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The Spanish Republic's Diplomatic Mission to Moscow during Civil War. Part 2

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“The Spanish Republic’s Diplomatic Mission to Moscow in the times of Civil War” (Part Two)

Abstract

The Spanish Civil War played a unique role in the Soviet Union’s geo-political strategies in the second half of the 1930s. The conflict marked the first occasion that Moscow participated in a foreign war beyond its traditional spheres of influence. But Soviet involvement in the Spanish war went far beyond the sale of armor and aviation to the beleaguered Spanish Republic. While Moscow organized and supported the creation of the International Brigades, on the cultural front, the Soviets sought to roll out a broad program of propaganda, employing film, poster art and music to link the destinies of the Slavic and Hispanic peoples. If scholars have succeeded in recent years to rewrite the history of many components of Soviet participation in the Spanish Civil War, diplomatic relations between the Republic and Moscow remain an unexplored theme. This is the conclusion of a two-part article that mines declassified, unpublished official documents, as well as memoirs, newsreels, private letters and the press, to offer the first narrative history of the Republican embassy in Moscow. In part one, the diplomatic rapprochement between the USSR and Spain in 1933 was explored as a prelude to the exchange of ambassadors following the outbreak of the civil war in summer 1936. The posting of the young Spanish doctor Marcelino Pascua to a newly recreated Moscow embassy was then examined in detail, up to the end of summer 1937. In this second part, the successes, failures and denouement of Pascua’s mission are set against the backdrop of the Republic’s dwindling fortunes in the civil war.

Keywords/ Ключевые слова:

Spain, USSR, Spanish Civil War, Joseph Stalin, Diplomacy, Europe 1918-1939, Moscow

In the first instalment of this two-part series, the diplomatic rapprochement between the USSR and Spain in 1933 was explored as prelude to the exchange of ambassadors following the outbreak of the civil war in summer 1936. The appointment of the young Spanish doctor Marcelino Pascua to the new Moscow embassy was then examined in detail. In this part, we pick up the story one year later, but not before doubling back to consider multiple difficulties confronting Ambassador Pascua. The most intractable problem facing Pascua’s mission to Moscow was general neglect by the Republic’s Foreign Ministry. From the moment Republican Spain resumed normal diplomatic ties

with the Soviet Union in August 1936—a time, it should be added, when the Republic had everything to gain from large-scale and well-orchestrated lobbying of Stalin’s regime—its commitment to the Moscow mission was curiously weak. The digression on embassy lodgings in the first part of this series well illustrated the expectation in autumn 1936—held by both Pascua and Soviet officials – that the Republic’s embassy would soon be busy and well-staffed. Yet Pascua would occupy his post for little more than one year, and his tenure would be marked by extended absences.¹ With the ambassador away from post, the Spanish mission was overseen by the second in command, Vicente Polo. In July 1938, Manuel Martínez Pedroso was appointed commercial attaché to Moscow.² This was the extent of personnel in the embassy during the war. Neither Polo nor Pedroso, it should be noted, were ever elevated to the status of ambassador.

More than anyone else, Pascua was in the best position to appreciate the shortcomings of Spain’s support for its Soviet embassy. Indeed, even before leaving on his assignment, the ambassador was given a sober preview of the obstacles he faced at the hands of the Foreign Ministry. In late September 1936, for example, he attempted to convince his superiors of the need to name an aviation attaché to the Moscow office. At the time, the Nationalists enjoyed unchallenged control of the skies, and Pascua believed that a leading Spanish aviator – a certain Mellado - could do much in the Soviet Union to ensure that the Republican air force received the necessary training and equipment. Prieto refused to authorize the request for Mellado to visit the USSR. The day prior to Pascua’s departure, Mellado was lost over enemy territory.³ Later, Pascua’s entreaties to the Foreign Ministry to create a consulate in Leningrad were also ignored.⁴

This crisis of personnel naturally put the new ambassador, who was eager to make a good impression and rapidly assess Soviet attitudes towards the Republican cause, at a considerable disadvantage. In his first telegram to the ministry, sent the day of his arrival in the Russian capital, Pascua implored his government to relieve him of the early handicap:

Arrived today in Moscow received cordially as in Leningrad. Request the immediate incorporation of embassy staff which for the moment you may limit to a secretary and a commercial attaché.⁵

Two days hence, still having heard nothing from Madrid regarding further appointments, Pascua sent a more urgent and detailed request for the completion of his staff:

¹ On Pascua’s December 1937 trip to Spain, see: Zugazagoitia J. *Guerra y vicisitudes de los Españoles*. Paris, 1941. Vol. II. P. 75.

² Del Vayo to Pedroso, 3 July 1938. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 12, 2

³ Zugazagoitia J. *Guerra y vicisitudes de los Españoles*. Paris, 1941. Vol. II. P. 170.

⁴ Viñas Angel. *Al Servicio de la Republica*. Madrid, 2010. P. 80.

