

Document analysis**Document A**

When considering which side, the Right or Left can be held responsible for causing the Civil War, the debate often focuses on which side departed from democratic and legal means first. The Socialists are held responsible, by some, for refusing to join the Popular Front government which in turn concerned the Right; they thought this could be because the Socialists were now intent on revolution. The Right then planned the coup to prevent this.

In terms of which side resorted to violence first, it could be viewed as the Left in attempting to seize power in the Asturias Rising – but the right had attempted this earlier, in 1932 in the Sanjurjo Rising. In the end most historians agree that it was the right's coup that triggered the general conflict.

From Antony Beever, *The Battle for Spain: The Spanish Civil War 1936–1939*, 2006

Document B

Faced with the difficulties of modernising a backward economy and social structure in a country without strong democratic traditions, and against the background of the Depression, the Republic was facing insurmountable problems by 1936. Civil War may not have been inevitable but certainly did not come as a surprise.

From Patricia Knight, *The Spanish Civil War*, 1998

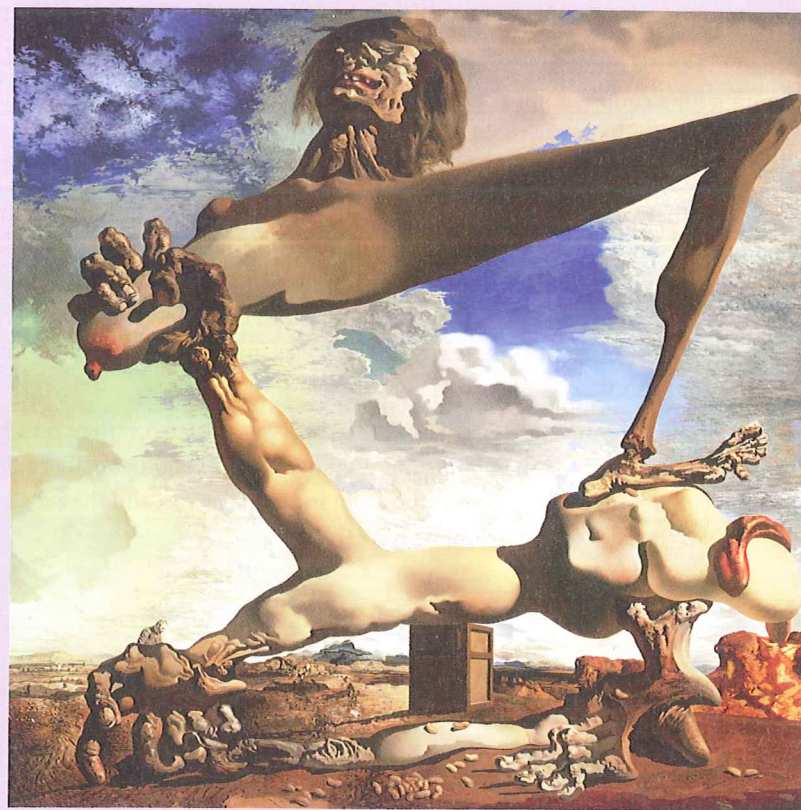
Question

Explain the key points made by Antony Beever in Document A and Patricia Knight in Document B.

ToK Time

Discuss in small groups how the political and socio-economic situation of a contemporary observer influences his or her opinion of a crisis such as the Spanish Civil War. Write up the key points of your discussion in your ToK journal.

‘Soft Construction with Boiled Beans (Premonition of Civil War)’ (1936), by the Spanish Surrealist painter Salvador Dalí.

**Research question**

Salvador Dalí painted ‘Soft Construction with Boiled Beans (Premonition of Civil War)’ in 1936. In pairs, research Dalí’s motives in painting this picture and what the images in the picture represent with regard to Spain and war.

