelude to World War: A Witness from Spain', *Foreign Affairs*, XXI, 1, October 1942, 105-6; Maria Rosa de Madariaga, 'Imagen del moro en la memoria colectiva del pueblo español y retorno del moro en la guerra civil de 1936', *Revista Internacional de Sociología* XLVI, 4, October-December 1988, 590-6; Mijail Koltsov, *Diario de la guerra de España* (Paris, 1963), 88-9.

as a long-term investment, was to be an essential part of Franco's repertoire both as a general and as a dictator. During, and long after the Civil War, those of his enemies not physically eliminated would be broken by terror and forced to seek survival in apathy.

Under the overall field command of Lieutenant-Colonel Juan Yagüe, Franco's columns advanced out of the province of Seville and into Extremadura. They took town after town, advancing 200 kilometres in a little over a week. The accumulated terror generated after each minor victory, together with the skill of the African Army in open scrub, explains why Franco's troops were initially so successful. The scratch Republican militia would fight desperately so long as they enjoyed the cover of buildings or trees. However, even the rumoured threat of being outflanked by the Moors would send them fleeing, abandoning their equipment as they ran. Franco planned his operations accordingly. Intimidation and the use of terror, euphemistically described as *castigo* (punishment), were specified in written orders.²⁰ The most extensive slaughter took place in the days following the capture of Badajoz on 14 August, when two thousand prisoners were massacred. Franco's decision to turn back to Badajoz, a sixty kilometre detour for his columns, was typical of his obsession with the annihilation of all opposition, irrespective of the time lost or casualties incurred. If his forces had pressed on to Madrid, the Badajoz garrison could not seriously have threatened them from the rear. The decision contributed to the delay which allowed the Republic to organise its defences.

Just three days earlier, on 11 August, Franco had written Mola a letter in which he revealed this obsession with the thorough purging of captured territory. It was a strategic vision which would not change substantially in the course of the war and one that was deeply imbued with an essentially 'colonial' mentality. He made it clear that, for him, the cumulative conquest of ground and the subsequent annihilation of all resistance in the 'occupied zones' meant more than rapid victory. Nonetheless, he agreed that the ultimate objective must be the capture of Madrid. Significantly, noting that the fortress of the Alcázar in Toledo was besieged by Republican militiamen, he commented that the advance of his troops on the capital would 'take the pressure off and relieve Toledo without diverting forces which might be needed'.²¹

After the capture of Badajoz, the African columns advanced rapidly up the roads to the north east in the direction of the capital. On 27 August, they reached the last town of importance on the way to Madrid,

²⁰José Manuel Martínez Bande, *La marcha sobre Madrid* (Madrid, 1968), 165–70.

²¹José Manuel Martínez Bande, 'Del alzamiento a la guerra civil verano de 1936: correspondencia Franco/Mola', *Historia y Vida*, XCIII, 1975, 22–3.

Talavera de la Reina, which fell one week later.²² Another savage and systematic massacre ensued. The main road to Madrid was now open and Franco took it. However, in the light of subsequent decisions to be discussed below, there is room for speculation that Franco was not especially interested in an early capture of Madrid. With resistance intensifying, his troops took more than fifteen days to reach the town of Maqueda, where the road divided to go either north-east to Madrid or south-east to Toledo.²³

Maqueda fell to Yagüe on 21 September and from that moment on, the nature of Franco's war altered dramatically. Earlier in the month, the Republic had reorganised its government under the leadership of the Socialist Francisco Largo Caballero. That move towards central authority increased a feeling among the Nationalist commanders that they too needed a unified command. Franco had long since expressed ambitions in that direction, telling the Germans in Morocco that he wanted to be seen 'not only as the saviour of Spain but also as the saviour of Europe from the spread of Communism'.²⁴ That was not something which could be achieved by means of a swift military victory over the Republic and a subsequent armistice. Franco's long-term political ambitions and immediate military decisions came together in a remarkable fashion in the immediate aftermath of Yagüe's capture of Maqueda. On the same day, at a meeting of the senior rebel generals held at an airfield near Salamanca, Franco was elected Generalísimo of the Nationalist forces by his comrades-in-arms. However, behind a near-unanimous vote and rhetoric of support, there was a discernible reluctance. Three days passed and nothing was done about publicising or implementing the decision to name Franco Generalísimo. Accordingly, Franco sought a way of clinching their support.