⁵ Pascua to Foreign Ministry, 7 Oct. 1936. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 9. The “white book” was in all probability a protocol guide issued by the Foreign Ministry.

In view of immediate necessities I should like to suggest to you ... the following composition for this delegation: a secretary general of the embassy, a commercial and economic attaché and a military attaché. The first of these might also serve as consul general for this city.... At the same time it is advisable to establish a consul on the Black Sea, preferably in Batum or Odessa, as accords with the future development of our commerce with the USSR. I beseech your grace to immediately send this delegation. The conditions in which I am currently forced to work—without a single compatriot and with the Spanish-less interpreter whom the Commissariat has lent me—are extremely harmful.⁶

Indeed, so overwhelmed and short-handed was Pascua in his first days in Moscow that the commissariat lent him, in addition to the interpreter, a small staff of secretaries and assistants.⁷ In this way the new ambassador was able to carry out the necessary formalities involved in establishing an embassy, such as distributing and receiving communications from the diplomatic community and arranging interviews with Soviet officials.

Neither Pascua's frequent entreaties to the Foreign Ministry nor the unconventional and risky practice of borrowing NKID functionaries to carry out official Spanish business succeeded in rousing Republican officials to assign adequate personnel to the Moscow embassy. Three months after arriving in Russia, the ministry had given Pascua only one staff member—in the ambassador's words, "a second-class secretary with no experience whatsoever, young and amateurish, who cannot even take shorthand or type."⁸ This was at a time when many of the Republic's most seasoned diplomats languished in Latin American capitals, doing practically nothing.⁹ Writing to Asúa, he expressed incomprehension at the lack of support.

I am very concerned with the continuous lack of information from the Ministry to this embassy, and despite my petitions. There is no excuse for this absence of both materials and staff ... and it is translating into very difficult situations for me.¹⁰

Yet throughout 1937, the conditions Pascua faced did not improve. On the occasion of the one-year mark of his tenure, the ambassador sent the new prime minister, Juan Negrín, a scathing rumination on twelve months of seclusion:

The embassy of the Republic in the USSR, whose transcendent importance at the present moment ... I need not remind you, possesses a staff consisting of a second-class

⁶ Pascua to Foreign Ministry, 9 Oct. 1936. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 1, Exp. 19, 4.

⁷ AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 5, Exp. 7, 5.

⁸ Pascua to Negrín, 27 Oct. 1937. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 2, 22.

⁹ Amorós M. *75 Años Despues: Las Claves de la Guerra Civil Española. Conversación con Ángel Viñas*. Barcelona, 2014. Digital edition; no page numbers.

¹⁰ Pascua to Asúa, 6 Jan. 1937. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 13, 11.

secretary ... and the ambassador.... I would not be carrying out my assigned duties were I not to reiterate to you that this situation, and above all its prolongation without resolution, is a complete and absolute disgrace....¹¹

The letter closes with Pascua's offer to resign if for some reason the government no longer has faith in him. The response from Valencia, arriving a month later, was a perfunctory reassurance and the promise to send two additional secretaries to Moscow.¹² They never appeared.

In the event, however, a pair of added staff members could not have repaired the serious damage to the Spanish Republic's diplomatic prestige in the Russian capital. Pascua's spirits, moreover, plummeted as his isolation grew more acute. Writing to Zugazagoitia in late November 1937, the ambassador was exasperated and livid:

Let me assure you that I am undergoing a period of tremendous difficulty and my patience is buoyed only by the fundamental consideration of what the USSR can do for us in certain areas at this time...Greatly contributing to my desolate state is the almost criminal fact that I have no staff in the embassy, that is, advisors, secretaries, attachés, etc., despite repeated and anguished requests.¹³

When Pascua departed permanently for his French reassignment in March 1938, the Spanish neglect of their Moscow embassy was only heightened. His successors, the commercial attaché Polo and later the chargé d'affaires Pedroso, each found themselves increasingly cut off from the Republic and alienated from the Soviet regime. Indeed, in the last year of the war the Spanish mission in Moscow was a wholly ineffective embassy, incapable of carrying out any serious responsibilities related to government business or the war effort. As critical problems continued to arise in Soviet–Republican relations, the mission's failure became more conspicuous.

Though the personnel crisis neither improved nor worsened after spring 1938, Pascua's departure had the effect of accelerating the impoverishment of the Moscow mission. In part, this was a straightforward issue of financing. Once Pascua was reassigned to Paris, the Foreign Ministry never appointed a new ambassador to Moscow. The most immediate result of the ministry's inaction was a precipitous drop in the funds available to sustain the Moscow mission. As ambassador to Moscow, Pascua was paid a standard salary of 12,856 French francs per month. In addition, he was also

¹¹ Pascua to Negrín, 27 Oct. 1937. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 2, 22.