The course of the Spanish Civil War

With the assistance of Nazi Germany, General Franco airlifted 24,000 experienced troops of the Army of Africa to Spain. It was the fact that Hitler responded to Franco’s pleas for help, that kept Franco’s efforts alive. Once on the Spanish mainland, he used a policy of terror as his forces moved towards Madrid in August. Franco’s success was complemented by the achievements of General Emilio Mola, who took territory in the north (see map).

The army coup had aimed to crush the ‘left revolution’, but had instead politicized and radicalized many Spaniards towards the left. The supporters of the Republican regime of 1936 became known as the ‘Loyalists’, and those that supported the rebels called themselves ‘Nationalists’. Divisions could generally be drawn by class: the workers supporting the Republic and the middle and upper classes the Nationalists. The Nationalists also had the support of much of the church. However, alliances could also be accidental, depending on where they were when the war developed. The peasants of the north and central Spain tended to be Nationalists, while the landless labourers of the south followed the Republicans. The Basques and Catalans supported the Republic, as it had backed their autonomous ambitions.

Although the Nationalists made gains in the first weeks of the war, the Republic retained some advantages. It remained in control of most major cities and key industrial areas, it had Spain’s gold reserves, and important elements of the military – most of the air force and navy – remained loyal. Yet as you can see from the timeline and the maps below, the Nationalists were able to make steady progress in pushing back the Republic.



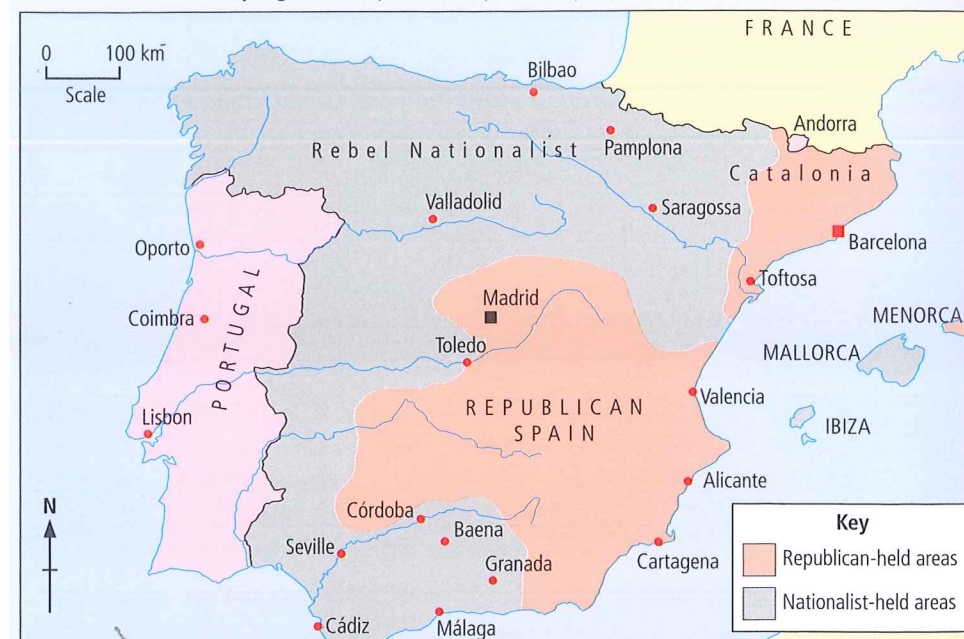
‘Death of a Loyalist’, photograph by Robert Capa, 5 September 1936.

Timeline of the Spanish Civil War – 1936–39

Republican- and Nationalist-held territory, July 1936.