This took the form of the strategically bizarre decision to divert his troops away from Madrid towards Toledo. He thereby lost an unrepeatable opportunity to reach the capital while it was poorly defended and demoralised. Yagüe, Kindelán and Franco's Chief of Operations, Lieutenant-Colonel Antonio Barroso, all warned him that a diversion to relieve the Alcázar would cost him Madrid. He later admitted that 'we committed a military error and we committed it deliberately'.²⁵ Franco was choosing to give a higher priority to the inflation of his own political position by securing the emotional victory and propagandistic coup of the liberation of the Alcázar on 27 September.

²² Martínez Bande, *La marcha sobre Madrid*, 45–56.

²³ Martínez Bande, *La marcha sobre Madrid*, 56–71; Ramón Garriga, *El general Juan Yagüe* (Barcelona, 1985), 111–12.

²⁴ *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, D, III, 28.

²⁵ Armando Boaventura, *Madrid-Moscú de ditadura à República e à guerra civil de Espanha* (Lisbon, 1937), 212.

On the following day, the Nationalist high command met again at the airfield near Salamanca and Franco was both confirmed as *Generalísimo* and elected as 'Head of the Government of the Spanish State'. Thereafter, he simply arrogated to himself the powers of the Headship of State.²⁶ As a consequence of his decision, there was a delay between the fall of Maqueda on 21 September and 7 October, when the advance on Madrid was renewed.

From the moment of his political elevation, the rhythm and style of Franco's war effort changed. The lightning war of the columns now gave way to a far more deliberate process wherein the gradual destruction of the enemy took precedence over grand strategic objectives. In line with his grandiose plans for permanently eradicating the left from Spain, Franco began to prolong the war both in order to crush his Republican enemies and to eliminate his rivals on the right. Visiting the ruins of the Alcázar after the Civil War, Franco said to the official historian of his military triumphs, Manuel Aznar, 'When I entered the Alcázar, I was convinced that I had won the war. From then on it was just a question of time. I was no longer interested in a lightning victory but in a total victory, on every front, as a result of the exhaustion of the enemy.'²⁷

On 7 October, the Nationalist forces tentatively resumed operations against Madrid. After frequent consultations with Franco, Mola had developed a two-part final strategy to take the capital which was already surrounded on the west from due north to due south. The idea was first for Nationalist forces to reduce the semi-circle by closing in on the capital, and then for the Army of Africa, now under the command of the impetuous General Varela, to make a frontal assault through the north western suburbs. The forward defences of the city were demoralised by Nationalist bombing and then brushed aside by motorised columns armed with fast Italian 'whippet' tanks.²⁸ However, there was little real urgency about the attack and Franco himself was curiously absent from the front until 23 November when he came to order the cessation of the attack. He was altogether more concerned with the less important battle to relieve the Asturian capital Oviedo, for which he sent valuable troops from the Madrid front. However, when Barroso suggested that the Nationalist forces were insufficient to justify the risks involved in attacking a city which could be defended street by street and house by house, Franco replied 'let Varela have a go. He has always been lucky.' Such frivolity suggests that Franco was distancing

²⁶On the machinations behind the political elevation of Franco, see Preston, *Franco*, 174–85.

²⁷José Antonio Vaca de Osma, *La larga guerra de Francisco Franco* (Madrid, 1991), 209.

²⁸Martínez Bande, *La marcha*, 81–95.

himself from the attack on Madrid. Varela's plan to attack the northern suburbs, a natural fortress girded by the River Manzanares, was suicidal. There were acrimonious debates within the Nationalist high command over the wisdom of an uphill advance through narrow streets, yet Franco ultimately did nothing to prevent Varela's attack. The Generalissimo could not call off the attack on Madrid when there was widespread conviction in the Nationalist ranks that the capital was about to fall. However, if Varela were to fail, there could be no opposition to his preference for a long war.²⁹

By 22 November, the people of Madrid, assisted by the International Brigades, defending the city with their backs to its walls, had repulsed the Nationalist attack.³⁰ On the following day, Franco travelled from Salamanca to Leganés on the outskirts of Madrid and informed his generals that there was no choice but to abandon the attack. He was fortunate that the Republican forces in the capital were too exhausted to mount an immediate counter-offensive. If they had, the tide might well have turned decisively in their favour. Before the Republic could rally its forces, Franco's battered columns would receive massive reinforcements from Fascist Italy. Mussolini harboured increasing doubts about the Generalissimo's strategic vision but he was already too committed to the Nationalist cause to permit Franco to be defeated.³¹ The Germans were also 'faced with the decision either to leave Spain to herself or to throw in additional forces.'³² This was a situation which Franco would exploit with some skill.