¹² Giral to Pascua, 26 Nov. 1937. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 14, 6. Earlier, in February 1937, the republic had appointed a consul general to Odessa. See Negrín to Pascua, 7 Feb. 1938. Leg. 2, Exp. 2, 37. However, the appointment had not been taken up even the following November, when Pascua put the matter before the Soviets. Stalin was amenable to this, voicing no objection, but it is curious how long the Republic delayed in finalizing the matter. See APRF, f. 3, op. 65, d. 218, l. 10-11.

¹³ Pascua to Zugazagoitia, 28 Nov. 1937. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 13, 21.

provided with an expense allowance of 43,712 francs, out of which he was responsible for paying the various and sundry costs associated with his office: food, supplies, receptions, fuel, heating, transportation, pouch and courier expenses, etc.¹⁴ When Pascua left the embassy in spring 1938, the commercial attaché Polo assumed all of his duties. Yet Polo's salary remained what it had been when he was subordinate to Pascua: a regular income of 2600 francs plus a niggardly expense budget of 6241 francs. Put another way, for the last year of the Republic's existence, the Foreign Ministry had reduced its budget for the Moscow embassy by almost 85 percent, from a total of 56,568 francs a month under Pascua to Polo's combined 8841 francs.¹⁵

The lack of funds led to real and immediate problems in the embassy's day-to-day operations. Quite apart from the frequent shortages of this or that necessity that one might expect during any long stay in Soviet Russia—such as the lack of writing paper in the embassy during the summer of 1938¹⁶—Pascua's successors faced pecuniary straits that threatened to shut down the entire mission. On 14 April 1938, for example, Polo was instructed to hold a reception at the embassy to commemorate the seventh anniversary of the declaration of the Second Spanish Republic. Invitations went out to members of the Spanish colony resident in and around Moscow, including the teachers working with the evacuated children and the four families of the Bank of Spain.¹⁷ Ten days after the event, a distraught Polo alerted Pascua that he had paid for the entire affair out of his own pocket, even though his salary remained unchanged and the ministry had not given him an operating budget. "I am now in a situation where I genuinely lack sufficient money," Polo wrote, "because my Ministry has paid me only part of my salary and not even every month...."¹⁸

From July 1938 until the end of the war, the Moscow embassy's financial problems steadily increased. The *de facto* head who now bore the brunt of this financial crisis was Manuel Pedroso, Polo's successor and the Foreign Ministry's third and final front man in its Moscow mission. As was the case during Polo's tenure, Pedroso found himself financially cut off from his home government, and his entreaties for prompt payment of salary and expenses often elicited no response whatsoever. With the war drawing to a close, he faced new responsibilities that required both regular funding and close collaboration with his advisors. The most important of these duties included his attempts to repatriate the three thousand Spanish children and their teachers who had been evacuated to the USSR

¹⁴ See the Moscow embassy's account statements provided by the Bank for Foreign Trade USSR. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 15, Exp. 1, 1–9.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Polo to Pascua, ? June 1938. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 10-1, 15.

¹⁷ Soviet officials were not invited to the function. According to the chargé d'affaires Pedroso, since the ambassador was not in attendance, the occasion was not considered sufficiently formal to merit diplomatic invitations. See Pedroso to Foreign Ministry, 23 Apr. 1938. Archivo de Ministro de Asuntos Exteriores, Madrid (AMAE), Archivo de Barcelona, apt. 1, carp. 57, informe 2, 687–688.

¹⁸ Polo to Pascua, 24 Apr. 1938. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 10-3, 3.

earlier in the war.¹⁹ In addition, he was also obliged to see to the proper disposal of the embassy contents, most notably the archive.

Pascua intervened when he could from Paris, sending the Moscow mission small amounts of cash via diplomatic pouch.²⁰ These donations kept the embassy afloat through the winter of 1938–39, but as the end neared, the futility of Pedroso’s frustrated efforts became apparent. By early March 1939, the chargé d’affaires reported that, “apart from a handful of rubles and a few British pounds, I am out of money.”²¹ The embassy, he continued, had received no money from the government in either January or February. Most egregiously, the ministry had ordered Pedroso to return to Barcelona the sum of 5,000 pounds, funds that had earlier been set aside to eventually evacuate the Moscow mission.²² Pascua, when he learned that Pedroso had obeyed the order, was furious: “It was an enormous error on your part to send back the 5,000.... Imagine what that quantity of money would have allowed you to accomplish and the freedom of movement which it would have granted you.”²³

Exacerbating the problem of support and making matters considerably worse was a notoriously poor communications system between the Moscow embassy and the Foreign Ministry (which, after November 1936, was located in Valencia with the rest of the government). As with other aspects of the Spanish mission, the deficiency here lay only partially in technological shortcomings, but chiefly in the Republic’s poorly placed priorities and unwillingness to collaborate with the Soviets. When Pascua arrived in Russia in October 1936, the Soviets had already tested and established telephone and radio links between the Foreign Commissariat and its Madrid mission.²⁴ Naïvely, perhaps, Pascua believed that this same link would permit him to communicate with his own government.²⁵ In the event, neither Pascua nor any of his adjutants ever gained access to the direct line. Instead, to communicate with their superiors, staffers in the Moscow embassy were forced to rely on slow and insecure methods: through a courier, via rail and air to the Republic’s French embassy (to be relayed from Paris to the Foreign Ministry in Spain), or through the NKID’s own telegram service and diplomatic pouch. The first option was slow and vulnerable to breaches of security; the second choice was even less satisfactory, as it required full trust in the Soviets’ confidentiality. “Needless to say,”