1936	Jul	Franco's forces airlifted from Morocco to southern Spain
	Aug	Britain and France begin policy of non-intervention
	4 Sep	Largo Caballero forms new Republican government
	13 Sep	San Sebastián taken by Nationalists
	Oct	Republic incorporates militias into new Popular Army
	1 Oct	Franco becomes head of Nationalist government and supreme military commander
	29 Oct	Soviet intervention begins; German and Italian planes bomb Madrid
	6 Nov	Republican government leaves Madrid for Valencia
	23 Nov	Nationalists abandon attempt to take Madrid
1937	Feb	Nationalist offensive to cut the links between Madrid and Valencia fails at the battle of Jarama. Russian tanks and planes play a crucial role in the battle
	8 Feb	Fall of Málaga to the Nationalists
	March	Nationalist offensive to tighten the pressure on Madrid from the north fails at the battle of Guadalajara. This was a major defeat for the Italian Army, and again Soviet equipment was vital to Republican success
	Apr	Franco unites Carlists, fascists and monarchists into one movement
	26 Apr	German Condor Legion bombs and destroys Guernica
	15 May	Fall of Largo Caballero
	17 May	Juan Negrin forms new government
	19 Jun	Fall of Bilbao to the Nationalists; end of Basque independence
	Jul	Republican offensive to break the siege of Madrid to the west fails at Brunete
	Aug	Republican offensive to break out from Madrid to the north-east fails at Belchite
	Sep–Oct	Nationalists captured rest of northern Spain
	Dec	Newly organized Republican Popular Army captures Teruel in central Spain.

Republican- and Nationalist-held territory, May 1938.



1938	Feb	Nationalists retake Teruel and launch the strategically crucial advance to the Mediterranean to cut Catalonia off from the rest of Republican Spain
	Apr	Nationalists reach the Mediterranean at Vinaroz. Republican Spain cut in two
	Jul	Republican offensive on the River Ebro fails
	Nov	Nationalists drive Republicans back across River Ebro. Nationalists march on Barcelona
1939	Feb	Barcelona falls to Nationalists
	28 Mar	Nationalists enter Madrid
	1 Apr	Franco announces end of war.

Why did the Nationalists win the Spanish Civil War?

We can analyze the reasons for the Nationalist victory by considering the weaknesses of the Republicans versus the strengths of the Nationalists.

Republican weaknesses

Political disunity

Caballero became head of a coalition government in September 1936. His rule was weakened by the fact that the Republicans were politically divided. Indeed, Republicans subscribed to widely different ideologies. The key divisions were between the communists and socialists, who believed that the 'revolution' should now be postponed until the war was won, and the anarchists, who argued that the war could only be won through revolutionary policies. The anarchists, dominant in Catalonia, Aragon and Andalusia, encouraged 'revolution from below' in the areas they controlled, and some historians suggest that this added a crucial hurdle for the Republic, as they had to try to regain their centralized control. The communists/socialists had more influence in Madrid and Valencia. The regions of Catalonia, the Basque region and Asturias became virtually independent.

The war generally increased the popularity of the communists. For example, in July 1936 the Spanish Communist Party numbered around 40,000 members, but by October 1937 it had 400,000 members. The Communist Party exploited the fact that it was the only Republican group with clear foreign support – from the USSR. However, to retain control the communists often used 'terror' tactics, which led to some resistance even in sympathetic territories (for example, the 'May Days' in Barcelona in 1937 – see below). In addition, the communists and socialists wanted victory in the war to strengthen the Second Republic, whereas the anarchists wanted a new revolutionary regime.

The lack of unity between the forces of the Republic is exemplified in the four days of street fighting in Barcelona in May 1937 – communists and socialists on one side and the anarchists and POUM on the other. This fighting became known as the 'May Days'. As a result of this turmoil, Caballero was replaced by the Marxist Juan Negrin, the communists' choice, as leader. Negrin attacked the POUM and anarchist leaders, who were imprisoned or executed. His more authoritarian regime lasted until March 1939, when there was military a coup in Madrid.

Military problems

The Republic lacked strong military leadership. There was no unified command, and the communists and anarchists would not work together. Indeed, the anarchist militias and the Basques refused to be led by a central command structure. The Basques would not permit their forces to defend areas outside their own territory. In addition, loyal army officers, with potentially valuable experience, were not trusted by the Republic.