The failure of the assault on Madrid left Franco indecisive in the face of a complex war of manoeuvre. In the judgement of General Faupel, 'his military training and experience do not fit him for the direction of operations on their present scale.'³³ Eventually, after considerable hesitation, he moved forward from the deadlock by adopting an encircling strategy against the Madrid-La Coruña road to the North West.³⁴ In appalling weather, bloody battles were fought for small villages. The Italian commander in Spain, General Mario Roatta, also complained to Rome that the Generalissimo's staff was incapable of

²⁹ Vaca de Osma, *La larga guerra*, 233-4; George Hills, *Franco: The Man and his Nation* (New York, 1967), 263.

³⁰ Vicente Rojo, *Así fue la defensa de Madrid* (Mexico D.F., 1967), 55-103; Robert F. Colodny, *The Struggle for Madrid* (New York, 1958), 52-91; Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (3rd ed, 1977), 82.

³¹ *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, D, III, 139; *Fascistas en España: la intervención italiana en la guerra civil a través de los telegramas de la 'Misión Militar Italiana en España' (15 diciembre 1936-31 marzo 1937)*, Ismael Saz & Javier Tusell, eds, (Madrid/Rome, 1981), 25. (Henceforth *MMIS*.)

³² *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, D, III, 155.

³³ *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, D, III, 159-62.

³⁴ José Manuel Martínez Bande, *La lucha en torno a Madrid* (Madrid, 1968), 37.

mounting an operation appropriate to a large-scale war.³⁵ When the fronts had stabilised by 15 January, each side had lost about 15,000 men.³⁶ The various efforts to take Madrid had severely depleted Franco's forces. The Republicans were now solidly dug in and Franco was doubly fortunate that they were unable to launch a counter-attack to break through his severely overstretched lines and that substantial reinforcements would soon arrive from Italy.

Partly out of contempt for Franco's generalship and partly out of a desire to monopolise the anticipated triumph for Fascism, Mussolini insisted that Italian troops must be used as an independent force under an Italian general only nominally responsible to Franco's overall command. Rejecting the Duce's more ambitious plans to cut off Catalonia from the rest of Spain, Franco agreed to an assault on Malaga to provide a seaport nearer to Italy and a launching pad for an attack on Valencia from the south west.³⁷ Mussolini considered that he could send instructions to Franco as to a subordinate and the attack on Malaga seems to have been his personal idea.³⁸ Franco was not much interested in the Italian tactic of *guerra celere* (lightning war) and the possibility of victories for Mussolini which might end the war before his own leadership was consolidated. He visited the southern front only once and was furious that Italian troops were first to enter Malaga and mortified by a telegram from Roatta which read 'Troops under my command have the honour to hand over the city of Malaga to Your Excellency'.³⁹ In fact, given the massive numerical and logistical superiority of the attackers, the triumph was less of an achievement than it seemed at the time.

While the Italians attacked in the south, and heartened by the availability of the crack German Condor Legion, Franco had renewed his efforts to take Madrid, launching on 6 February 1937 a major attack through the Jarama valley towards the Madrid-Valencia highway to the east of the capital. Still convinced that he could capture the capital, Franco took a special interest in the Jarama campaign.⁴⁰ However, when Colonel Emilio Faldella, Roatta's Chief of Staff, offered the Generalissimo the opportunity to use the Italian forces to close the circle around Madrid, he responded negatively: 'This is a war of a special kind, that has to be fought with exceptional methods so that such a numerous mass cannot be used all at once, but spread out over several

³⁵ MMIS, *Telegramas*, 79.

³⁶ Carlos de Arce, *Los generales de Franco* (Barcelona, 1984) 186; Martínez Bande, *La lucha en torno a Madrid*, 51–69.

³⁷ De Felice, *Mussolini il Duce*, 389–90.

³⁸ Mussolini to Roatta, 18 December 1936, MMIS, *Telegramas*, 69.

³⁹ Roatta to Ufficio Spagna, 8 February 1937, MMIS, *Telegramas*, 130.

