POLITICAL ASCENT AND MILITARY COMMANDER: FRANCO IN THE EARLY MONTHS OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR, JULY-OCTOBER 1936[1]

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The months of July and August 1936 are vital to understanding the transformation of a military coup against the leftist Popular Front government of Spain into a lethal three-year civil war. The military uprising started on 17 July 1936 in Spanish Morocco, and during the next two days most military units throughout Spain rebelled and joined the coup – some with enthusiasm and others half-heartedly. The original plan, designed by Brigadier General Emilio Mola, envisaged a swift military takeover of Madrid through a concentric attack by the infantry divisions stationed at Valencia, Zaragoza, Burgos, and Valladolid, as well as by the Spanish Army of Morocco, to be disembarked in advance at Málaga and Algeciras. However, the prestigious Major General Manuel Goded, commander of the Balearic Islands, and General Manuel González Carrasco failed to control the key cities of Barcelona and Valencia. Furthermore, a sailors' rebellion against the uprising crippled the navy, making the planned sea transport of the Moroccan forces temporarily impossible. Although an officers' pogrom left the navy with little operational effectiveness, sailors and low-ranking noncommissioned officers (NCOs) managed to use the ship to install a blockade of the Straits of Gibraltar.

These unforeseen setbacks radically altered the strategic situation, and gave Major General Francisco Franco a unique opportunity. This essay seeks to understand

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how he used that opportunity. The manner in which Major General Francisco Franco rose from being merely another general supporting the July 1936 military uprising, whose acts were supposedly determined by the 'director' of the *coup d'état*, Brigadier General Emilio Mola, to the position of commander-in-chief of the Nationalist Army and head of government, is still open to debate.

One side of the debate revolves around the notion that the official announcement of Franco[2] as Commander-in-Chief and chief of government of the new Nationalist[3] state on 29 September 1936 was rendered inevitable because both Germany and Italy had effectively recognized Franco as the main head of the army uprising and therefore channeled their help exclusively to him. That point of view, exemplified in the work of scholars such as Stanley Payne and Paul Preston, also proposes that many of Franco's colleagues admired his military deeds and successful career, and thus supported Franco's appointment.[4] Certainly by 1936, Franco had become well known throughout the military establishment through his rapid promotions and legendary *sang-froid* in combat.[5] Promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel in June 1923 in order to take command of the Spanish Foreign Legion, he quickly secured promotion to Colonel in February 1925 and to Brigadier General in February 1926. That meteoric rise, the result of a system of combat promotion and King Alfonso XIII's protection of and favoritism towards the *Africanistas*, also gave Franco the opportunity to take his place in the glamorous world of Spain's high society, making his name well known to the Spanish public. All these factors, together with the relatively straightforward successes of the African columns in their advance toward Madrid, are the arguments used by those who believe that the military and political rise of Franco was nothing more than a logical and perfectly understandable process. But although all these factors clearly helped Franco in his

[2] "Art. 1º: En cumplimiento de acuerdo adoptado por la Junta de Defensa Nacional, se nombra Jefe del Gobierno del Estado Español al Excmo. General de División don Francisco Franco Bahamonde, […]"; in José P. San Ramón Colino, *Legislación del Gobierno Nacional. Segundo Semestre 1936* (Ávila: SHADE, 1937), 198-199.

[3] Gobierno Nacional (Estructuración del nuevo Estado: Junta Técnica del Estado). Ley de 1 de Octubre de 1936: "La estructuración del nuevo Estado español dentro de los *principios nacionalistas* reclama el establecimiento de aquellos órganos administrativos […]". Ibid., 220-222 (my emphasis).

[4] Andrée Bachoud, *Franco,* trans. María Pons (Barcelona: Crítica, 1997), 148; Brian Crozier, *Franco: A Biographical History* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967), 208; George Hills, *Franco: The Man and his Nation* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 255; Stanley Payne, *Politics and the Military in Modern Spain* (Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 1967), 455-57; *Paul* Preston, *Franco, "Caudillo de España"* (Barcelona: Grijalbo, 1994), 233.

[5] Preston, *Franco*, 58, 64-65; Geoffrey Jensen, *Franco: Soldier, Commander, Dictator* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2005), 41-43; José E. Álvarez, *The Betrothed of Death: The Spanish Foreign Legion during the Rif Rebellion, 1920-1927* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 2001), 248.

ascent, one key question remains, which is precisely where all the controversy lies: could it be argued that during the first two months of the Spanish Civil War Franco acted consciously and purposefully with the ultimate objective of accumulating all military and political power in his hands?

One end of this debate is occupied by scholars who see Franco as a deeply patriotic soldier whose only desire was to win the war. This argument holds that he accepted the highest post involuntarily and only because of the urgency of events. This idea can be easily defended since before 1936, Franco never explained where his political loyalties lay.[6]But that reasoning completely ignores the possibility that some of Franco's decisions during this period were made with the clear intention of acquiring as much military power and political weight as possible. Other scholars indeed believe that most of Franco's acts during this period were cleverly, cautiously and patiently orchestrated in order to reach the highest position, as demonstrated by Franco's famous decision to postpone his offensive against Madrid and instead to 'liberate' Toledo's *Alcázar*. That action has been interpreted as a political decision rather than an operational necessity, as the resulting two-week delay gave the Republican forces time to strengthen their defenses, saving Madrid from imminent capture and thus – allegedly – unnecessarily prolonging the war.[7]

To argue that by 1936 Franco was merely an army figure without political ambition is scarcely credible. A man who had occupied so many key positions before 1936 could hardly have remained completely immune to the increasingly violent polarization of Spanish politics during the 1930s. The military establishment was especially sensitive politically during the years leading up to 1936, especially after years of being insulted, mocked and held responsible for the military catastrophes in Cuba, the Philippines and Morocco. As José Ortega y Gasset explained, different groups within the army felt "separated from other social classes – as they in turn are from each other – without respect for them, nor any sense of their straining pressure, the army

[6] Javier Tusell, *Franco en la Guerra Civil: Una biografía política* (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1993), 15.
[7] Paul Preston, 'Franco as a military leader', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6:4 (1994), 29; Gabriel Cardona, *Historia militar de una guerra civil. Estrategias y tácticas de la Guerra de España* (Barcelona: Flor del Viento Ediciones, 2006), 81; Preston, *Franco*, 231; Juan Blázquez Miguel, *Auténtico Franco: Trayectoria Militar, 1907-1939* (Madrid: Almena, 2009), 213.

lives in perpetual turmoil, wanting to spend its accumulated spiritual powder, and finding no adequate enterprise in which to shoot it off."[8] The collapse of Republic's authority as a consequence of the military uprising gave the rebellious generals absolute freedom of decision and action, since the existing Spanish state no longer commanded their loyalty. That independence was to cause grave difficulties and delays in the field, for each general conducted military operations without necessarily cooperating with the others. Furthermore, the political beliefs of the commanders also affected the development of military events. The purported need to "purify" the armed forces and Spanish society of the Communist "red menace" was in their view a valid military objective.

This article will analyze, first, the time during which Franco's army was blockaded in Spanish Morocco, giving him little real power to influence events on the ground, and second, his conduct of the war from his Sevilla headquarters. During these three months, Franco maintained intense diplomatic and propaganda activities with the dual objective of obtaining foreign military aid and of promoting himself as the sole military and political leader of the uprising.

I. THE SEARCH FOR PREPONDERANCE

The period which Franco spent in Spanish Morocco from 19 July 1936 until his definitive move to Sevilla on 7 August was a time of great uncertainty, from both a military and a political standpoint. During this phase, generals such as Antonio Aranda, Fidel Dávila, Emilio Mola, Miguel Ponte, Gonzalo Queipo de Llano, and Andrés Saliquet were deeply immersed in the task of securing lines of communication, establishing firm lines of defense and organizing and leading columns against Madrid and other objectives. Meanwhile Franco, unable to prove his military competence with an army blockaded in Morocco, decided instead to remain there, establishing his HQ in Tetuán. From here Franco, as Paul Preston explains, flooded the airwaves with constant assertions of faith in the eventual triumph, congratulations to specific garrisons for their

[8] José Ortega y Gasset, *Invertebrate Spain* (New York: Norton, 1937), 48-49.

successful uprisings, and of support for those who were either surrounded or under siege.[9]

There is no doubt that Franco felt unstoppable and full of energy after he was gloriously welcomed upon his arrival in Tetuán on 19 July 1936, and he had tears in his eyes when he later heard the welcome speech of his loyal legionnaire Lt-Col. Juan Yagüe.[10] Furthermore, the grave problems facing the insurgents during the following days were not reflected in the positive language employed in Franco's broadcasts and radiograms. In fact, the press of Spanish Morocco was ordered to adopt an unfounded optimism, and to paint a picture in which General Mola was advancing unopposed towards Madrid and in which the city of Oviedo was under complete Nationalist control.[11] From the safety of Morocco, it was easy for Franco to project a façade of never-ending confidence. However, these radiograms sought to achieve a more important objective than merely raising the moral of the insurgents. As recalled by Lt-Col. Franco Salgado-Araujo, Franco's cousin and Aide de Camp (ADC), the entire Tetuán headquarters was terrified that General Mola's columns would reach Madrid before Franco's forces.[12] Such a scenario seemed a real possibility when, at 10.45 p.m. on 20 July 1936, army radio operators received the following message from Mola:

> Contrary to false news radioed from Madrid, Spain's North 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th divisions are in complete control and the situation remains almost completely quiet. Motorized forces from Zaragoza, Pamplona, Logroño, Burgos, and Valladolid are quickly advancing towards Madrid, converging with columns from Andalucía. This is the only truth. *Viva España. Viva la República*.[13]

This message shows how Mola, just moments after learning of the death of General José Sanjurjo, the intended overall leader of the military insurrection, sought to give an appearance of total control, and even lied about columns coming from the South

[9] Preston, *Franco*, 187.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Francisco Franco Salgado-Araujo, *Mi vida junto a Franco* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1977), 173.
[12] Ibid.
[13] AGMA, A6, L342, C13. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are the author's own.

– something which will not happen until 2nd August.[14] Unaware of the real situation, Franco might have believed this radiogram and been convinced of the urgency of acquiring as much political weight as possible. He needed to be in the best political position in case the insurgents rapidly triumphed and a republican military dictatorship was established. Franco accomplished this through a combination of radio and telegraph propaganda, employing a clever combination of different types of discourse, ranging from Republicanism to anti-Communism and patriotism.