In the first vital weeks of the war, the Republic was dependent on ineffective militia units that formed haphazardly. This meant that they fought a series of local conflicts rather than one clear overall campaign. Different fronts operated separately, although to some extent this situation was due to the territory held by the Republicans. Many battlefields were not within range of their air force, and they failed to sustain offensive campaigns in 1937 at Brunete, Belchite and Teruel. Indeed, it was not until the end of 1936 that the Republicans started to replace militias with a coherent 'Popular Army'.

Economic problems

In areas under anarchist control, industries, public utilities and transport were taken over by workers' committees; in the countryside collective farms were set up. However, neither

To access worksheet 12.1 on propaganda in the Spanish Civil War, please visit www.pearsonbacconline.com and follow the on-screen instructions.

POUM

The Partido Obrero Unificación Marxista (POUM; Workers' Party of Marxist Unification) was a small influential Catalan Marxist party that was critical of the Soviet system and was often in opposition to the communists/socialists, siding with the anarchists.

power and authority from his victories on the battlefield, and that it was he who extended the war to enhance his own dictatorial power. The nationalistic politics of Franco were not undermined by the foreign support given by Germany and Italy.

Military unity

Militarily the Nationalists initially had similar problems to the Republicans – ‘columns’ of Carlist and Falangist militias attempted to operate alongside regular army units. In contrast, however, these militias were effectively drawn into the regular army. The Army of Africa played a significant role. It contained the best troops in the country, and it could cover for other forces while they were being trained and equipped. In open and mobile offensive operations, the Army of Africa proved itself the most effective force in the entire Civil War.

The unified command was key to the Nationalists’ success. Franco’s leadership was accepted by the other generals and right-wing parties. Ultimately, the Italian forces were under his command too. They were successful in pushing on and winning offensives, and were also able to adopt effective defensive tactics during the Republican offensive campaigns of 1937.

The Nationalists had sound communications, and managed to equip their growing army throughout the civil war. They could also rely on their large number of junior officers.

Franco was an able military and political leader. He would often not pursue more radical advice given to him by his German and Italian advisers. His concern for his troops ensured that the majority was obedient.

Economic advantage

The business community backed the Nationalists, which meant they could get credit to buy war supplies. Also, by September 1936 they were in control of the main food-producing areas. After their successes in 1937 in the north, they added the main industrial areas to their control.

The Nationalists also benefited from international trade and credit, which was not restricted. It has been estimated that the USA gave \$700 million in credit during the course of the war. This meant that Franco’s forces could buy all the rubber and oil they needed, acquired from US companies.

Foreign assistance

As suggested above, some historians have argued that foreign aid was a crucial factor in the Nationalists’ victory over the Republic. Hugh Thomas writes in his 1961 book *The Spanish Civil War* that the conflict ‘became an international crisis whose solution was decided by external circumstances.’ Indeed, the rebels benefited from more aid, which was of a better quality than that given to the Republicans, and its supply was continuous throughout the war. The Germans had airlifted Franco’s Army from Morocco to the mainland in the first stage of the war, at a vital moment in the conflict. The Germans also committed the Condor Legion – 10,000 troops, 800 aircraft and 200 tanks. The Italians sent 70,000–75,000 troops, 750 planes and 150 tanks. The Portuguese sent 20,000 troops and permitted aid to pass over their long border with Spain. This assistance was significant in several ways. It allowed the Nationalists to fight in the first place, owing to the German airlift, but German planes also gave the Nationalists control of the air from 1937. Franco’s command was not compromised, and after an Italian defeat at Guadalajara, they were taken under Spanish command. The key benefit for the Nationalists, however, was not the manpower, as most of their armies were Spanish, it was the modern equipment they received.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Review activities

Summarize the key points made in the text in a grid:

	Nationalists	Republicans
Political strengths/weaknesses		
Military strengths/weaknesses		
Economic advantages/disadvantages		
Foreign assistance		

Class debate

Divide the class into two groups. One side will argue that the Nationalists’ strengths won the Spanish Civil War, the other will argue that it was due to Republican weaknesses. The motion is:

‘The strengths of the Nationalists won the Civil War.’