⁴⁰ Franco Salgado-Araujo, *Mi vida*, 220.

fronts it would be more useful.⁴¹ He thereby revealed not just his resentment of the victory at Malaga, but also the narrowness of his own strategic vision. His preference for piecemeal actions over a wide area reflected both his own practical military experiences in a small-scale colonial war and his desire to conquer Spain slowly and so consolidate his political supremacy.⁴² Franco would not be shaken from his preference for the gradual and thorough occupation of Republican territory, telling Faldella: 'In a civil war, a systematic occupation of territory accompanied by the necessary purge (*limpieza*) is preferable to a rapid rout of the enemy armies which leaves the country still infested with enemies'.⁴³

However, when the Nationalist attack in the Jarama was blunted by the determined resistance of Republican troops reinforced by the International Brigades, Franco was forced to eat his words and beg Faldella for a diversion to relieve his exhausted forces. The Generalissimo perceived an Italian attack on Guadalajara, forty miles north-east of Madrid, to be an ideal way to divert Republican troops away from the Jarama. The Italians, however, were not thinking in terms of a supplementary action but rather of a bold and decisive initiative. The way in which Franco resolved in his own interests the contradiction between his own and the Italians' strategic conception was to reveal his political ruthlessness. More significantly, it was also to underline the extent to which he had gained in confidence and developed his notion of how the war should be fought since the débâcle at Madrid had occasioned the contemptuous remarks of Faupel and Roatta.

Anxious to get the Italians to relieve the pressure on his exhausted forces in the Jarama, on 1 March, Franco agreed to Faldella's proposal to close the circle around Madrid, with a joint attack south west by the Italians from Sigüenza towards Guadalajara backed up by a north eastern push by Nationalist troops from the Jarama towards Alcalá de Henares. On 8 March, the Italians under General Amerigo Coppi initially broke through the Republican defences. However, it became clear by the evening that Franco's promised attack from the Jarama had not materialised. The Republicans were thus permitted to withdraw forces from that front and concentrate reinforcements to the north of Guadalajara. The Italians were further disadvantaged by the weather. Equipped for African operations, they were unprepared for heavy snow and sleet. Their aircraft were grounded while the Republican air force

⁴¹ Olao Conforti, *Guadalajara: la prima sconfitta del fascismo* (Milan, 1967), 30–2; Coverdale, *Italian Intervention*, 215.

⁴² Cantalupo to Ciano, 17 February 1937, Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Spagna Fondo di Guerra, b.38, no.287/137.

⁴³ Conforti, *Guadalajara*, 33.

operated almost normally. Their light tanks with fixed machine guns were vulnerable to the Republic's Russian T-26 with revolving turret-mounted cannon. As Roatta desperately called for the promised supporting attack from the south, Franco feigned powerlessness. While he prevaricated before an apoplectic Roatta, the Italian forces were routed. The defeat of Guadalajara had many components—the weather, the poor morale and inappropriate equipment of the Italians and the skill of the Republican operations. Nevertheless, if Franco's attack had taken place as promised, the outcome might have been very different. The Generalissimo's refusal to commit his own troops and his readiness to let the Italians exhaust themselves in a bloodbath with the Republicans makes it difficult to avoid the conclusion that he had decided to use the Italians as cannon fodder in his strategy of defeating the Republic by gradual attrition. He let the Italians bear the weight of the fighting while his own units regrouped.⁴⁴

Franco could take comfort from the fact that Guadalajara was a defeat which cost the Republic dearly in terms of casualties. However, it obliged him fundamentally to reconsider his strategic options. The unmistakable conclusion offered by the easy victory at Malaga and the bloodbaths at the Jarama and Guadalajara was that the Republic was concentrating its best units around the capital and neglecting other fronts. Accordingly, albeit reluctantly, Franco accepted the possibility of destroying the Republic by instalments far from the centre. Throughout March, Franco was subjected to pressure from Colonel Vigón, Chief of Mola's General Staff, via Kindelán, and General Hugo Sperrle, commander of the German Condor Legion, to intensify the war in the north in order to seize the heavy industrial resources of the Basque provinces. It took Guadalajara to change Franco's mind.⁴⁵ Franco made the decision with uncharacteristic rapidity, persuaded by promises from Sperrle and his Chief of Staff, Colonel Wolfram von Richthofen, about the likely impact of 'close air support' in smashing the morale of opposing troops.⁴⁶ The Condor Legion was theoretically responsible directly to Franco.⁴⁷ However, given the difficulties of hour-by-hour liaison, Franco gave Sperrle a free hand to deal directly with Mola and Vigón. Accordingly, with Franco's acquiescence, the Germans had the

⁴⁴ On the battle of Guadalajara, see Preston, *Franco*, 229–37; MMIS, *Telegrams*, 161–83; Emilio Faldella, *Venti mesi di guerra in Spagna* (Florence, 1939), 255–66; Conforti, *Guadalajara*, 51–178; Martínez Bande, *La lucha en torno a Madrid*, 133–46; Alberto Rovighi & Filippo Stefani, *La partecipazione italiana alla guerra civile spagnola (1936–1939)* 4 vols (Rome, 1993) I, 232–333.