An example of this is a radiogram of 21 July 1936 which Franco sent to Lt-Col. Juan Huerta Topete, Military Commander of Almería.[15] Using the title of Chief of the Expeditionary Army, Franco ordered Huerta to ignore the "intimidation from the [Republican destroyer] *Lepanto*", and to evacuate the population to the city's outskirts if necessary, finishing the message with a characteristic show of will power: "Faith in the triumph", followed by two cheers for Spain and the Republic, "¡¡Viva España!! ¡¡Viva la República!!"[16] This show of loyalty to the Republican state, which was probably an effort to encourage Huerta to act more violently and less hesitantly,[17] also demonstrates Franco's political flexibility and adaptability. This profession of insurgent Republicanism was later justified by his cousin as either caused by the uncertainty of victory, or by some people using General Franco's name without his consent.[18] This hardly seems likely, since Franco fully acknowledged his loyalty to the Republican system during his early radio broadcasts. For example, he concluded a speech given at 17.15 hours on 18 July from Tenerife, by promising that "for the first time we will make

[14] General Sanjurjo died after his small plane crashed on takeoff from an abandoned racing track in Cascais, Portugal. His death, together with those of Major General Joaquin Fanjul Goni in Madrid, and specially Major General Manuel Goded in Barcelona, left the uprising without three of their most prominent generals. Preston, *Franco*, 195. Of all 24 major generals on active duty in the spring of 1936 who sided with the Nationalists, Fanjul had been the last to get his two stars, immediately followed by Franco (23rd), Carlos Masquelet Lacaci (21st), Andrés Saliquet Zumeta (11th), Gonzalo Queipo de Llano (7th), Manuel Goded Llopis (5th), and Miguel Cabanellas Ferrer (2nd), the most senior of all. The Spanish Army had three active lieutenant generals, one of whom was Alberto Castro Girona, who only managed to join Franco's Spain after mid-1937. The other two, Pío López Pozas and José Rodríguez Casademunt, were shot by Republican militias in 1936. I am indebted to Dr. Albert A. Nofi for sending me a copy of his thesis, *General Officer Loyalties in the Spanish Civil War* (Doctoral dissertation, The City University of New York, 1991).

[15] The only military unit in this city was a machine-gun battalion (*Batallón de Ametralladoras No. 2*).

[16] Archivo General Militar Ávila (hereafter AGMA), Armario 6, Legajo 337, Carpeta 7.

[17] Lt-Col. Huerta surrendered at 12.45 am on 21 July when Fuentes López, Captain of the destroyer *Lepanto*, threatened to shell the city. For the full account see, Juan Blázquez Miguel, *Historia Militar de la Guerra Civil Española*, vol. 1 (Madrid: Fragma, 2003), 170-174.

[18] Franco Salgado-Araujo, *Mi vida junto a Franco*, 174.

the trilogy of fraternity, liberty and equality come true."[19] And again on 22 July: "Our movement is dangerous only […] for those who do nothing but attack the Republic. Something has to be done rapidly to save the Republic."[20]

However, Franco was able to use a very different discourse in an effort to appeal to the patriotism of his listeners, reminding them that loyalty to Spain was above petty political considerations. This can be seen from a second message sent to Almería on the same day to Lt-Col. Gregorio Vázquez Mascardí, the chief of Almería's Civil Guard; Franco, now employing the title of General in Chief, ordered him to resist to the end:

> Your behavior fills us with enthusiasm. Love for the fatherland compels us to commit the sublime sacrifices of which our History is so full. The vigorous defense of these heroic forces will be another of these examples. I am doing my best to ensure this situation ends soon. Accumulation of troops will allow us to fulfill our objectives. For Spain and for our History.[21]

These messages clearly confirm the hypothesis that Franco tailored his language very carefully to what his listeners most wanted to hear. Even so, one could still argue that all these radiograms do not unequivocally demonstrate Franco's ambition and that he may simply have been attempting unselfishly to ensure military success. There is one occasion when the temptation to reveal his true intentions could have been too irresistible: the death in the afternoon on 20 July of General Sanjurjo. The long-held belief that "there is no record of Franco's reaction to the death of Sanjurjo",[22] now needs revision. However, a recently discovered document suggests that Sanjurjo's death made Franco truly believe that he could take his place as leader of the rebel factions.

This document is a radiogram sent by Lt-Col. Juan Beigbeder, head of the Native Affairs Office (*Asuntos Indígenas*), to "H.E. Franco" on 22 July 1936. In this communication, Beigbeder explains that due to the disappearance of Spain's

[19] César Vidal, *Memoria de la Guerra Civil Española: Partes de Guerra Nacionales y Republicanos* (Barcelona: Belacqva, 2004), 49.
[20] Ronald Fraser, *Blood of Spain: The Experience of Civil War 1936-1939* (Middlesex, UK: Penguin, 1981), 128.
[21] AGMA, A.6, L.337, C.7. The emphasis is mine.
[22] Brian Crozier, *Franco: A Biographical History* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967), 190.

plenipotentiary Minister in Tangier, Prieto, who was believed to have taken refuge on a warship,

> [t]he Legation has been automatically brought under the control of the First Secretary who does not need the approval of France or the MENDUT.[23] He also cannot be forced by these two to leave Tangier. It would be convenient to instruct him through the Count of Casas Rojas, with whom communication "behind the scenes" exists, in order to put the entire Legation at the service of *General Franco's National Government*.[24]

This proves that the "ambitious and impassive" Franco was indeed thinking in something more than "just winning the war."[25] The date of this radiogram is highly relevant as the *Junta Nacional de Defensa* (National Defense Council) headed by General Miguel Cabanellas was not created until 23 July. There is no doubt that the creation of such an organism in Burgos was a huge blow for Franco's aspirations, and to add further insult, he was not nominated as a full member until 3 August.[26] Franco, deprived of any political voice and blockaded in Morocco, came to realize that only links with Germany and Italy could give him the chance to move his army swiftly to the mainland and to overshadow Mola as the main figure in the fast-changing scenario. Franco needed to move quickly. Were Mola able to defeat the Republican forces blocking his northerly attack on Madrid, the civil war could be effectively over.

From the very beginning, Franco made efforts to obtain military aid from Germany. On the night of 23 July, Lt-Col. Beigbeder and General Franco asked General Kühlental, German Military Attaché in Paris, and Wegener, head of the German Consulate in Tetuán, to "send ten troop-transport planes together with German crews with the maximum seating capacity through private German firms. They can land in any airfield of Spanish Morocco."[27] However, the requisition of the Lufthansa Junkers Ju.52/3 D-APOK, which had brought General Luis Orgaz from the Canary Islands that

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[23] MENDUT is probably a misspelling of MENDOUB, the Sultan's official in Tangier. I am grateful to Prof. José E. Álvarez and Prof. Shannon Fleming for clarifying my confusion over this word.
[24] AGMA, Cuartel General del Generalísimo (CGM), A1, L.40, C.38.
[25] Preston, *Franco*, 196.
[26] AGMA, A6, L342, C13.
[27] *Documents on German Foreign Policy: Germany and the Spanish Civil War* (hereafter DGFP), series D, vol. 3 (London: HMSO, 1951), No. 2, 3-4.

morning, allowed General Franco to organize a diplomatic mission with the intention of delivering two letters to Hitler and Göring. D-APOK departed for Germany at 17.30 on 23 July 1936. The mission to Hitler was to be carried out by three men: Adolf P. Langenheim, head of the NSDAP's *Auslandsorganization* in Tetuán; the German businessman, Johannes Bernhardt, who was both an active member of the Nazi party in Morocco, and friend of Brigadier Mola, Lt-Col.s Yagüe and Beigbeder;[28] and Air Force Captain Arranz Monasterio. Their task was to ask Hitler personally for military support.[29] Franco's significance in Spain thus reached new heights when, after the failed attempts by Mola and Queipo de Llano to secure military aid from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, this effort was successful. In addition, this success convinced Franco that even if 'on paper' he was not the official leader of the revolt, he was being treated as such by his two newly acquired allies. On 27 July 1936 Mussolini learned that the French Foreign Minister, Yvon Delbos, and his colleague Camille Chautemps, Minister of State, planned to adopt a policy of strict neutrality in Spain and that the British fully supported this. [30] This convinced the Italian dictator that a relatively small amount of help to Franco was not going to arouse an international outcry, and the next day, the Italian minister in Tangier informed Franco of the Italian decision to send twelve S.81s bombers and another twelve Fiat C.R.32s fighters to help "the Franco movement". Better still, by 1 August five German Ju.52/3s transport/bombers had arrived at Tetuán airport, six more were on their way, and a shipment of ten more Ju.52/3s together with six He.51s fighters, twenty 20mm. anti-aircraft guns, ammunition, and personnel, arrived at Cádiz aboard the steamship *Usaramo* on 6 August.[31] Now that Germany and Italy considered him as the head of the rebellion and the only recipient of weapons deliveries, Franco felt that he could start breaking his dependence from the other generals and bolster his position of power.

However, it should be made clear that the impression the Germans and Italians had of Franco was not a product of their imaginations, for they were made to believe in

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[28] Ibid.
[29] For a full explanation on how Franco got the support of Nazi Germany see Angel Viñas, *Franco, Hitler y el estallido de la Guerra Civil* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2001), 335-397.
[30] Paul Preston, 'Mussolini's Spanish Adventure: From Limited Risk to War', in Paul Preston and Ann Mackenzie, eds., *The Republic Besieged* (Edinburgh: EUP, 1996), 41-42; Martin Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement* (Oxford & NY: Berg, 1996), 91.
[31] Gerald Howson, *Armas para España: La historia no contada de la Guerra Civil española*, trans. Bernardo Moreno Carrillo (Barcelona: Península, 1998), 35; Raymond L. Proctor, *Hitler's Luftwaffe in the Spanish Civil War* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), 26.

Franco's position of power by Franco himself. That this was the position can be determined by a thorough examination of the radiograms sent by Franco's headquarters in Tetuán, as well as by the German representatives in Spanish Morocco. On 29 July Langenheim, after a conversation with Franco, informed Col-Gen Göring through the German Consulate in Tetuán that

> [t]he future Nationalist Government of Spain has been organized in the form of a directorate of the three Generals, Franco, Queipo de Llano, and Mola, with General Franco presiding. Our view of future German commercial, cultural, and military relations with Spain conforms fully with General Franco's desires and intentions.[32]

This was not the only time that Franco enhanced his position when talking to the Germans. On 3 August 1936 the German pocket battleship *Deutschland* and the torpedo boat *Luchs* arrived in Ceuta. During this visit Franco used the occasion to elevate his standing amongst the German officers, telling them that he "would like to be looked upon not only as the savior of Spain but also of Europe from the spread of Communism."[33] He also made sure that all these bare-faced efforts of self-promotion while in Morocco were not known by the other generals on the mainland. Evidence of Franco's double-dealing can be seen in the Mola-Franco radiograms from 1936. In particular, the one that Franco sent to Mola in early August bears closer scrutiny.