Each side must have a series of thematic and coherent arguments. To gain a point, they have to support arguments with clear evidence.

Overview: foreign intervention

In general, the decision by foreign governments to get involved (or not get involved) in the Spanish Civil War was a result of both ideology and self-interest. Foreign intervention had two main effects:

- It both lengthened and intensified the war
- It meant that the Spanish issues that caused the war were overtaken and submerged by the wider ideological battles taking place in Europe.

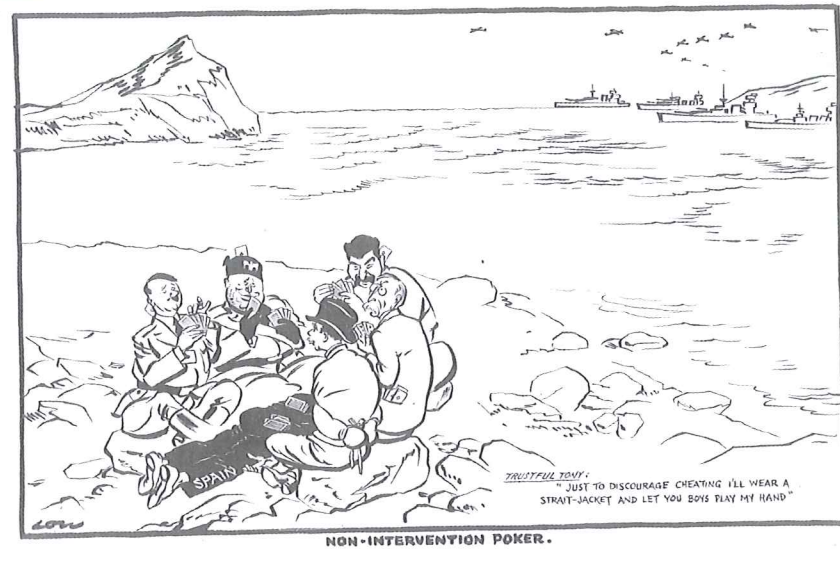
Britain

Britain took the lead in establishing the NIC in September 1936. Britain’s fear was that the war would spread and become a general European conflict. However, three of the key members of the NIC – Germany, Italy and the USSR – ignored the NIC completely and became the main foreign forces in Spain. In addition, Britain’s non-intervention policies were limited and tended to favour the Nationalists. They focused on preventing aid going to the Republic and allowed the Nationalists, but not the Republicans, to use Gibraltar as a communications base. In December 1936, they signed a trading agreement with the Nationalists that permitted British companies to trade with the rebel forces. The USA also allowed American companies to trade with the Nationalists, such as the Texaco oil company and General Motors. It would seem that Spain was sacrificed to the policy of appeasement in the same vein as Czechoslovakia; Britain wanted to avoid a general war at all costs, and did not want the civil war to damage its relations with Italy or Portugal.

Cartoon by David Low, in the *Evening Standard*, 13 January 1937. The caption says: "Trustful Tony: 'Just to discourage cheating I'll wear a strait-jacket and let you boys play my hand'"

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Cartoon analysis



Question

What is the message of this cartoon with regard to the Non-Intervention Committee?

France

The French support for the Republic was inconsistent, and this reflected the complexity of its position towards the civil war. It was not in French interests to have a right-wing regime on its border that could join with Italy and Germany to encircle France. But French politics was also polarized, and the government feared a revolt in France should it fully commit in Spain. France was also reliant on Britain, which was more anti-Republic, for its foreign policy options. In the end, the French restricted themselves mainly to humanitarian assistance. The impact of the French pursuing non-intervention with Britain dealt a fatal blow to the Republic, which could have benefited greatly from support from this large country on its border. The resulting reliance of the Republic on the Soviets polarized the politics of the Spanish Civil War, and associated the Republic with 'Soviet communism'. Nevertheless, the French did not stop citizens from joining the International Brigades, which were mainly organized in France. In addition, France was the main centre for the coordination of Soviet aid.