¹⁹ On the evacuated children, see; Zafra E. *Los niños españoles evacuados a la URSS*. Madrid, 1989, and Kowalsky’s chapter in Kowalsky D. *La Unión Soviética y la guerra civil española: una revisión crítica* (Barcelona: Critica, 2004), p. 96-120, which quoted unpublished Soviet-era documents. This has now been complemented by a number of recent accounts, including Susana Castillo S. *Mis años en la escuela soviética*. Madrid, 2009, and Limonero I. C. *Dos patrias, tres mil destinos: vida y exilio de los niños de la Guerra de España refugiados en la Unión Soviética*. Madrid, 2010.

²⁰ Pedroso to Pascua, 6 Dec. 1938. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 12, 12.

²¹ Pedroso to Pascua, 3 Mar. 1939. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 12, 25.

²² Ibid.

²³ Pascua to Pedroso, 12 Mar. 1939. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 12, 24.

²⁴ The direct line between Moscow and Madrid was no secret. On 16 Oct. 1936 — a week after Pascua’s arrival — *Izvestiia* touted the achievement on its front page.

²⁵ Pascua to Foreign Ministry, 9 Oct. 1936. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 1, Exp. 19, 4.

Pascua told his ministry upon receiving the Soviet offer to forward Spanish mail, “until I receive your express authorization I will abstain from employing [the NKID] method.”²⁶

Compounding the communications crisis was the Spaniards’ careless use of codes in diplomatic correspondence. The code system established to communicate with the embassies was by many accounts easily compromised, and Pascua was convinced of its vulnerability. In an October 1937 letter to Negrín, he informed the prime minister that the Soviets almost certainly possessed the Republic’s codes.²⁷ On other occasions, Pascua confessed that a lack of confidence in the security of his dispatches prevented him from speaking his mind.²⁸ By early 1938, the ambassador’s fears for the vulnerability of his dispatches led him to develop, together with the chargé d’affaires Polo, a private code for their personal correspondence.²⁹

It is a measure both of the Republic’s inattention to the ongoing communications crisis and the Russians’ code-cracking prowess that on several occasions Soviet officials demanded that their Spanish allies rectify the problem. In a February conference with Pascua, Stalin gave the ambassador a stern and three-pronged message: 1.) The Loyalist codes are too easy to read; 2.) Codes must be changed daily; and 3.) It is always preferable to send a personal courier over a coded telegram.³⁰ This advice was clearly not heeded, for eight months later, in October, Voroshilov felt compelled to again rebuke Pascua for using insecure communications methods. On this occasion, the defense commissar urged the ambassador to use a diplomatic pouch rather than telegrams or regular mails.³¹

One consequence of the embassy’s neglect and the poor communications between the Republic’s Foreign Ministry and Moscow was a tendency toward serious breakdowns in the relay of specific orders. When letters to the ministry could take up to a month to reach Spain, and the reply another several weeks, the result was a general paralysis of the Republic’s Moscow outpost.³² At times, Loyalist messages to the embassy were delayed on arriving, only to be held up further by the

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Pascua to Negrín, 29 Oct. 1937. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 2, 23.

²⁸ Pascua to Negrín, 28 Nov. 1937. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 2, 26. The relevant passage is worth quoting in full: “For some time I’ve considered sending you a report on Soviet international politics and their repercussion on Spain’s domestic front. After much reflection I have opted not to for fear of its possible capture.”

²⁹ Pascua to Polo, undated. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 2, 23.

³⁰ Conference with Stalin, Molotov, and Voroshilov, 2 Feb. 1937. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 6, 4.

³¹ Conference with Molotov and Voroshilov, 21 Oct. 1937. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 7-1, 2. At the same meeting, another facet of the republic’s code problem proved particularly embarrassing. Pascua had requested the interview in order to relay a recent and urgent request from his government for additional Soviet military shipments. Face to face with the ambassador, Voroshilov asked bluntly, “What material is needed most urgently?” Pascua replied that the coded telegram requesting the arms was indecipherable; Voroshilov would have to wait for his reply.