Admiral Rolf Carls, squadron commander of these two ships, and his staff were received with military honors by the Spanish forces in Ceuta, and subsequently transported in two cars to the Spanish High Commissioner's office in Tetuán. Accompanying Admiral Carls were Franz Fischer, Secretary of Legation of Madrid's German Embassy, Wegener as German Consul for the Spanish Morocco, Langenheim, and Johannes Bernhardt. Franco, having arrived early that day from a meeting with General Queipo in Sevilla, was waiting for them, accompanied by Lt-Col. Beigbeder, Temes, Chief of the Diplomatic Cabinet, and all of Franco's Navy and Army staff officers. After a long private talk with Admiral Carls, Franco offered everyone lunch. After this meal at 4.30 p.m., Franco sent Mola the following radiogram:

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[32] DGFP, D, III, No. 16, 16.
[33] DGFP, D, III, No. 27, 28.

> The German battleship *Deutschland* and one torpedo boat arrived today in Ceuta. The admiral invited me for lunch in Tetuán. They completely agree with our objectives, and do not haggle over military assistance. I am shaping this help – delivery of German fighter-planes delayed for two days due to difficulties crossing France, changing route, I hope to have solved tomorrow the [Republican] ships issue, modern fighter planes will arrive in three days and I will immediately send you two of these, and another two older three-engine planes.[34]

Here, Franco intended Mola to believe that it was the German admiral who invited him for lunch and played down his role in the magnanimous reception given to the German officers and crews.[35] Mola was not completely oblivious to Franco's efforts of self-aggrandizement and something must have reached his ears when this very same day he telegraphed Franco asking him to make clear "to German politicians that you and I completely agree with the military action and with the project of national reconstruction. It is an interesting thing that some people there believe the opposite."[36] To this Franco replied that "Berlin has been informed of our objectives, which I will repeat to them again. These misunderstandings are caused by our simultaneous dealings [for the procurement of arms and munitions]".[37]

The radiograms between Mola and Franco throughout August reveal how desperate Mola was for Legion soldiers, ammunition and fighter-planes. Such desperation is clear from a reply which Franco sent to a message from Mola on 15 August 1936, telling him that "the convoy you were expecting will depart this Friday. [It contains] 20,000 gas masks, six little-birds [fighter planes], and other things, which like everything else I will share with this army." However Franco wanted to close this matter and let Mola know that he alone had a close relationship with Germany and Italy, "[who] only wish to work with me [and] beg me to stop all other inefficient private

[34] AGMA, CGG, A.6, L.337, C.35. It can be presumed from this message that the mission of Admiral Carls was the collection of first-hand information as well as the need to clarify with Franco the details for the delivery of German aircraft and war equipment.
[35] DGFP, D, III, No. 27, 28. All 250 crew members were treated as guests by the city of Ceuta, and the military governor passed instructions to shops, restaurants and other small businesses not to ask for money from the sailors.
[36] AGMA, CGG, A.1, L.40, C.40.
[37] AGMA, CGG, A.6, L.337, C.35

initiatives [to get supplies]".[38] If these assertions were not enough, Franco even had the nerve to "recommend" that Mola search for aircraft in other countries, for example Great Britain.

> I have been offered today ten aircraft of unknown condition from England: Four-engine Fokkers with 14 seats; also two [DH.84] Dragons with two Gipsy Major engines, ten seats and 200 km/h, 1,500 GBP each. Ready to hand, payment in cash. Once paid in London, they would fly there. We are not interested in these. Tell me if you are interested and have foreign currency available.[39]

The dismissive tone that Franco adopts here was not casual and reflects the increasing confidence of Franco in himself given by his unrestricted access to the German and Italian diplomatic corps and military staff, which eventually would give him the monopoly over all direct communications between the exterior and Nationalist Spain.

German and Italian backing gave Franco an immense political advantage over the other generals, but was this sufficient to persuade them to accept Franco as their only commander-in-chief? Or did they instead think like Queipo de Llano, commanding general of insurgent Andalusia, who after two chaotic weeks had no intention of placing himself under the command of a man whom he believed had spent the day of the uprising "pulling petals off of daisies" in Casablanca, while everyone else was risking their lives.[40] How was Franco going to react to the fact that he could not employ his army? Why did it take Franco nearly three weeks to decide to move his headquarters to Sevilla?

II. DISTANT WAR: FRANCO AT HIS HEADQUARTERS AT TETUAN

In Spanish Morocco the military uprising triumphed in a single day, and the first troops started to be ferried across the Strait of Gibraltar, with one indigenous battalion

[38] AGMA, ZN, A.6, L.337, C.17. For German complaints over "numerous unwelcome messengers, coming partly from Franco, partly from Mola", see DGFP, D, III, No. 43.
[39] AGMA, CGG, A.6, L.337, C.35. The mentioned Fokkers are probably referring to the British Airways F.XII models that Mola unsuccessfully tried to buy the previous week. For the full explanation of how these aircraft finally ended in the hands of the Republican government see, Gerald Howson, *Armas para España*, 94-100.
[40] Ana Quevedo y Queipo de Llano, *Queipo de Llano: Gloria e Infortunio de un General* (Barcelona: Planeta, 2001), 394.

of *Regulares,* also known as *Tabor,* arriving at Algeciras and another one reaching Cádiz on 19 July 1936. Mola's instructions sent to the Morocco on 24 June 1936 specified the military doctrine under which these forces should operate during the military uprising. These revolved around three main principles: extreme violence, tempo, and high mobility: "The advance must be […], of course, extremely violent. The march of the columns, once disembarked, must move fast and towards Madrid."[41] However, the blockade of the straits by the Republican navy left General Franco, self-proclaimed commanding general of the African Army as soon as he arrived in Tetuán on 19 July, with only one option: to organize an airlift with all available aircraft capable of transporting passengers and cargo to airbases under rebel control such as Tablada (Sevilla), Granada, and Jérez de la Frontera. This was to prove a slow and hair-raising process, for the only aircraft capable of anything resembling an airlift were four obsolete Fokker F.VIIb3m, two Dornier J Wal flying boats, and one Douglas DC-2.[42]

The delay caused by the loss of the navy for the insurgent cause also meant that for ten days Franco's African troops could be transported across the Strait of Gibraltar only in small numbers, giving him enough time to observe how the uprising developed in the mainland. Franco's past military experiences and the obvious failure of the coup as well as Mola's inability to take Madrid made him reconsider the future of what with each passing day seemed more and more like an uncertain civil war.

From Tetuán, he realized that pursuing a quick military defeat of those forces loyal to the Republic could not guarantee a political victory. This idea finds its roots in Franco's role during the suppression of the October 1934 leftist uprising in Asturias. On that occasion, Franco, acting as a special technical advisor to the War Minister Diego Hidalgo, clashed with General Eduardo López Ochoa, commander-in-chief of the forces sent to Asturias, over how to 'pacify' the region. Franco was in favor of following a policy of terror and political cleansing,[43] and the 'humane approach' of

[41] José Manuel Martínez Bande, Appendix 1: 'Directivas para Marruecos, 24.06.1936', *La Marcha sobre Madrid* (Madrid: SHM, 1968), 163.
[42] Gerald Howson, *Aircraft of the Spanish Civil War* (London: Putman, 1990), 12; Jesús Salas Larrazabal, *Air War over Spain* (London: Ian Allan Ltd., 1974), 56; Juan Manuel Riesgo Pérez-Dueño, 'Paso Aéreo del Estrecho del Ejército de África", http://www.secc.es/media/docs/2_3_JM_Riesgo.pdf, 6. According to Jesús Salas Larrazabal, at least 2,065 men were airlifted across the Straits before the Junkers transports arrived.
[43] Preston, *Franco*, 139.

General Ochoa exasperated him. The negotiations between General Ochoa and the rebel leader Belarmino Tomás seemed to have gone well because "the rebels have heard of the general in command's gentlemanliness and humanity."[44] That enraged Franco's appointee as commander of the African units deployed in the area, Lt-Col. Juan Yagüe, who believed that "to defeat an enemy is completely useless while his morale has not been broken."[45] A combination of Franco's experience in Morocco and his readings of the anti-Communist bulletin *Entente Internationale contre la Troisième Internationale*[46] shaped his view of Spain's problems, like so many of his contemporaries, in organic metaphors. Communism, Socialism, and Anarchism were like a cancer and the only way to save the patient was to remove the corrupted organ. This raised a very difficult problem in military terms. The insurgents in particular, and the military establishment in general, still believed in the view expressed by Field-Marshal Helmuth von Moltke (1800-1891) during the Franco-Prussian War when he remarked that in war "the destruction of the enemy's armies was no longer sufficient";[47] rather, the enemy's national will to resist must be destroyed. As Major Mariano Rubió y Bellvé wrote in 1900:

> War is the acute representation of the struggle constantly manifested in the social organism. [...] War is the most terrible of all functions of social life. [...] A civil war is a social suicide; is the task of a body using its limbs to destroy itself, and its energies to extinguish and annihilate itself. A national war is more noble, but not less disastrous. A matter of life or death, [...].[48]

This European trend that led to the catastrophic attrition campaigns of 1915 to 1916 was still very much alive in a country whose army did not fight in the Great War. However, the transformation of politics into mass-politics with the appearance and propagation of trans-national ideologies such as Anarchism, Communism, Fascism, Nationalism, and Socialism, helped to blur the boundary between external and internal threats. A threat that came from outside, not in the form of armies but of ideas,

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[44] Gen. Eduardo López Ochoa, *Campaña Militar de Asturias en Octubre de 1934* (Madrid: Yunque, 1936), 165.
[45] Ramón Garriga, *El general Juan Yagüe* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1985), 62.
[46] Preston, *Franco*, 131.
[47] Azar Gat, *The Development of Military Thought: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: OUP, 1992), 73.
[48] Mariano Rubió y Bellvé, *La Guerra Moderna: Ojeada sobre sus principios fundamentales*, Vol. 6 (Barcelona: Manuel Soler Editores, 1900), 8-17.

transforming obedient and unquestioning workers and peasants into organized and highly motivated "people's armies". At the beginning of the era of mass politics, the distance between those armed forces focused on overseas action and those so-called police-armies, paradoxically converged into a belief that military action within one's borders was of necessity a response to an external enemy or idea. Many believed that after the parliamentary elections of February 1936 "Spain's destiny to be, or to die, was posed".[49] This was particularly true for Franco, who was convinced that the Comintern was behind the narrow victory of the Leftist Popular Front.[50] He was convinced of the existence of "Soviet colonies in Spain",[51] and believed that saving Spanish civilization and national independence from the Bolshevik menace and Anarchist barbarism entailed ruthless no-quarter struggle.