⁴⁵ Kindelán, *Mis cuadernos*, 120–3; General Jorge Vigón, *General Mola (el conspirador)* (Barcelona, 1957), 303–4; Franco Salgado-Araujo, *Mi vida*, 225.

⁴⁶ Williamson Murray, *German Military Effectiveness* (Baltimore, 1992), 104–5.

⁴⁷ *DGFP*, D, III, 125–6.

decisive voice in the campaign. While the advance was being planned, von Richthofen wrote in his diary, 'we are practically in charge of the entire business without any of the responsibility'.⁴⁸

Although Franco was delighted to bask in the sensation of having the Condor Legion at his orders, its novel use of ultra-modern technology was some distance from his strategic world. Indeed, to the consternation of Sperrle, he weakened the Basque offensive (Bilbao did not fall until 19 June) by keeping substantial forces near Madrid and requested, unsuccessfully, that the Condor Legion be split up among his units in central Spain. Nevertheless, German ground attack methods, exemplified by atrocities such as the bombing of undefended civilian targets like Durango on 31 March and Guernica on 26 April, fitted well with his notion of a war effort which would terrorise the enemy into defeat.

He explained his thinking in this regard to the Italian Ambassador Roberto Cantalupo on 4 April 1937. He dismissed the idea of swift strategic strikes as appropriate only for war against a foreign enemy. Speaking of 'the cities and in the countryside which I have already occupied but which are still not redeemed', he declared ominously that 'we must carry out the necessarily slow task of redemption and pacification, without which the military occupation will be largely useless. The moral redemption of the occupied zones will be long and difficult because in Spain the roots of anarchism are old and deep.' Redemption meant bloody political purges such as those which had followed the capture of Badajoz and Malaga: 'I will occupy Spain town by town, village by village, railway by railway . . . Nothing will make me abandon this gradual programme. It will bring me less glory but greater internal peace. That being the case, this civil war could still last another year, two, perhaps three. Dear ambassador, I can assure that I am not interested in territory but in inhabitants. The reconquest of the territory is the means, the redemption of the inhabitants the end.' With a tone of helpless regret, he went on, 'I cannot shorten the war by even one day . . . It could even be dangerous for me to reach Madrid with a stylish military operation. I will take the capital not an hour before it is necessary: first I must have the certainty of being able to found a regime.'⁴⁹ There can be no doubting that Franco placed the greatest importance on the consolidation of his political power. That had been shown throughout September and October 1936 and it was

⁴⁸ Wolfram von Richthofen, 'Spanien-Tagebuch', in Maier, Klaus A. *Guernica 26.4.1937. Die deutsche Intervention in Spanien und der 'Fall Guernica'* (Freiburg, 1975) diary entries for 24, 28 March 1937, on pages 79, 82.

⁴⁹ Cantalupo to Mussolini, 29 March 1937, ASMAE, SFG, b.38, T.709/345; Roberto Cantalupo, *Fu la Spagna. Ambasciata presso Franco* (Milan, 1948), 230-3.

to lead, concurrently with the Basque campaign, to his devoting considerable time, effort and cunning to creating a single party under his undisputed leadership.⁵⁰

By the summer of 1937, with the Basques defeated and a further assault about to be launched on Santander, Franco was confident of ultimate victory, though with a calendar marked in years rather than months. His Axis allies, however, found it difficult to accept his long term view of the political benefits of a plodding war of attrition. This led to talk of a negotiated settlement, something which the Caudillo dismissed out of hand—he wanted a war to the death. Nonetheless, he moved with crab-like slowness and this enabled the Republican Chief of Staff, General Vicente Rojo, to try to halt the attack on the north by a diversionary attack on 6 July at the village of Brunete, in arid scrubland fifteen miles west of Madrid. As he was later to show at Teruel and the Ebro, Franco's notion of a war of moral redemption by terror did not permit him to give up an inch of once captured territory nor to turn aside from any opportunity to hammer home to Republican Spain the message of his invincibility—whatever the human cost. By responding to the attack at Brunete, Franco delayed the far more important campaign in the north because he believed that he could destroy large numbers of Republican troops on the Madrid front.⁵¹