³²See, for example, Giral’s letter to Pascua of 26 Nov. 1937. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 14, 6. The letter is a reply to Pascua’s note of 26 Oct. Giral apologizes for the late response, adding that he received it “only a few days ago.”

embassy's poor coordination with the Soviet leadership. In June 1938, for example, Polo learned from unreliable sources that a group of Spanish refugee children were to arrive in Leningrad within a week. As the highest official working in the embassy, he had a responsibility to tend to the children's welfare. "Officially," he wrote, "nothing on this matter has been communicated to me, neither through Soviet channels, nor, something even more unpardonable, through Spanish channels."³³ Were it not for the rumor mill, Polo would have been unaware of the refugees' impending arrival.

A more prominent example of the communication problem was brought to light during Pascua's February 1938 conference with Stalin, Molotov, and Voroshilov. The defense commissar loudly complained to the ambassador that the communication crisis between Valencia and Moscow had reached the point where he no longer knew the needs of the Popular Army. While the shamed Pascua looked on, Voroshilov bellowed furiously:

You have constantly been demanding bombers. As a result of our last conversation, we are now ready to send sixty-one bombers. Only now we are being told that you want thirty bombers and thirty fighters?³⁴

As if Voroshilov's tone and message were not adequately clear, Pascua's notes of the meeting record a brief comment written to himself regarding the commissar's harangue: "He says this in order to call attention to [our] disorientation and critical lack of information."³⁵

The foregoing should make clear that, from the time of its founding in October 1936 until the end of the war in the spring of 1939, the Republican mission to Moscow was severely handicapped by numerous factors, the most important of which was the Republican government's refusal or inability to lend proper support. To gain a better sense of the extent of the neglect, one need only look at the mission Pascua took over in Paris in the spring of 1938. As of 22 January 1939, the Spanish Republic's embassy in France included some thirty-six Spanish nationals on the payroll. Among them were five secretaries and seven separate attachés, including postings specific to the military, navy, agriculture, finance, commerce, as well as two floating "special" attachés. The embassy also had two full-time coders as well as a support staff including three chauffeurs, a diplomatic pouch courier, several doormen, and even a night porter.³⁶ By contrast, at no point did the Moscow embassy have more than two Spanish employees on staff; for the last year of the war, it had no ambassador.

³³ Polo to Pascua, 23 June 1938. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 10-4, 1.

³⁴ Conference with Stalin, Molotov, and Voroshilov, 26 Feb. 1938. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 6, 7.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Pascua to Foreign Ministry, Barcelona, 22 Jan. 1937. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 14, 5.

Admittedly, certain factors temper this comparison. Given the long history of close Spanish diplomatic ties with France (one of only two states with which Spain shares a border), the Foreign Ministry had always provided strong support to its Parisian delegation. Meanwhile, the Moscow embassy staff had to be created from scratch, and was thus handicapped from the beginning. The Republic's government potentially had much to gain from its relations with the French, even if the Paris government had prohibited the sale of arms to the Loyalists and for the first year of the war refused to open its borders for the transit of weaponry.³⁷ It should also be noted that the Republic's embassy in France performed other indirect functions vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. For example, a portion of Soviet assistance to the Republic was purchased in third countries, and paid for through the Banque Commerciale pour l'Europe du Nord (or Eurobank), located in Paris.³⁸ Second, but perhaps more significant, the Republican legation to France often presented the Republic's requests for military matériel directly to the Soviet embassy in Paris.³⁹

These considerations aside, the contrasting levels of support is still jarring, not least because, by fall 1936, Republican officials were well aware of the new ground rules established by the international community: the French were committed to non-intervention, while the Soviets were willing to sell their best hardware, dispatch pilots and tank crews, and lend their top advisors. Given these factors, the Republic's poor upkeep of its Moscow embassy defies explanation.

The insufficient support given to the Moscow embassy had several major and unquestionably detrimental repercussions on the overall effectiveness of the Spanish mission. To begin, the nonexistence of any auxiliary personnel at the embassy forced Pascua—and later Polo and Pedroso—to carry out not only the major functions of ambassador or chargé d'affaires, but also the secondary tasks normally performed by attachés, assistants, or staff. The principal responsibility was, of course, initiating and maintaining high-level contacts with the Soviet leadership. Pascua's early celebrity status in Moscow made this goal quite unproblematic, and his interview schedule through the first year of the war indicates that he had unprecedented access to any commissariat in the city, and thus to the architects of Soviet policy. The Republican government, despite its inaction in processing

³⁷ For Pascua's Paris mission, though one that largely ignores the Soviet question, see: Miralles R. "La embajada de Marcelino Pascua in París durante la Guerra Civil Española (21 de abril de 1938-28 de febrero de 1939)" // *Bulletin d'histoire contemporaine de l'Espagne*. 1999, no. 28-29. P. 135-58.

³⁸ See: Alvarez del Vayo J., *The Last Optimist*. P. 284–287; and Fischer L., *Men and Politics*. London, 1941. P. 364–365.