Franco also learned in the Asturias campaign a lesson that to a large extent explains his political behavior in Tetuán. Military and political command had to be unified and under a single head. He remembered his experience as 'shadow' chief of staff during the 1934 uprising. As previously mentioned, Diego Hidalgo, the War Minister, had given Franco political and military prerogatives far exceeding his nominal rank, and had left the real chief of staff, General Carlos Masquelet, in limbo. This experience, as Paul Preston has explained, gave Franco "an intoxicating taste of an unparalleled political-military power."[52] Of course, this was bound to cause problems in the command structure, and General López Ochoa, commanding officer of the army sent to Asturias, repeatedly complained to the War Ministry of the problems caused by having a dual-high-command – Franco in Madrid, and himself in the Asturias. López Ochoa expressed his irritation at his "authority as general in chief being invaded, and [argued] that this duality of commands could provoke a disaster for which at the end I

[49] Raimundo Fernández Cuesta, 'Razones del Alzamiento Nacional', in *La Guerra de Liberación Nacional* (Zaragoza: Universidad de Zaragoza, 1961), 12.
[50] AGMA, ZN, A.6, L.342, C. 18; Preston, *Franco*, 150. It is true that the *Komintern* did have some power to influence Spanish politics through the Socialist leader Largo Caballero, as when in view of the forthcoming elections he was persuaded not to break with the democratic parliamentary system, and to cooperate with the PSOE's moderate faction. The strength of the Spanish Communist Party in 1936 was however small: 16 deputies and roughly 400,000 votes in the 1936 elections. See Edward H. Carr, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 2-3.
[51] AGMA, ZN, A.6, L.342, C.13.
[52] Preston, *Franco*, 137.

will be held responsible."[53] The feeling was entirely mutual, and Franco was deeply angered by the fact that his orders and plans were not followed in Asturias. The experience convinced Franco that he could perfectly well head the insurgent movement himself; after all, he had been promoted to two-star general in March 1934: Spain's youngest major general. His roles as Director of the General Military Academy in Zaragoza between 1928 and 1931; commander of the 15th Infantry Brigade in Galicia from 5 February 1932; military commander of the Balearic Islands from February 1933; 'military advisor' to the War Minister between October 1934 to February 1935; commander-in-chief of Spanish forces in Morocco, army's chief of staff from 6 May 1935 to February 1936; and subsequently commander of the Canary Islands, had given him plenty of confidence, and had certainly made him believe that he was the most capable of the generals that had survived the initial phases of the uprising.

With these two thoughts in mind, Franco came to realize that because the rate at which the Spanish troops were being airlifted was painfully slow, the only thing he could do was to wait and see how his diplomatic contacts developed. Until then he only listened to Mola's and Queipo's war reports describing their military successes. The news from the battle-fronts convinced him that without victories such as those of Queipo, who controlled Cádiz, Córdoba, Granada, Huelva, and Sevilla, and Mola, who had conquered Galicia, Castilla-León, Navarra, Vitoria, and half of Aragón and Extremadura, his only power in the mainland was limited to the loyalty of the small number of his troops already operating in Queipo's Southern zone. Although not ready to leave his secure base in Morocco, he had to do something to help to distract from/cover up his lack of military activity. He decided to once more use the radio waves to promote his role as commander-in-chief of the African Army.

To those receiving these radiograms, the impression given was that Franco was in command of the uprising. For example, on 21 July Franco ordered the aerodrome of León to report back how many planes and pilots were available and to create a linkage with General Mola.[54] Franco, as commander-in-chief of the African Expeditionary Force, and from 24 July as commander-in-chief of the African and South Army proceeded to send orders to regions under Mola's command. This in itself can only be described as surprising. Not only was he interfering in Mola's areas of responsibility,

[53] López Ochoa, *Campaña*, 143. For his complains to the War Minister, 170.
[54] AGMA, CGG, A.6, L.337, C.18.

he also weakened the airpower of the Northern forces by ordering the commander of the Naval Base of Janer, located in the town of Marín, Pontevedra, to send three flying boats to Cádiz via Lisbon on 28 July 1936.[55] This movement of warplanes to the South becomes even more incomprehensible when just a day before on 27 July Mola was reminding Franco of the "urgently needed delivery of those three fighters and four bombers as I only have six aircraft for everything, [and we need to halt] the punishment the enemy is inflicting against Oviedo and Gijón with 155 mm. artillery fire."[56] Five minutes after having sent this message, at 3 a.m., Mola decided to stress his point by sending another message:

> In the radiogram 26 [July 1936] at 0.30 hrs I said "Send me three fighter planes that I need". This conflicts with your radiogram of yesterday at 23.45 hrs which said that "I will send you two Breguets [B.R. 19]". I believe there are fighter planes in Granada or Sevilla, and it could give us a great moral effect if the enemy would see this afternoon that we have some of these aircraft.[57]

Franco's habit of promising either aircraft or other materiel was in many cases no more than wishful thinking, especially when aircraft were concerned. However, all these promises gave Franco the chance to act as *primus inter pares* with the other generals, acting as a mediator between Mola and Queipo, and giving the impression to other officers that in order to get things done they had to ask him. A perfect example can be seen in the messages generated between Franco's Tetuán headquarters and the rebel forces in Albacete. Here, the *Guardia Civil* (Civil Guards), seconded by the Republican Assault Guards, rebelled against the Republican government taking control of the city and most of the region. However by 24 July the city was completely surrounded by two infantry companies, one howitzer battery, a machine-gun platoon, Assault and Police guards, plus 3,500 militia.[58] The fact that the commander of the rebel forces, Lt-Col. Martínez Moreno, continuously asked for help through Franco indicates

[55] AGMA, CGG, A.6, L.337, C.23. Also mentioned in Franco Salgado-Araujo, *Mi vida junto a Franco*, 176. This base housed the 3rd Reconnaissance Squadron equipped with five Savoia-Marchetti SM.62 flying boats. See, Blázquez, *Historia Militar de la Guerra Civil Española*, Vol. 1, 522.
[56] AGMA, CGG, A.6, L.337, C.34.
[57] AGMA, CGG, A.6, L.337, C.17.
[58] Blázquez, *Historia Militar de la Guerra Civil Española*, Vol. 1, 589.

how successful the radiograms originating from Tetuán had been in strengthening the image of Franco as leader of the insurrection. On 23 July Franco promised help and requested artillery ammunition and air support from General Miguel Cabanellas, commander of the 5th Organic Division (HQ in Zaragoza), and fighter planes from General Queipo de Llano, to be sent to Albacete.[59] These requests from Franco at this point in time were utterly ridiculous because this city was deep within Republican territory and both Sevilla and Zaragoza were also suffering from lack of materiel and threatened with possible Republican offensives. Instead of receiving help, the insurgent forces in Albacete had to make do with Franco's ever-brilliant rhetoric:

> We and especially myself admire your adhesion to the offensive that dominates and expands the beneficial influence of the National movement for the regeneration of Spain that has given so much hope to those Patriots who desire a Spain great, immortal, and feared.[60]

This need to transmit the image of being deeply immersed in military operations created the false impression that Franco was in fact responsible for the successes of Queipo's Southern forces. He had the habit of informing Mola of the progress in the South, something Queipo did every day for the preparation of the daily Nationalist war report. The fact that some African troops reached Andalusia before 22 July was used by Franco to make it look like he was in charge of them,[61] when in fact they were under the command of Queipo. That Queipo was the supreme commander in Andalucía and not Franco is something he made clear during his daily broadcasts, "letting his comrade generals Franco, Mola, Goded, Saliquet, Cabanellas, etc., know the progress of [operations] in Andalusia".[62] However, if Franco needed for the sake of his military prestige to have a more active role in the operations taking place, what stopped him from leaving his Tetuán headquarters?

He knew that with the available aircraft at least another month would be needed to fulfill the full potential of his African forces, which had survived the uprising in their original military strength and with their chain of command intact. Therefore his decision to remain in Tetuán could have been understood if he argued that moving to Sevilla

[59] AGMA, CGG, A.6, L.337, C.14.
[60] AGMA, CGG, A.6, L.337, C.14.
[61] AGMA, CGG, A.6, L.337, C. 13, 34.
[62] AGMA, Zona Nacional (ZN), A.18, L.35, C.24, Subcarpeta 14, p. 3.

made no sense unless he had a large force of his own, and furthermore a conflict over command with Queipo might have arisen. However, within a week of the beginning of the uprising Franco had managed to channel all external military assistance through his headquarters. The arrival of German and later Italian aircraft rapidly increased the number of troops transported by air. By the end of July, Franco was capable of airlifting his African Army at a rate of at least 700 men per day,[63] and by 4 August some eight battalions: three *Banderas* (4th, 5th, and 6th) of the 2nd Legion (Ceuta-Tetuán), and five indigenous *Tabores* (3rd Larache, 1st and 2nd Tetuán, and 1st and 2nd Ceuta) had reached Andalucía.[64]

He now had a force of some 5,600 men with which to prove himself in the battlefield. By the end of August that number had increased to nearly 11,000 troops and some 114 tons of materiel, and by October 24,000 troops had been airlifted.[65] Furthermore, the bombing capacity of these aircraft, specially the nine Italian Savoia-Marchetti S.81s, allowed his forces to dominate the Straits and keep the Republican Navy away from the Nationalists' African supply routes.[66] Franco could thus begin to use convoys of merchant ships. The first of them he named the 'Victory Convoy';

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[63] According to Franco Salgado-Araujo, *Mi vida junto a Franco*, 180, by 30 July the Army of Africa was being transported at a rate of 500 men plus 15 tons of war equipment per day. Modern studies such as Raul Arias Ramos, *La Legión Condor en la Guerra Civil* (Madrid: La Esfera de los Libros, 2003), 76, suggests that each aircraft could carry up to 40 men; flying four to five return trips each day, a single aircraft could carry as many as 160 to 200 men per day. See also, Christopher C. Locksley, 'Condor over Spain: The civil war, combat experience and the development of Luftwaffe airpower doctrine', *Civil Wars* 2:1 (Spring 1999), 81; and Raymond L. Proctor, *Hitler's Luftwaffe in the Spanish Civil War* (Westport, Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 1983), 26.

[64] Ramón and José María Salas Larrazabal, *Historia General de la Guerra de España* (Madrid: Rialp, 1986), 78. At the time of the uprising 2nd Legion had 78 officers, 124 NCOs, and 1,982 men. The largest native force was organized into five groups known as *Grupos de Fuerzas Regulares Indigenas* (GFRI), each composed by three infantry and one cavalry *Tabores*. At this time their composition was a follows: 1st GFRI (Tetuán) had 113 officers, 135 NCOs, and 2,045 men; 2nd (Melilla) with 113, 97 and 2,150 men; 3rd (Ceuta) with 109, 116, and 1,557 men; 4th (Larache) with 108, 112, and 1,992; and finally the 5th (Alhucemas) with 115, 91, and 478 men. AGMA, ZN, A.31, L.1, C.2.