Franco's decision to accept the challenge of Brunete has widely been considered a strategic error. In fact, it ensured that, in one of the bloodiest slogging matches of the war, the Republic, in delaying the fall of Santander only by about five weeks, would lose twenty thousand of its best troops, an objective on which Franco always placed the highest value.⁵² More remarkable than the decision to abandon the northern campaign in order to fight at Brunete was Franco's response to the success of his troops. General Varela was convinced that, with the Republican forces in disarray, he could take Madrid. Franco now had no interest either in the early capture of Madrid nor in risking his advance in the north and ordered a flabbergasted Varela to dig in.⁵³ The collapse of Madrid would probably have ended the war. Franco, however, did not want victory until every square inch of Spain had

⁵⁰On the process of the so-called unification of all right-wing parties under Franco, see Maximiano García Venero, *Falange en la guerra de España: la Unificación y Hedilla* (Paris, 1967) *passim*; Southworth, *Antifalange*; Preston, *Franco*, 248–74.

⁵¹Kindelán, *Cuadernos*, 131–7.

⁵²On the battle and its strategic significance, see Faldella, *Venti mesi*, 357; Vicente Rojo, *España heroica: diez bocetos de la guerra española* 3^a edición (Barcelona, 1975) 91–101; Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 710–16.

⁵³Kindelán, *Mis cuadernos*, 136–7; Manuel Aznar, *Historia militar de la guerra de España* (Madrid, 1940), 460; José Ignacio Luca de Tena, *Mis amigos muertos* (Barcelona, 1971), 205–6; Vaca de Osma, *La larga guerra*, 294–7.

been cleansed of leftists and liberals.

The campaign in the north became something of a walk-over. On 24 August 1937, two days before the fall of Santander, Rojo launched another diversionary offensive along a broad front westwards from Catalonia aimed at encircling Zaragoza. The small town of Belchite fell and Franco gave long consideration to a response. However, given the low strategic value of the ground lost and the likely impact on both Nationalist and Republican morale of delaying the attack on Asturias, this time he did not take the bait.⁵⁴ Belchite hardly interrupted the Nationalist conquest of Asturias during September and October. In terms of control of industrial production and population, the balance of power had now shifted dramatically in the Generalísimo's favour. His lines shortened and his commitments diminished, Franco now had powerful and well-equipped army available for use in the centre and the east.

After nearly two months reorganising his forces into six army corps, Franco hesitated over the direction of his next great offensive. After lengthy consideration of a great push through Aragón and then either an attack on Valencia or else a sweep through Catalonia to cut off the Republic from the French frontier, he decided, in early December, to launch his next attack against Madrid.⁵⁵ He hoped to complete the encirclement of the capital with a push towards Alcalá de Henares. However, Rojo pre-empted the operation by another diversionary offensive on 15 December against the bleak city of Teruel in Aragón. The Republican forces quickly captured one thousand square kilometres and, for the first time, entered an enemy-held provincial capital.⁵⁶ Franco abandoned his Guadalajara offensive despite the firm, not to say frantic, advice of his own staff and of the senior German and Italian officers to abandon Teruel. His goal of the total, humiliating annihilation of the Republic did not admit of allowing the enemy such successes. With Rojo having thrown everything into the Teruel offensive, the capture of Madrid was a realistic possibility but Franco was not inclined to end the war before he had thoroughly 'redeemed' more territory. In that sense, the attraction of confronting Rojo at Teruel was that it provided the opportunity to destroy a large body of the Republic's best forces.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Rojo, *España heroica*, 103–15; Servicio Histórico Militar (Coronel José Manuel Martínez Bande), *La gran ofensiva sobre Zaragoza* (Madrid, 1973), 78–167; Aznar, *Historia militar*, 499–516; Thomas, *Civil War*, 722–8; Franco Salgado-Araujo, *Mi vida*, 241–2.

⁵⁵ José Manuel Martínez Bande, *La batalla de Teruel* 2ª edición (Madrid, 1990), 16–26.

⁵⁶ Rojo, *España heroica*, 117–125; José Manuel Martínez Bande, *La batalla de Teruel* (Madrid, 1990), 52–64; Aznar, *Historia militar*, 543–54.

⁵⁷ Claude Martín, *Franco soldado y estadista* (Madrid, 1965), 293; Aznar, *Historia militar*, 551, 622; Garriga, *Tagüe*, 139–40.