³⁹ This was not always the case, as requests were sometimes made through Soviet representatives in Spain, or through the Republic's embassy in Moscow. The record indicates that on 27 April 1937 Pascua appealed directly to Stalin for increased shipments of aircraft. APRF, f. 3, op. 65, d. 223, l. 173-174. Generally, however, the inherent stability of the Republican and Soviet missions in Paris made them more reliable than negotiating such arrangements in the USSR or Spain. Incidentally, the fact that the arms traffic was being carried out through intermediaries in the French capital was a poorly guarded secret. In November 1936, German intelligence agents ascertained as much and alerted their superiors in Berlin. See: Dumont to German Embassy in France, 11 Nov. 1936, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, vol V, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1957). P. 128.

Pascua's pleas for funds and staff, counted on their ambassador for the timely delivery of requests for military aid to the Soviet leadership.⁴⁰

Had Pascua or his successors only been responsible for conveying the Republic's military needs to the Defense Commissariat and lobbying Voroshilov for rapid action, this certainly would have already been a daunting and challenging responsibility. Yet their attention was to a large degree diverted to the myriad minor obligations of diplomatic affairs that, for lack of any staff, fell on their shoulders. With no officer to coordinate counter-intelligence, Pascua was required to investigate reports of suspected fascist or Nationalist spies infiltrating Republican vessels.⁴¹ As the embassy never received a military (much less aviation) attaché, first Pascua, then Polo and Pedroso filled the void. When in 1937 the Republic began sending pilot trainees to the USSR for instruction, the ambassador found himself overseeing the project, despite his conspicuous paucity of experience in military aviation.⁴² Similarly, responsibility for the welfare of the three thousand refugee children evacuated to the USSR was also assigned to the Moscow embassy. Here as elsewhere, the mission was in over its head, frequently pleading with the Republican government to send officials from the Education Ministry to ensure effective monitoring of the young evacuees.⁴³ Were all of this not enough, the lead man at the embassy invariably played the role of financial and commercial attaché, charged with arranging credit extensions, overseeing the gold transfer, keeping track of the four Bank of Spain families detained in Russia, and serving as trade negotiator in the burgeoning traffic of non-military goods between the USSR and the Republic.⁴⁴

After the problems generated by the overwork and over-extension of Pascua and his successors, the second consequence of Spanish neglect of the Moscow embassy was a deterioration of relations between the Soviet regime and the Republic's Moscow delegation. It is clear that the Soviets' heavy investment in and VIP treatment of the Republic's mission to Moscow was never reciprocated. Over time, the Republic's careless neglect of their Russian embassy began to alienate the Soviets and made them less willing to continue their collaboration. Official Soviet sources long

⁴⁰ For example, a July memo from the Ministry of Defense implored Pascua to urgently secure the dispatch of additional aviation to replace recent losses. Giral to Pascua, 11 July 1937. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 2, 1.

⁴¹ Captain of the Antonio de Sotrustegui to Pascua, 25 Dec. 1936. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 14, 8

⁴² See AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 8, 1-8; Leg. 12, Exp. 2, 1-3, 9, 12.

⁴³ See AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 10-1, 15; Leg. 2, Exp. 10-3, 6, 8; Leg. 2, Exp. 12, 25.

⁴⁴ See: AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 14; Leg. 2, Exp. 3; Leg. 2, Exp. 12,5, 9. A brief digression is necessary to clarify the reference to the "four Bank of Spain families." Soviet military support to the Spanish Republic was paid for through the transfer of a large part of Madrid's gold stocks, housed until September 1936 in the Bank of Spain. When the gold was mobilized and shipped to the USSR, the Republic dispatched with it a group of bank officials and their dependants to ensure fair exchange. These families subsequently found themselves stranded in Moscow, and it fell to Pascua to provide for their well-being and oversee their repatriation.

denied any falling out between the two states, but this is not surprising, as the issue was doubtlessly an embarrassment to all involved.⁴⁵

It has been noted above that a little over a year after arriving, in late November 1937, Pascua had worried that his lack of staff and resources may leave a “poor impression” on the Soviet government.⁴⁶ A poorer impression still was left by the ambassador’s own unceremonious departure in the spring of 1938. Pascua was rarely present in the last few months of his Moscow sojourn, and he received his Paris assignment while in Spain, a post which he immediately took up. He never formally took leave of the Soviet leadership in person, nor of the larger diplomatic community in Russia. Indeed, some weeks after arriving in Paris, Pascua instructed his adjutant Polo to send out apologies for this breach of protocol.⁴⁷ He himself, however, took care to personally notify the Soviet officials with whom he had worked most closely. In February 1938, Pascua telephoned Potemkin to express his regret that he would not be returning to Moscow.⁴⁸ Later that spring, writing to Litvinov in English, Pascua was unusually contrite as he expressed regret and embarrassment over the course of events:

I must confess to you that I am very disturbed indeed by this forced alteration of what should be normal behavior and the more so remembering your continuous courtesies and kindnesses regarding me and the noble attitude of the Soviet Government in regard [*sic*] the Spanish Republic as well.⁴⁹