[65] Gabriel Cardona and Fernando Férnandez Bastarreche, *La Guerra Militar: La Guerra de Columnas* (Madrid: Historia16, 1996), 55; Fernando y Salvador Moreno de Alborán, *La Guerra Silenciosa y Silenciada: Historia de la campaña naval durante la guerra de 1936-39*, Vol. 1 (Madrid: Gráficas Lormo, 1998), 708-09; Proctor, *Hitler's Luftwaffe*, 22-31; José Semprún, *Del Hacho al Pirineo*, 404; Howson, *Armas para España*, 14; De la Cierva's estimate quoted in José Andrés Gallego et al., *Historia de España: La Guerra Civil (1936-1939)*, Vol. 13.1 (Madrid: Gredos, 1989), 154; Manuel Aznar, *Historia Militar de la Guerra de España*, Vol.1 (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1958), 158.

[66] Howson, *Aircraft of the Spanish Civil War*, 26, estimates that Nazi aircraft deliveries between 28 July and 29 September amounted to 21 Ju.52/3m (one captured by the Republicans), 24 He.51 single-seat fighters and 29 He.46 two-seat tactical reconnaissance and army co-operation aircraft. As for Mussolini's deliveries until the end of September 1936, these totalled 39 Fiat CR.32 single-seat fighters, 12 SM.81s (three lost during delivery), 10 Ro.37s, and seven flying boats (one Cant Z.501 reconnaissance bomber, three Savoia-Marchetti SM.55X long-range reconnaissance bombers, and three Macchi M.41 single-seat fighters).

protected from the air by S.81s, it managed on 5 August 1936 to ferry some 3,000 troops (1st *Bandera*, 3rd *Tabor* 2nd *Grupo de Fuerzas Regulares Indígenas*, 3rd *Tabor* 4th GFRI) plus artillery batteries, communications, military and medical vehicles, 1,200 artillery shells, and two million rifle cartridges.[67] Finally, after ten days of uncertainty, Franco could order the transport of entire units of the African Army. He then needed to use the African troops already in Andalusia swiftly and intelligently if he wanted to recover the time lost in Morocco awaiting the results of his mission to Germany.[68] Without further delay, Franco ordered an advance northwards along the Sevilla-Zafra-Mérida road by two swiftly organized columns which left Sevilla on 2 and 3 August respectively with orders to advance towards Madrid. The departure of these forces represented a powerful reason for Franco to leave Morocco; however, he still chose not to do so. Even francoist authors such as Manuel Aznar affirm the urgency of a move to Sevilla when pointing out the "paradoxical and grave military situation caused by problems of communication between Sevilla and Tetuán".[69] Furthermore, Franco's two trips to Sevilla before definitively leaving his African headquarters and his decision to send one of his most trusted subordinates, Brigadier Luis Orgaz y Yoldi, to Granada,[70] shows how imperative his presence in the mainland had become if he was to stay informed and control events on the ground.

Franco's first visit took place on 27 July, and he returned to Tetuán the following day. He flew in a second time on 2 August, and also returned the next day. It is not clear what transpired during these two visits: whether Queipo de Llano and Franco co-operated and reached some sort of agreement on the distribution of command responsibilities, or if they merely ended up exasperating one another. On 24 July the newly created National Defense Council sent a radiogram to Queipo's headquarters in Sevilla naming Franco as commander-in-chief of the African and Southern Armies. The historian Francisco Espinosa says that the original radiogram has four lines crossed out, precisely those where Mola was named Commander-in-Chief of the Northern Army and

[67] Michael Alpert, *La guerra civil española en el mar* (Madrid: Siglo XX, 1987), 93; Iribarren, *Con el general Mola*, 199-200; Juan Priego López, *Síntesis histórica de la Guerra de Liberación 1936-1939* (Madrid: SHM, 1968), 43; Martínez Bande, *La marcha sobre Madrid*, footnote 3, 18; Franco Salgado-Araujo, *Mi vida junto a Franco*, 184.
[68] Viñas, *Franco, Hitler y el estallido de la Guerra Civil*, 349.
[69] Aznar, *Historia Militar*, 142.
[70] He was sent from Morocco to Granada on 25 July to supervise the defensive measures undertaken to protect the city from a possible Republican counterattack; see Ian Gibson, *La Represión Nacionalista de Granada en 1936 y la Muerte de Federico García Lorca* (París: Ruedo Ibérico, 1971), 50.

Franco was appointed commander of the Southern and African forces. Espinosa believes Queipo de Llano and his staff did this,[71] allegedly demonstrating the already poisoned relationship between the two generals. But that animosity had probably existed from the beginning of the uprising, and did not affect the independence of action enjoyed by Queipo.[72]

During the morning of 28 July, Generals Franco and Queipo, and brigadiers Orgaz and José Varela, met in Queipo's Sevilla headquarters. [73] The son of General Cabanellas, Guillermo Cabanellas, believes this meeting took place in order to solve the problem of command but without result.[74] For his part, Nuñez Calvo says that this meeting decided that Brigadier General Varela should have tactical command of all columns operating under the control of Sevilla headquarters,[75] and was ordered to repel Republican attempts to retake Córdoba.[76] Another view, from Olmedo and Cuesta's hagiography of Queipo, is that the generals met to discuss the creation in Burgos of the National Defense Council.[77] Franco's decision to travel to Sevilla precisely on this day can be described at the very least as curious. This same day, between one and three o'clock, his mission to Germany returned to Tetuán with the excellent news that Hitler had approved Franco's plea for weapons and aircraft. The explanations of why the Sevilla meeting took place on that particular day could be summarized as follows. First, Franco wanted the others to know that his mission in Germany was highly likely to be successful. That information, which reached Tetuán in the form of a brief radiogram, "Everything going well",[78] during the late hours on 27 July, was with all probability transmitted to Franco before the Sevilla meeting. Second, he wanted to collect first-

[71] Francisco Espinosa, *La Columna de la Muerte* (Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 2003), 1.
[72] Antonio Olmedo and José Cuesta Monereo, *General Queipo de Llano* (Barcelona: AHR, 1958), 136.
[73] Franco sent a cipher message to Orgaz at 20.45 pm on 27 July 1936, instructing him that a light aircraft under the command of Queipo was to collect him from Granada so that he could be in Sevilla by 10 am: AGMA, A.6, L.337, C.13.
[74] Guillermo Cabanellas, *Cuatro Generales*, Vol. 2 (Barcelona: Planeta, 1971), 283.
[75] Jesús Núñez Calvo, *General Varela: Diario de Operaciones* (Madrid: Almena, 2004), 20; Ana Quevedo y Queipo de Llano, *Queipo de Llano* (Barcelona: Planeta, 2001 p. 393, mentions that Franco arrived in Sevilla around mid-day on 28 July, adding with irony the fact that ten days had passed from the beginning of the uprising before Franco set foot on mainland Spain.
[76] Gen. Francisco J. Mariñas, *General Varela (De Soldado a General)* (Barcelona: AHR, 1956), 91.
[77] Olmedo and Cuesta, *General Queipo de Llano*, 140.
[78] Viñas, *Hitler y el estallido de la guerra civil*, 414. See also, P. Monteath, 'Hitler and the Spanish Civil War. A Case Study of Nazi Foreign Policy', *The Australian Journal of Politics and History* 32:3 (1986), 437, who says that Capt Arranz was told in Berlin of Hitler's approval in the afternoon of 26 July. This author also says that Franco's mission arrived at Tetuán at 3 pm on 28 July.

hand information regarding two points: the extent to which Sevilla was secure, in case he decided to move his headquarters there, and what progress was being made in securing and expanding Nationalist control of Andalucía.

Espinosa believes that another motivation for this travel was Franco's anger about Queipo's self-made legend that he had captured Sevilla with a few soldiers, ignoring the important role of Franco's *Legionarios* and *Regulares* in securing Cádiz, Córdoba, Granada, Huelva, and Sevilla. However, it is more plausible to argue that Franco's anger derived from Queipo's excessive combat use of the African units rather than his own conscript units. In Franco's eyes that was unjustifiable as Queipo was not short of regular forces in insurgent Andalucía, which had amounted to some 6,700 men prior to the uprising. For example, Sevilla alone had the 6th Infantry Regiment that, even excluding 377 on leave, still had 50 officers, 75 NCOs and 608 men; the 7th Cavalry Regiment had 40 officers, 41 NCOs, and 385 men (125 on leave); the 2nd Engineer Battalion, 22 officers, 18 NCOs and 258 men (120); and the 3rd Light Artillery Regiment. 40 officers, 64 NCOs, and 417 men (150). Sevilla's total military strength on 18 July included the division's administrative (226 men), logistics (192), medical (146), and veterinary (18) units, a total of 2,600 men.[79] Casualties inflicted on Franco's own carefully husbanded striking forces thus infuriated him,[80] at a time when he was planning to advance towards Mérida and Badajoz. Franco had already warned Queipo sternly on 22 July that "the use of the shock troops must be economized as much as possible for future actions. Although not inactive, these troops must not be intensively used to avoid attrition. Better to use artillery against buildings, which causes great moral effect and can save many casualties."[81]

This demand for African units was increased with the arrival of the African Army in numbers great enough to make the qualitative difference between the military capacities of the non-African insurgent forces and those of the *Banderas* and *Regulares* all too obvious. The fact that both Queipo and Mola had served for part of their careers in Morocco made them long for African units,[82] and repeatedly asked Franco to lend

[79] AGMA, ZN, A.31, L.1, C.2. As for Algeciras, Cádiz, Córdoba, Écija, and Granada, the regular forces numbered 1,043, 866, 417, 257, and 1,274 respectively. For other estimates of Nationalist regular forces in mid-July, see Alpert, *El Ejército Republicano en la Guerra Civil*, Appendix 2-C, 342-43.
[80] Espinosa, *La Columna de la Muerte*, 2.
[81] AGMA, CGG, A.6, L.337, C.34.
[82] Queipo had first campaigned in Morocco from 1912 to 1916, when his 28th *Chasseurs* Cavalry Regiment had been sent to Larache to pacify the region. He was promoted Lt-Col. in April 1914 for his

them African units, well aware that the savage legends that surrounded these troops could fracture and demoralize the Republican militias.[83] In the future, as we will see, a policy of trading troops was to damage the military capabilities of Franco's columns, reducing their speed, making them more vulnerable to attacks, and further complicating the defense of their supply lines.