USSR

The USSR's reasons for supporting the Republic were not simply ideological. The Spanish conflict in fact presented Stalin with a dilemma. The emergence of another fascist state in Europe would strengthen Hitler's position in Europe. On the other hand, a Republic victory could panic Britain and France into an alliance with Hitler against the threat of communism. Such an outcome would ruin Stalin's policy of bringing Britain and France into an alliance with the USSR to contain Hitler. Stalin was divided between these two concerns. Initially he welcomed the NIC, but seeing that Germany and Italy were able to ignore its rules, he then went on to organize the transport of international volunteers to Spain and also weapons from Russia. He actually withdrew from the NIC in October 1936.

Although some historians have argued that Franco protracted the Spanish Civil War to enhance his own power, Stalin also had a motive for dragging the fighting out. The war would drain the resources of Germany, and the longer it went on the more likely it was for the war to develop into a general war. This general war would then be waged on the other side of Europe, far from the borders of the USSR.

Nevertheless, Stalin withdrew Soviet support in June 1938. Not only did the Republic seem to be losing, but it now seemed that the Western democracies were set on appeasing the fascist dictators. Stalin's aim of creating a bloc to resist Hitler ended when Czechoslovakia was abandoned by Britain and France in the Munich Agreement in September 1938.

Germany

Hitler's Germany was cautious when the appeal for help came from the rebels. He was not yet ready for a general European war. Hermann Göring was important in the decision to support the rebels. Both he and Hitler wanted to stop the spread of communism, but Göring also wanted to test out his *Luftwaffe* in live conditions. There were economic and strategic benefits for Germany too; raw materials such as iron ore could be gained, and deploying to Spain would give Germany the potential to hamper Anglo-French maritime communications.

Hitler did not think the war would last long, and only wanted to commit limited aid. Although a member of the NIC (it left in May 1937), Germany supplied the Nationalists through Portugal. As well as its support of Franco in the initial stages of the war, the Condor Legion perpetrated the now infamous bombing of Guernica and they played a pivotal role supporting the nationalists in taking Catalonia.

German involvement was important to the outcome of the war, not only as it played crucial military roles at critical times during the fighting, but also as other governments were deterred from getting involved due to their presence.

Italy

Italy gave the most assistance of all the foreign powers. Mussolini wanted to be involved for a number of reasons. First, involvement would be in line with his anti-communist/socialist/democratic outlook and his pro-fascist stance. Second, he wished to enhance his influence as the key power in the Mediterranean and thereby demonstrate Italy's might. Third, a fascist victory would weaken France and prevent French left-wing influence in Spain. Another fascist power would encircle France and put pressure on French colonies in North Africa.

As we have seen, the Italians not only sent 70,000–75,000 troops, they contributed many planes, tanks and weapons. Italian bombers attacked Spanish cities, and their submarines were a constant threat to supplies. Italy ignored its membership of the NIC. Historians suggest that although Italy sent many troops, the significant element of its intervention was its air and naval support, which helped the Nationalists to secure victory. As a wider result, the relationship between Italy and Germany was cemented in Spain.

Portugal

Portugal was an important part of the foreign contribution to Franco's victory. Indeed, it was the only foreign force not compromised at any time by membership of the NIC. Not only did Portugal send 20,000 troops, but it was fundamental to supplying the rebels along the Spanish-Portuguese border, and provided a base for communications. Portugal's long-term alliance with Britain led to the British being reluctant to counter its support for the Nationalists. This was, of course, an important benefit for Franco's troops.