The same day, Pascua penned a similarly humble letter, in French, to Stalin, asking that the Soviet leader express his apologies and his gratitude, to Molotov and Voroshilov.⁵⁰

Apologies aside, with Pascua gone relations worsened in the late spring and summer of 1938. It became increasingly clear to any cogent observer that the Republic would not appoint a new ambassador in Pascua’s place. Polo was keenly aware that Soviet leadership had interpreted Spain’s attitude towards its Moscow mission as a major insult. Polo described his first days in charge of the embassy this way:

I now find myself totally neglected by all our “Russian friends” and all this time I have received from them not a single word of support nor the most minimal demonstration of

⁴⁵ For example, the 1975 publication by the Academy of Sciences of the USSR: *International Solidarity with the Spanish Republic, 1936–1939*. Moscow, 1974. P. 312, insists that “Soviet–Spanish relations remained invariably friendly until the end of the national-revolutionary war”.

⁴⁶ Pascua to Zugazagoitia, 28 Nov. 1937. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 12, 21.

⁴⁷ Pascua to Polo, 22 Apr. 1938. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 10-2, 14.

⁴⁸ APRF, f. 3, op. 65, d. 226, l. 37-38.

⁴⁹ Pascua to Litvinov, 5 Apr. 1938. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 9-4, 20.

⁵⁰ Pascua to Stalin, 5 Apr 1938. APRF, f. 3, op. 65, d. 226, l. 62-63

interest.... In other areas I have also observed a deliberate withdrawal and coldness with respect to the Spanish question.⁵¹

A week later, attending May Day celebrations in Red Square, Polo was shocked that in a long speech, Voroshilov made only one passing allusion to the Spanish Civil War.⁵² In a letter to Pascua, Polo offered an interpretation:

On the occasion of May 1 I sent a letter of congratulations to the Foreign Commissariat, which to this date has not responded. I continue to have the impression that something is amiss with respect to those of us in this embassy, and I can't help but conclude that it may be the result of our not having an ambassador.⁵³

Pascua's response confirmed that both men agreed on the problem of the embassy vis-à-vis the Republican government:

For my part, I urged the Ministry to resolve this abnormal situation which in fact could damage the relations between both countries. Given how sensitive the Russians can be, the prolongation of this irregular situation will produce some ill will. The first to be injured and bothered by this will be you.⁵⁴

Polo, of course, was neither the first nor the last. His replacement, Pedroso, who manned the helm until late March 1939, sent the Foreign Ministry a note on 25 July 1938 indicating that he had been "warmly received by Litvinov, Potemkin and Weinberg."⁵⁵ After this date, however, the new chargé d'affaires had virtually no contact whatsoever with any Soviet official of consequence. Several weeks before the end, he recounted his isolation to Pascua:

⁵¹ Polo to Pascua, 24 Apr. 1938. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 10-3, 1.

⁵² Polo to Pascua, 12 May 1938. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 10-3, 6. To balance this gloomy assessment, however, it must be pointed out that elsewhere the archival and press record makes clear enough that the Spanish question had not in fact disappeared from official pronouncements or public discourse. In July of the same year, VOKS organized an exhibition in Moscow devoted to the Spanish Republic's Quinto Regimiento. See Pedroso to Foreign Ministry, Valencia, 31 July 1938. AMAE, Archivo de Barcelona, apt. 1, carp. 57, informe 6, 734-5. To cite one additional example, six months after Voroshilov's short-shrifting of the Republicans during his May Day remarks, the annual delegation of visiting Loyalists was per usual featured prominently in the festivities marking the twenty-first anniversary of the Russian Revolution. Their participation was even included in a widely disseminated Soyuzkinochronika newsreel.

⁵³ Polo to Pascua, 12 May 1938. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 10-3, 6.

⁵⁴ Pascua to Polo, 23 May 1938. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 10-2, 8.

⁵⁵ Pedroso to Foreign Ministry, Valencia, 25 July 1938. AMAE, Archivo de Barcelona, apt. 1, carp. 57, informe 2, 716.

Recent events have produced absolutely no modification in our relations with the authorities, which continue to be as restrictive as ever. Not a single soul has approached me during these sad days. Not a word and not a single visit.⁵⁶

The embassy's poor standing was evident on two occasions in the last months of 1938. The first of these occurred when Pascua travelled from Paris to Moscow in August of that year to win an audience with the Soviets and present to them a request for arms.⁵⁷ The second occasion was Ignacio Hidalgo de Cisneros' December 1938 emergency visit to Moscow. The Republican government had dispatched its air force chief to the Soviet capital in a desperate attempt to secure fresh military hardware from the Russians. It need hardly be underlined that the purpose of this mission, or indeed Pascua's trip in late summer, would have normally been executed by a competent and operational embassy. The Valencia government was evidently well aware of the cumulative damage it had inflicted on the Moscow operation. Thus Pedroso, though the official Loyalist representative in the USSR, played no role in the negotiations for increased aid in later 1938.