Franco's second trip to Sevilla aimed at seeing his first column off, and making sure his troops knew who their commander-in-chief was. He was concerned with how his beloved African troops were being used in Andalucía, and wanted to make doubly sure they were not being overstretched. For example, on 2 August 1936 Queipo de Llano ordered the dispatch by air of 235 *Legionarios* to help Colonel González Espinosa to strengthen Granada's defense.[84] But that order was revoked and a new one stating that only one *Legion* squad (17 men) was to be sent was issued.[85] That was probably Franco's doing, –for this very same day he decided to make a one-day visit to Sevilla. He wanted to ensure that his aide-de-camp, Colonel Francisco Martín Moreno, who arrived in Sevilla on 23 or 24 July, was succeeding in the task of preparing the first motorized column to head the march toward Madrid, and planned to jump off from Sevilla at 20.00 hours on 3 August 1936.[86]

Franco was also losing patience with the time-consuming airlift, anxious as he was to see his name in the headlines announcing newly 'liberated' cities. The importance given by Franco to capturing republican territories cannot be

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performance in skirmishes with rebel tribes. Promoted Brigadier in December 1922, he was sent to Ceuta as deputy area commander on 9 April 1923. As for Mola, the Moroccan campaigns gave him the opportunity for an extremely swift ascent: he was promoted to Lt-Col. in June 1921, Col in February 1926, and Brigadier in October 1927.

[83] For example, Jose María Iribarren, Mola's secretary, in his diary entry for 7 August 1936, remembers Mola requesting that Franco send one *Bandera* to help his operations at the Somosierra pass (see Iribarren, *Con el General Mola*, 214).

[84] AGMA, A.18, L.18, C30.

[85] Ibid. These radiograms suggest that that the information provided byJose M. Martínez Bande, *La Campaña de Andalucía* (Madrid: SHM, 1969), 76, is incorrect. Martínez Bande states that Queipo de Llano received on 2 August a letter describing the extremely delicate position at Granada, and explains why he decided to send one *Legion* company on 3 August, and a second on 4 August. But the letter was not written until 5 August, and only delivered the following day. In it Col. González Espinosa explains to his general and friend Queipo his lack of infantry units, ammunition, and materiel. He only had one bomber to face eight enemy aircraft located at Cerrajón de Alcudia. In order to defend Granada's explosives factory, which appeared to be one a main enemy objective, he requested two *Legion* companies, 250 rifles to arm two empty-handed companies, 50,000 cartridges, 300 81mm mortar shells, 1,000 hand grenades, and 1,500 fuses for 12 and 50 kg air bombs. AGMA, A.10, L.447, C.9.

[86] Preston, *Franco*, 206.

underestimated. The conquest of key cities should not be solely understood from a military point of view, but also as a vital factor in raising the morale of his forces and their prestige both inside and outside Spain. That idea is well illustrated by Francoist historian Manuel Aznar, who in reflecting on the fall of Mérida and Badajoz and the union of both insurgent South and Mola's North, wrote that at last "Franco was now master of one of Spain's frontiers",[87] that of central Portugal. The political gains deriving from 'liberating' Mérida, Badajoz, Oviedo, San Sebastian, and Toledo were very important as a means of accumulating political weight through the use of propaganda.

Another issue to be debated during Franco's second visit to Sevilla was the objectives of these columns. Franco was desperate to see his troops advancing, and was not willing to wait any longer. He organized two columns each numbering roughly between 2,000 and 2,500 men and mainly composed of forces of the Spanish Foreign Legion and the Spanish-led Moroccan indigenous *Regulares*, with orders to join with Mola's forces from Cáceres and to take Badajoz. At a time when insurgent Andalucía was still in a precarious situation, this reduction in his front-line troops probably worried Queipo. And in addition columns also included artillery and service units that belonged to Queipo's 2nd Division. Both Franco and Queipo had to trade their various military capacities, and while Queipo could provide artillery, ammunition, food, and other facilities; Franco could trade units from his African forces, leaving some under the command of Brigadier Varela to help secure Queipo's control of Andalucía. This was a better deal for Franco, for it allowed him to organize more powerful columns and he could also exercise pressure on Queipo by providing troops that were entirely loyal to himself. As Franco assured *The Guardian* correspondent during an interview at his Tetuán headquarters, "The Foreign Legion, both Spanish and native, is entirely loyal to me."[88]

Despite all the troop movements, the truth was that the operational timing of what was now being known as the Expeditionary Army, and later renamed the Column

[87] Aznar, *Historia Militar*, Vol. 1, 180.
[88] R.H. Haigh, D. Morris, and A. Peters, eds., *The Guardian Book of the Spanish Civil War* (Aldershot, Hauts: Wildwood house, 1987), 12.

of Madrid, was less than clear. Guillermo Cabanellas believes that Franco, having decided that his columns should follow the Sevilla-Mérida route instead of the Córdoba-Despeñaperros-La Mancha – a decision taken "entirely on his own initiative and responsibility" (*por sí y ante sí*)[89] – also instructed them to capture and secure Badajoz,[90] even though at the time he took this decision the situation was confused, and little was known regarding the approximate strength of the Republican army and militia forces in the province of Badajoz.[91] Some evidence suggests that the decision to capture Badajoz was solely taken by Franco, with Queipo fully agreeing. On his departure Lt-Col. Carlos Asensio, commander of the first column, was simply instructed to "advance as much as possible following the Zafra-Mérida route."[92] On 4 August, having crossed the boundary between Andalucía and Extremadura and after capturing the village of Monesterio, he asked Franco to clarify "if the given order to *quickly advance* towards Talavera excludes the occupation of Badajoz, contemplated in the first order."[93] Asensio was probably wondering if he could be given clearer instructions as how to organize simultaneous attacks against Mérida and Badajoz, or if he should continue the advance once Mérida was taken, while other units took care of Badajoz. Queipo, having received desperate calls for help from the Badajoz barracks where the Civil Guards and Assault Guards were under siege, also wanted to capture Badajoz. He proposed to Franco that:

> Given the situation of Badajoz's Civil and Assault Guards which H.E. knows and considering the present international circumstances I believe necessary that the column of [Major Antonio] Castejón [which left Sevilla on 3 August] should take Badajoz aided by a column from Cáceres; meanwhile Asensio's column will continue towards Mérida. Tell me if I can organize the operation.[94]

This meant that once Asensio took Zafra, Castejón was meant to follow the North-West road leading to Badajoz, while Asensio continued on the North road to

[89] Cabanellas, *Los cuatro generales: La lucha por el poder*, Vol. 2, 283.
[90] Martínez Bande, 'Doc. 2: Orden General de Operaciones No. 1', *La Marcha sobre Madrid*, 165.
[91] The only confirmed news was that the city's Civil Guard and some Republican police force (*Guardias de Asalto*), who had joined the uprising, failed to take control of the city and had to seek refuge in their barracks, where they surrendered on 7 August 1936 after a siege. AGMA, A.6, L.337, C.1.
[92] AGMA, ZN, A.22, L.2, C.16.
[93] AGMA, ZN, A.6, L.342, C.13. Emphasis is mine.
[94] AGMA, CGG, A.6, L.337, C.1.

Mérida. This, if successful, would have saved time. However, Franco, having spoken with Queipo on the phone, agreed to capture Badajoz, something of which he was already convinced, but ordered Asensio and Castejón to together capture Mérida, and after this Badajoz. To accomplish this meant postponing the advance towards Madrid by a week; a time occupied in reorganizing the two columns in Mérida, covering the 122 km. (76 miles) from Mérida to Badajoz and back, and seizing and securing Badajoz and its surroundings.[95] That also gave time for the Republican forces to prepare and mount counter-attacks, as actually happened in Navalmoral on 22 and 24 August 1936.[96]

These radiograms prove four things. First, Franco provided no clear operational orders to his columns. Queipo de Llano tried to resolve this lack of clarity, probably believing that it made more sense for him to have the operational command of these African columns in the absence of Franco, who was once again in Morocco. Second, Franco's absence was causing confusion over command, as proven by the fact that both Asensio and Castejón simultaneously sent daily reports both to Sevilla and Tetuán. Third, Queipo, regardless of his personal opinion of Franco, put himself under Franco's orders, therefore respecting and obeying Burgos when on 3 August (Decree No. 25) Franco was appointed a member of the National Defense Council.[97] Finally, the political weight (first city taken by force by the insurgent army) and strategic importance (to unite the two main areas under insurgent control, and also to control the Portuguese border which relieved Franco's of any worry about their left flank) of capturing Badajoz swiftly and at any price was very much needed to boost his image, and outweighed all other considerations, even that of reaching Madrid as quickly as possible.[98]

Franco's decision to move from Morocco and to establish his headquarters in Sevilla in early August was thus far from being a mere coincidence. Once the airlift was proceeding efficiently and the sea convoy had crossed the Straits on 5 August, Franco had no more excuses for remaining in Morocco. Incredible as it may seem, Franco's most important reason to move his headquarters to Sevilla was probably that the

[95] AGMA, ZN, A.22, L.2, C.16.
[96] AGMA, ZN, A.22, L.2, C.17.
[97] Cabanellas, *Cuatro Generales*, Vol. 2, 226.
[98] In addition to this, the Portuguese government allowed the rebel forces to use its territory, infrastructure and airfields. For example, a radiogram from Queipo to Franco on 5 August 1936 communicated that the Portuguese government authorizes the entry of people and weapons, but separately and at night as to avoid attracting attention. AGMA, CGG, A.1, L.40, C.37.

situation was developing well enough so that his own security and control could be guaranteed both in Morocco and at Sevilla. As he told Lt-Col. Eduardo Losas Camaña, Larache's *Jefatura* chief:

> I urge you to immediately fix "that" of Larache. I know is a difficult situation, but you have full powers. Before I depart in order to fix the problem in the Peninsula, I want you to guarantee that not a single "wasps' nest" be left in my back. [99]

Only when his two leading columns had begun to 'liberate' territories outside Andalucía, Morocco was under control, and his army was being transported swiftly and in sufficient numbers, did he finally decide to leave Tetuán for Sevilla definitely on 7 August 1936. A further reason for moving was the arrival on 6 August at Cádiz of the first German supply ship, fully loaded with six Heinkel He.51B and their pilots and maintenance crew, anti-aircraft guns, and ammunition, all of which was immediately transported for assembly at Sevilla's Tablada airbase.[100] Franco's military enterprise was growing incredibly fast. Feeling safe and having had enough time to think and see how things developed, Franco was ready to implement the strategy he believed was needed to win the war, and decided it was time to move ahead and establish his own headquarters in Sevilla.[101]

III. FRANCO AS MILITARY COMMANDER

Control over foreign supplies and the quagmire in which Mola's forces found themselves in the North gave Franco absolute preponderance over the other generals. But the foreign assistance that was arriving would predictably not be sufficient to win the war, and in his capacity as military commander Franco needed to make use of everything he had learned during his career. Above all, he needed to develop a strategy