When Franco pulled troops towards Teruel, an outraged Ciano commented 'Our generals are restless, quite rightly. Franco has no idea of synthesis in war. His operations are those of a magnificent battalion commander. His objective is always ground, never the enemy. And he doesn't realise that it is by the destruction of the enemy that you win a war'.⁵⁸ Ciano was wrong. Franco's obsession with 'ground' was a deliberate quest for great battles of attrition which could, and did, destroy vast numbers of the enemy's troops. Teruel would be just such a conflict. Conducted in freezing conditions and at enormous cost to both sides, the battle was eventually won by Franco's forces on 22 February.⁵⁹ The Republican army was shattered and the Nationalists were now poised to sweep through Aragón at their leisure. Franco now had a twenty per cent advantage in terms of men and an overwhelming one in terms of aircraft, artillery and other equipment.⁶⁰ The destruction of the best Republican units at Teruel made it the military turning point of the Civil War. The battle also coincided with a further step forward in the institutionalisation of Franco's political power, with the formation of his first government on 30 January 1938.⁶¹

The triumph at Teruel opened up vistas of uninterrupted victories against an exhausted Republic and, over the next five months, Franco made good use of his opportunities. His concern with the physical annihilation of the enemy precluded stylish strategic operations to finish off the Republic quickly. Nevertheless, he was now to show some skill in handling a large army of several hundreds of thousands of men across a huge front and should therefore be seen as more than the petty-minded battalion commander so often derided by Hitler and Faupel, Mussolini and Ciano. In early March, six army corps totalling 200,000 men began an advance across a 260 kilometre wide front in the direction of the Ebro valley. The objective was to destroy more Republican forces and to reach the point where the River Segre, which ran north to south through eastern Catalonia, met the Ebro running west to east near Lérida. So spectacular was its success that, by 15 March, Franco decided to push on to the sea and cut off Catalonia from Valencia and the central Republican zone.

However, when Lérida fell on 4 April to Yagüe, he along with Kindelán, Vigón and the new commander of the Condor Legion, General Hellmuth Volkmann, advocated the occupation of a badly

⁵⁸ Ciano, *Diary* 37–38, 46.

⁵⁹ Martínez Bande, *Teruel*, 165–209; Lojendio, *Operaciones militares*, 380–95; Aznar, *Historia militar*, 569–85; Salas Larrazábal, *Ejército*, II, 1672–1704.

⁶⁰ *DGFP*, D, III, 556–7; Gerald Howson, *Aircraft of the Spanish Civil War 1936–1939* (1990), 20–8.

⁶¹ *The Times*, 4 March 1938; *DGFP*, D, III, 613–14; Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Entre Hendaia y Gibraltar* (Madrid, 1947), 60–4.

defended Catalonia. It seemed to be the moment to finish off the Republic.⁶² If he had followed all this advice, Franco could probably have brought the war to a speedier conclusion. There were no significant Republican forces between Lérida and Barcelona. The loss of Catalonia, with the Republic's remaining war industry and the seat of government, would be a devastating blow to Republican morale. Franco rejected such a move partly because of fears of French intervention on behalf of the Republic.⁶³ However, he seems to have been motivated rather more by concern than a sudden Republican collapse in the wake of the fall of Barcelona would still have left a substantial number of armed Republicans in central and southern Spain. His goal remained the total annihilation of the Republic and its supporters. Accordingly, to the astonishment of Rojo as well as of Yagüe, Kindelán and Vigón, he decided to divert his troops south for an attack on Valencia. He wanted further destruction and demoralisation of the Republic's human resources before the war was over.⁶⁴

After reaching the Mediterranean on 15 April 1938, Franco's forces set off on a slow and bloody advance towards Valencia through the difficult terrain of the Maestrazgo. Kindelán begged Franco to desist from an operation which was incurring high casualties for the Nationalists as well as for the Republicans but he refused.⁶⁵ By 23 July 1938, however, his forces were less than forty kilometres from Valencia. In an attempt to restore contact between Catalonia and the rest of the Republican zone, a desperate diversionary assault across the River Ebro was launched by General Rojo on 24 July. With the advantage of surprise, by 1 August, the Republicans had advanced forty kilometres to Gandesa. Although his staff were dismayed by the Ebro crossing, Franco himself welcomed the opportunity to encircle the Republicans with their backs to the river. He poured troops into the area and began a merciless four-month battle of attrition in order, at no little cost in Nationalist lives, to smash the Republican forces. Valencia was abandoned and a strategically meaningless battle which would involve a bloodbath worse even than those of the Jarama, Brunete and Teruel. But Franco thought the losses a reasonable price to pay for the annihilation of the Republican army.⁶⁶

⁶² Kindelán, *Mis cuadernos*, 157–63; *DGFP*, D, III, 628.