[99] Raúl C. Cancio Fernández, 'Col. Adolfo Prada y Col. Eduardo Losas: Africanismo y Juntismo en el último acto de la Guerra Civil', *Military History Digital Journal*, www.militaryhistory.es, 11/01/2011, 7.
[100] Gerald Howson, *Aircraft of the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (London: Putnam Aeronautical Books, 1990), 173.
[101] It is important to note that Franco decided to take over the Marquis of Yanduri mansion, and refused to make use of Sevilla's military buildings in order to house a single unified Southern Command, to better coordinate Franco's *Legion* and *Regulares* and Queipo de Llano's 2nd Division forces. Preston, *Franco*, 200, 207; Quevedo, *Queipo de Llano*, 393.

to capture Madrid.[102] As he told General Wilhelm von Faupel, *Chargé d'Affaires* in Spain on 30 November 1936: "I will take Madrid; then all of Spain, including Catalonia, will fall into my hands more or less without a fight."[103]

Although a full evaluation of Franco as a military commander during the entire war is beyond the scope of this article, a concise analysis of his decisions during these early months does reveal how he understood war and what he considered his mission to be. Franco's command decisions have often been subjected to harsh criticism, without being considered in the context of war in the 1930s. Much has been written to demythologize Franco as a military genius, an image mainly constructed during his dictatorship. His contemporary image can be compared with that of Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, Commander in Chief of the British Expeditionary Force from 1915 to 1918. Like Franco, Haig received severe criticism both from his fellow generals and from historians of the First World War. He has been described as occasionally unintelligible in his speech, notably stupid, of mediocre ability, slow to grasp new situations, and afflicted with an obsessive need for order. He has frequently been seen as obstinate, hostile to the views of others, and pathologically suspicious of innovation and change.[104]

In contrast to Haig, whose image has been substantially revised,[105] criticism of Franco's "proverbial lack of imagination and audacity, his irresistible tendency towards a strategy of terror, and his extreme mediocrity"[106] has not been subject to revision. Some historians believe that he was ill-prepared for the command of units larger than a brigade or a regiment. That judgment is based on two facts: that his last combat command was during the Alhucemas landings in September 1925, when he had commanded the 4,000-man Spanish Foreign Legion, and that operations in Morocco had been conducted against a "primitive" opponent and had little resemblance to modern warfare.[107] Of course, during the 1920s and 1930s, other national armed forces

[102] DGFP, D, III, No. 109: Foreign Minister to the Embassy in Italy, 27 October 1936. "The military success of the Nationalists in Spain has been so great that one can count on the capture of Madrid in the course of this week or next."
[103] DGFP, D, III, No. 148.
[104] Tim Travers, *The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front and the Emergence of Modern War, 1900-1918* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Military Classics, 2003), 101-104.
[105] For example, J.P. Harris, *Douglas Haig and the First World War* (Cambridge: OUP, 2008), 1-2.
[106] Carlos Blanco Escolá, *La incompetencia militar de Franco* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2000), 504.
[107] Juan Blázquez Miguel, *Auténtico Franco*, 81; Carlos Blanco Escolá, *La incompetencia*, 152; Gabriel Cardona, *Historia Militar de la guerra civil*, 45.

facing frequent colonial turmoil found themselves unable to prepare, train, and consolidate doctrine for wars of national effort in Europe.[108] Furthermore, gaining military experience abroad was something many key military figures of the Second World War were doing in the 1930s, especially British and French officers who regarded overseas service as a way to see action and to gain promotion. Since most inter-war European armies acted as "colonial police forces," ample opportunities to satisfy such ambitions existed.

Undoubtedly, Franco's experience in Morocco shaped his understanding of what was needed to win a war. He was particularly influenced by the period between General Manuel Fernández Silvestre's defeat at Annual on 22 July 1921 – followed by the collapse of the Spanish Army and the loss of almost all of eastern Morocco – and Abd el-Krim's defeat by the Franco-Spanish offensives of 1925. From Franco's arrival as a major at the besieged city of Melilla on 24 July 1921 until his departure from Africa as a brigadier in 1926, he endured the Spanish Army's toughest and most difficult campaign between 1898 and the civil war. By 1926, the African fighting had taught him a great many things, and sometimes this knowledge was unconventional. He had learned to disregard the assertion of the 1913 Infantry Tactics Regulations that "bayonet assault [was] the best means to achieve victory."[109] He now understood the need both to disperse his units in order to present less conspicuous targets, and to ensure that mobile reserves were always present and ready to reinforce the attack. Heavy and light machine-guns could save many lives, as could tanks. And it was vital to keep war-experienced officers and NCOs well motivated with appropriate rewards, and to make sure troops were given proper rest and care – all seemingly self-evident but often neglected elements of military wisdom.[110] Once the combined French-Spanish campaign of 1925 defeated the Riff rebellion, the Spanish African army could finally get back to what it did best: using "flying-column" tactics or engaging the enemy at the front while a flanking maneuver cut the enemy's line of retreat. These were precisely the characteristics of the initial operations in 1936. Prolonged colonial campaigns in Morocco had prepared the army to operate under fire, made it flexible and tough in the

[108] David French, 'Big wars and small wars between the wars, 1919-39', in Hew Strachan, ed., *Big Wars and Small Wars: The British Army and the lessons of War in the 20th Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 39, 42.
[109] *Reglamento Táctico de Infantería* (Toledo: Imprenta del Colegio de María Cristina, 1914), 51.
[110] Maj. Francisco Franco Bahamonde, *Marruecos: Diario de una Bandera* (Madrid: 1922; electronic edition 1997), ch. XX.

field, and its vigorous and ruthless discipline compensated for a lack of numbers. Furthermore the small size of the columns and their ability to independently operate meant that junior officers and NCOs had greater command responsibilities, but had left them unprepared for large combined operations. In addition to these, Franco shared the belief – common both in Spain and elsewhere – that the officer's duty in combat was to be fearless in the face of enemy fire. This explains why the casualty rate among Legion officers during the Spanish Civil War was higher than that of their troops (46 percent compared to 39 percent),[111] revealing not merely bravery, but more importantly something of their "combat philosophy" and its negative impact on the conduct of operations. Tactics replaced strategy as the core of the campaign plan, staffs remained underdeveloped, and individual bravery and faith in victory received excessive emphasis.[112] As Franco explained in 1938:

> At Annual, the enemy was neither following a coordinated action, nor had superior equipment; his allies were the will to victory, [together with] constant use of tactical surprise and moral principles. Our glorious campaign [of 1936,] initially characterized for its severe lack of men and equipment[,] was won against all odds because [of] our firm will to victory, absolute faith in our cause, well conducted combined operations, and superior moral force.[113]

Franco's African experiences were inextricably linked with his military personality, and this explains his orders in August and September 1936. On a number of occasions in 1937 and 1938, Franco was criticized as being too slow, too cautious, and "lacking in vision."[114] But in these two months he took precisely the type of risks which had led to catastrophe at Barranco del Lobo in 1909 and at Annual in 1921. His decision to send two light columns, commanded by Lt-Col. Carlos Asensio Cabanillas and Major Antonio Castejón Espinosa, with only occasional air support towards Madrid on 2 and 3

[111] José E. Álvarez, *The Betrothed of Death*, 236.
[112] H. Strachan (1991), *European Armies*, p. 88. For an interesting analysis of the French colonial army until the outbreak of WWI see, D. Porch (1981), *The March to the Marne: The French Army 1871-1914*, pp. 134-68.
[113] [Francisco Franco Bahamonde], 'Comentarios al Reglamento de Grandes Unidades', *Revista de Historia Militar*, 40: 1976, 270.
[114] Preston, 'General Franco as military leader', 21, 23.

August, demonstrates his willingness to risk every force available.[115] Although military intelligence estimated that the enemy was short of "discipline and military readiness, lacking professional officers and short of weapons and ammunition, […], making the enemy's resistance usually feeble,"[116] the same used to be said of the Rif tribesmen. Franco indeed displayed qualities required of those in high command in war: "[w]ill-power. Audacity in attack, stubbornness in defense – these were the supreme virtues, and with them alone battles could be won."[117] Fortunately for Franco, his early columns did not encounter large enemy forces (most of which were concentrated along the Córdoba-Granada front), and while his decision to attack the well-defended Badajoz area with only four battalions proved extremely risky, it was ultimately successful.

Despite the fact that Franco continued to supplement the advancing columns with African Army units, the available numbers were still far from sufficient to protect his long supply route, to occupy and police the territory in his forces' rear, and to continue the advance towards Madrid. Many have argued that Madrid would have fallen had Franco chosen to ignore Toledo.[118] But that is pure speculation. The truth is that Franco's columns covered a distance of 316 km (189 miles) from Sevilla to Mérida (captured 11 August 1936), then turned West towards Badajoz (15 August), and back to Mérida in only 15 days, an average march performance, including combat, of an astonishing 21 km per day. However, during the second phase, from Mérida to Navalmoral de la Mata and Talavera de la Reina (captured on 3 September), Maqueda (21 September), Torrijos (22 September), and Toledo (28 September), the columns only

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[115] Asensio's column was composed of the 4th *Bandera*, 2nd *Tabor* 1st GFRI, two heavy machine-gun groups (equipped with the Spanish produced 7mm. Hotchkiss, mod. 1922), the 7th Battery 3rd Light Artillery Regiment (Seville) equipped with 70/16 Schneider (mod. 1908) mountain-guns – later exchanged for captured 75/28 (mod. 1906) during the occupation of Oropesa (30.08.36), 1st Co 2nd Engineers Bn. (Seville), and one mounted radio-transmission section. It received another battery of 105/11 (Mod. 1919) *Schneider* mountain-howitzers on 17 August. Castejón column had the 5th *Bandera*, 2nd *Tabor* 3rd GFRI, 4th Bty. 3rd Light Art. Reg. (Seville) equipped with 75/28 (mod. 1906) field guns. The following descriptions only refer to the columns' approximate combat strengths (or 'teeth'), since an estimation of their 'tail' (logistics, medical services, transport, and communications) is impossible with the available data. On 7 August a further third column commanded by Lt-Col. Heliodoro Tella Cantos also departed from Seville, which was to serve as reinforcement for the two leading columns. This column was made up of the 1st *Bandera* (Melilla), 1st *Tabor* 1st GFRI, the newly created 9th Bty. 3rd Light Art. Reg. (Seville) with four 105/22 Vickers (mod. 1922) howitzers and one section of Civil Guard.

[116] Martínez Bande, *La Marcha sobre Madrid*, Appendix 3, 169.