⁶³ Jaime Martínez Parrilla, *La fuerzas armadas francesas ante la guerra civil española (1936–1939)* (Madrid, 1987), 184–92; David Wingeate Pike, *Les français et la guerre d'Espagne 1936–1939* (Paris, 1975), 296–7; *DGFP*, D, III, 620–2.

⁶⁴ José Manuel Martínez Bande, *La ofensiva sobre Valencia* (Madrid, 1977), 16–18; Garriga, *Yagüe*, 145–6; Vicente Rojo, *¡Alerta los pueblos! estudio político-militar del periodo final de la guerra española* 2ª edición (Barcelona, 1974), 40, 46–50, 54–5.

⁶⁵ Martínez Bande, *La ofensiva*, 69–96.

⁶⁶ Franco Salgado-Araujo, *Mi vida*, 264; Aznar, *Historia militar*, 739–70.

Once more, his own staff and his German and Italian advisers were dismayed. They pointed out to him that it would be easy to contain the Republican advance and attack a now virtually undefended Barcelona.⁶⁷ He was not interested, much preferring to convert Gandesa into the cemetery of the Republican army than to seek a swift and imaginative victory.⁶⁸ The cost was horrendous on both sides. It was not until the end of October, after he had secured substantial supplies of German weaponry in return for mining concessions, that Franco could launch his decisive counter-offensive. By mid-November, he had recovered the territory lost in July. He had side-stepped another chance of quick victory and secured what he most wanted—the annihilation of the Republican army. There would be no negotiated truces, no conditions, no peace with honour. It was effectively the end for the Republic. The last push against Catalonia began on 23 December. Barcelona fell on 26 January 1939. In Madrid, on 4 March, the commander of the Republican Army of the Centre, Colonel Segismundo Casado revolted against the Republican government in the hope of stopping increasingly senseless slaughter. His hopes of a negotiated peace were rebuffed by Franco and, after a minor civil war within the civil war, troops all along the line began to surrender. The Nationalists entered an eerily silent Madrid on 27 March. On 1 April 1939, Franco issued his final victory communiqué.

Franco had fought a political war. He had not set out to emulate Napoleon. Indeed, he stated often enough his conviction that ‘stylish military operations’ did not serve his purpose. He was almost certainly lacking in the vision and the capacity to conceive such operations. His talents lay in other directions. He had a remarkable capacity to raise the morale of those around him simply by his imperturbability under pressure. No reverse affected his equanimity. His ability as a rebel general to secure the logistical support of Germany and Italy was crucial to the success of his war effort. His success in domesticating and unifying the disparate political forces in his coalition was hardly less remarkable. These were achievements which outweighed his deficiencies as a stylish strategist. In the last resort, his primordial concern as a military leader had been to ensure a long future as dictator, and his war effort successfully traumatised the defeated into long years of apathy. Many of Franco’s strategic decisions—Toledo, Brunete, Teruel, the Maestrazgo, the Ebro—confirm that he was not a great military thinker. Yet each of those decisions brought him nearer to his goal. He can hardly be considered a military failure. His strategy

⁶⁷ Kindelán, *Mis cuadernos*, 173.

⁶⁸ Manuel Tagüeña Lacorte, *Testimonio de dos guerras* (México D.F., 1973), 230; José Manuel Martínez Bande, *La batalla del Ebro* 2ª edición (Madrid, 1988), 168.

was based on an assumption of the primacy of political concerns. His war effort was the first and bloodiest stage in a political repression that would maintain an intense rhythm of killing until 1943 and never be entirely relaxed. Throughout the years following his victory, he rejected any thought of amnesty or reconciliation with the defeated. Over four hundred thousand Republicans were forced into exile. As many again were sentenced to periods in prison, concentration camps or labour battalions. Until he died, Franco's regime deliberately kept alive the memory of the Civil War and maintained the division between victors and vanquished as an instrument of policy.⁶⁹ His long war was the pillar on which his long dictatorship rested.

⁶⁹ Paul Preston, *The Politics of Revenge: Fascism and the Military in Twentieth Century Spain* (1990), 30–47.