[117] John Strawson, *Hitler as Military Commander* (Barnsley, S. Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Military Classics, 2003), 17.

[118] Preston, *Franco*, 224-226; Cardona, *Historia Militar de una guerra civil*, 78-79; Antony Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War* (London: Cassell Military Paperbacks, 1999), 149; Cardona, *La incompetencia militar de Franco*, 257-263.

averaged 7 km (5 miles) per day , a total of 319 km (191 miles) in 45 days. It seems plausible that inevitable logistical problems and a more organized and resilient Republican defense explain why the Nationalist forces failed to capture Madrid. Furthermore, Franco's decision to maintain the two-battalion column structure, which became a three-battalion column only late in September 1936, also helped to slow the advance. Many possible factors might explain this decision, such as shortages of equipment, too many and too dispersed fronts, the increasing exhaustion of the troops, and above all a shortage of well-trained officers with command experience at regimental and divisional level.

Strategically speaking, at this point Franco's main concern was to decide which course of action would enable him to quickly seize Madrid. However, that changed as early as October 1936, when Franco necessarily began to consider what would happen if Madrid did not fall. Historians have advanced various theories about Franco's strategic thinking. Geoffrey Jensen had argued that Franco's military thought evolved from his war experience in Morocco and that "[fortunately] for him, these experiences proved especially apt in the civil war."[119] He also believes that Franco's strategy of "gradual approach," learned during the long colonial campaigns, also corresponds to the lessons of the Second World War, when time and attrition had allegedly triumphed over the doctrine of decisive battle.[120] Other historians, such as Stanley Payne and Miguel Alonso Baquer, argue that Franco's extensive tactical experience compensated for his lack of strategic and operational wisdom.[121] German and Italian weapons and technicians, together with his own professional staff, gave Franco a far more effective military machine than the Republican Army. Payne believes that the Nationalist army's "superiority of leadership, equipment, and organization" balanced the operational impact of Franco's "cautious nature."[122] The historian and former brigadier Miguel Alonso Baquer, meanwhile, proposes a more sophisticated notion: that Franco was following a "British indirect approach strategy."[123] Under the influence of J.F.C. Fuller's

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[119] Jensen, *Franco*, 97.
[120] Ibid., 95.
[121] Stanley Payne, 'La Guerra de España', and Miguel Alonso Baquer, 'La Estrategia en la Guerra de España', in Francisco Aguado Sánchez et al., *La Guerra y la Paz: Cincuenta años después* (Madrid: Campillo-Nevado, 1990), 206.
[122] Stanley Payne, *Politics and the Military in Modern Spain* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford UP, 1967), 395-396.
[123] Alonso Baquer, *La Guerra y la Paz,* 233. His exact words were that Franco "*practica una estrategia de aproximación indirecta de inspiración británica*," while Rojo "*se entrega a una estrategia directa*

Decisive Battles of the Western World and Liddell Hart's *The Decisive Wars of History* (later replaced by *Strategy: The Indirect Approach*),[124] Baquer has argued that unlike his opponent General Vicente Rojo, Franco never sought a "decisive battle." Franco's experience in Spanish Morocco had taught him that total victory was not a question of speed but perseverance.

After being designated *Generalísimo* of all Nationalist forces on 29 September 1936, Franco indeed gave thought to strategy, and expressed deep concern about the precarious situation of the city of Oviedo, which was completely surrounded and under constant siege. Realizing that Madrid would not fall quickly; he diverted men and materiel to the Ribadeo-Oviedo front, thereby creating a total force of 21,000 men.[125] His thinking is clear from his Operational Instructions of October 1936:

> The situation in Oviedo occupies a great number of the enemy's forces, which, if freed, could apply decisive pressure to other sectors of the North front. The political and moral impact of a total evacuation of Oviedo would be terrible both abroad and in Spain, and immensely harmful to our national cause.[126]

This demonstrates that Franco had a global vision of the strategic situation of his numerous fronts, and that he was not ready to consider Madrid as the sole strategic aim. In fact he now had more or less the same number of troops at the Oviedo front as he did on the west of Madrid (25,000-30,000 men).[127] But that did not mean that he could disentangle his forces from the operations against Madrid, especially once the Republican Popular Army, re-organized and well-supplied, took the initiative and was able to counter-attack in the summer of 1937. Furthermore his appreciation of the enemy had also changed from the initial "demoralized and tired"[128] adversary initially

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para la acción de estructura germánica." The essay later appeared as the first chapter of his book *El Ebro: La batalla decisiva de los cien días* (Madrid: La Esfera de los Libros, 2003), 36-40.

[124] Alonso Baquer, *El Ebro*, 13.

[125] AGMA, A.7, L.365, C.7. The composition of this force (20,700 men) is as follows: 70 infantry companies with 13,000 men; 18 artillery batteries with 1,900 men; 3 engineer companies with 500 men; 1,600 militia; Civil Guard 700 men;, Assault Guard 200 men; one Legion battalion of 500 men, and 8 battalion of *Regulares* with 2,000 men.

[126] AGMA, A.7, L.365, C.8. Franco estimated that some 40,000 enemy forces operated around Oviedo.

[127] Madrid was also threatened from the North where some 15,000 spread along the Guadarrama mountains, and from the North-East along the Soria-Guadalajara road with some 12,000 men.

[128] AGMA, CGG, A.6, L.337, C.35.

encountered to a more complex analysis: "[The] enemy has mass-strength and makes good use of weapons – even though lacking in officers and NCOs and morale."[129]

Between July and August 1936, the civil war was evolving so swiftly that Franco's military expertise and experience began to reach its limits. On 5 August, the National Defense Council in Burgos issued a call-up decree of all annual drafts of 1933, 1934 and 1935. Spain was rapidly heading towards total war, and a number of the Council's actions made full mobilization seem inevitable: passing the decree for the immediate promotion of first sergeants, sergeants and corporals (18 August), creating a new recruiting process to join the Foreign Legion (29 August), second-lieutenant promotions and the creation of officer courses in Sevilla and Burgos (4 September). All of these decisions forced Franco to come to terms with a situation he had only known through textbooks, and in particular the 1925 *Regulations for the Employment of Large Units* – adopted by both armies during the Civil War as their main operational guidance.

Franco's operational command between October and November 1936 cannot be fully comprehended without a close study of the 1938 edition of this small book, which appeared enhanced with Franco's own comments and recommendations as well as deletions of those 1925 edition concepts he disagreed with. For example, Franco removed paragraph 105, which stated that "a firm desire for victory, a properly well organized combined operation, and surprise action will not be enough if the High Command has not achieved superiority in numbers, material and moral forces."[130] For him "an officer's tactical knowledge supported by his men's morale and skill, combined with a true desire to win will make up for any inferiority in equipment and numbers."[131]

With Madrid apparently within reach and with his forces growing in numbers, Franco relied on these principles to plan his decisive attack. He chose a frontal offensive with the aim of breaking through the enemy lines. The 1925 *Reglamento* explained that this tactic "require[d] a previous wearing down of the enemy, forcing him to call his reserve forces into the frontline. Once weakened, a sufficiently strong thrust will break through and open the frontline. [However] if the enemy's front-line weak points are not known [,] the break-through thrust must be directed against those sectors where favorable terrain conditions prevail. [This tactical system] demands superiority in

[129] AGMA, ZN, A.7, L.365, C.8.
[130] Estado Mayor Central del Ejército, *Servicio en Campaña: Reglamento para el empleo táctico de las grandes unidades* (Madrid: Talleres del Depósito de la Guerra, 1924), 47-48.
[131] [Francisco Franco Bahamonde], 'Comentario al Reglamento de Grandes Unidades', 270.

numbers, not only in the break-through zone, but along the entire attack front."[132] Franco did almost everything by the book, except for taking the last and most important advice: ensuring superior numbers. He organized six columns with three more in reserve with the intention of breaking the enemy's front line in the Northeast. The main thrust through the *Ciudad Universitaria* felt upon the columns commanded by Lt-Col. Asensio (2,700 men), Lt-Col. Bartomeu González (2,500 men) and Lt-Col. Delgado Serrano (2,700 men). The initial force of 13,000 men failed against an estimated Republican defense of 18,000 soldiers and Franco had to think of something else.[133] The *Reglamento* recommended diversionary attacks or tactical withdrawal to increase the effect of the offensive.[134] However, Franco resolutely opposed the use of troops other than as part of the main objective, because, he said, "secondary or demonstrative actions display a lower intensity and rhythm than the main ones, and hinder the objective of forcing the enemy to employ his reserves."[135] He also argued that a large concentration of forces was not desirable for maneuver warfare since it "[made] movement too slow."[136] He was convinced that small columns operating in a coordinated way had greater impact and superior maneuverability, which might explain the Nationalists' shortage of troops during their attack against the La Coruña road in January 1937.

In conclusion, there can be little doubt that from a political point of view, the period between Tetuán and Sevilla was a tremendously positive one for Franco. During almost three weeks, he saw key figures of the military rebellion such as Sanjurjo, Goded, and Fanjul disappear. He also concluded that Mola did not have enough military power to successfully break through Madrid's Republican defensive lines in the Guadarrama Pass. Finally, unlike Mola and Queipo, and through a variety of foreign contacts in Tangier, Franco managed to convince the Germans and Italians of the probable success of the anti-Communist military rebellion, and most importantly to see his army of Legionaries and *Regulares* as the only unit capable of rectifying Mola's military setbacks. Having achieved political preponderance over his peers, he also managed to achieve the necessary military momentum – through the conquest of

[132] *Reglamento*, 71.
[133] Blázquez, *Historia Militar de la Guerra Civil Española*, Vol. 2, 521-523.
[134] *Reglamento*, 72.
[135] [Francisco Franco Bahamonde], 'Comentarios al Reglamento de grandes unidades', 276.
[136] Ibid., 274.

Badajoz, the liberation of Toledo, the relief of Oviedo, and the drive to the outskirts of Madrid – to command the full attention of his national and international audience. Yet Franco's strategic capacity must in the end be measured by his failure to capture Madrid. His military decisions and operational skills although successful in seizing territory and in breaking the siege of Oviedo had a negative impact on the offensive toward Madrid, and left his troops without the necessary numbers to be truly decisive once they arrived there. Franco had no intention of prolonging the war. Had he been given the chance to destroy the Republican forces in a single great battle or series of battles, as the *Wehrmacht* did in France in 1940, he would doubtless have taken it. As Fuller wrote to Liddell Hart in June 1929, "the object is to defeat the enemy and if this can be done by a direct approach so much the better."[137] Franco's failure as a military commander in 1936 was mainly caused by the formative experiences in Africa which did not prepare him or his army for large-scale maneuver warfare.

[137] Ibid., *A History of Military Thought*, p. 682.