At this point, it should be clear that, for the duration of the Spanish Civil War, the principal impediment to the effective functioning of the Republic's Moscow embassy was not an increasingly mistrustful Soviet regime, but an indifferent and neglectful home government. Pascua's initial objectives were daunting: first, establish high-level contact with the Soviet leadership, and second, solicit large-scale military and technical assistance. To his surprise, Pascua discovered on his arrival that the entire Soviet public had already been mobilized to support the Republican cause. More important, the regime was favorably disposed toward assisting the Spanish ambassador in all facets of his mission. Thus the question arises, given the potential benefits of the Soviets' positive attitude towards the Republic—best exemplified through the privileges bestowed on Pascua—why did the Republican government apparently starve its Moscow embassy? Two possible explanations may explain the rise and fall of Pascua's mission.

First, it is conceivable that the counterproductive treatment of the Moscow delegation was in fact no deliberate sabotage at all, but rather the result of the myriad logistical problems that Republican officials were ill equipped to handle. In this scenario, the Republic had every intention of exploiting Moscow's assistance to the fullest, but the exigencies of war did not permit greater support of and communication with its Moscow-based representatives. At the same time, it is possible that, once the Republican government ascertained that the Soviets could be counted on to supply the Popular Army, there was no further need to expend resources on the upkeep of its Soviet

⁵⁶ Pedroso to Pascua, 3 Mar. 1939. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 12, 25.

⁵⁷ APRF, f. 3, op. 65, d. 226, l. 112.

mission. In effect, Pascua's objectives had been accomplished for him, even before he arrived in the Russian capital.⁵⁸

On the other hand, some evidence suggests that the Republic's undermining of its Moscow mission was the direct result of factional disagreements within the governing coalition. Let us recall that among the numerous political struggles that shook the Loyalist government during the civil war was an ongoing attempt by the PSOE leadership, together with its moderate allies, to stem the rising influence of the PCE. The PCE had much to gain through expanded Republican relations with the Soviet Union; meanwhile, the PSOE—in particular, its successive leaders Caballero and Prieto—attempted to foil Communist attempts to dominate the political arena. It is not unreasonable to conclude that, while the Caballero government initially sent the Republic's legation to Moscow, the premier was not about to unnecessarily inflate that embassy's position or prestige, for such a move would ultimately strengthen the hand of the PCE.⁵⁹

But political intrigues aside, it cannot be denied that Moscow's military support to the Republic adhered to a set of conditions that could never be swayed, perhaps not even influenced, by most-favoured nation diplomacy. Thus the final stage of Soviet participation in the civil war—the period between August 1937 and the end of the war on 1 April 1939—was marked by a steady ebb in Moscow's involvement with the Republic. Every major indicator of Soviet investment in a Republican victory was then in decline: arms supplies were dramatically scaled back, Soviet flyers and tankers began to be replaced by Republican crews, and, from autumn 1938, the International Brigades were withdrawn. The earlier agit-prop onslaught, which saw enthusiastic cultural exchanges, slowed and then ceased. On the domestic front, the Soviet regime began to disengage the populace from Spanish affairs. The war disappeared into the middle pages of Soviet state newspapers, and in public speeches Soviet leaders mentioned the Republic's cause less and less. In Russian cinemas, newsreels devoted to the Chinese Communists began trumping coverage of the war in Spain; the filmmaker Roman Karmen and his assistant left Spain in early summer 1937, transshipped to the Far East. For the last twenty months of the Spanish Civil War, the Kremlin was all but resigned to accept a Republican defeat.

There was the intractable problem of the logistics of Operation X, which became more difficult over time. As the struggle wore on, the Defense Commissariat became distressed that future shipments of Soviet weaponry might be intercepted and could never reach the Republican shore.

⁵⁸ This is one conclusion of Gabriel Jackson, who claims that Pascua “had little or no influence on Soviet decision-making.” Negrin J., *Physiologist, Socialist, and Spanish Republican War Leader*. Eastbourne, East Sussex, 2010. P. 58. A noted English scholar was able to astutely sum up the matter: “Pascua's brief was to promote more substantial Soviet aid... But he found Stalin and his lieutenants already persuaded of this need.” Graham H. *The Spanish Republic at War*. Cambridge, 2002. P. 152.

⁵⁹ Pascua to Zugazagoitia, 28 Nov. 1937. AHN-Madrid. Diversos. M. Pascua, Leg. 2, Exp. 13, 21. In the letter, Pascua explained his “total isolation” as a result of relations between the PCE and the Socialists.

More to the point, after the Republic's gold - or rather, the credit that gold had guaranteed - was exhausted in early 1938, any losses would be incurred directly by the Soviets. But a second development was equally significant in determining supply volume. Even barring successful delivery of hardware to Spain, the Soviet technological advantage in the war was conclusively lost by late spring, 1937. By that time, the most advanced Russian tanks and planes available could no longer compete with the weaponry being supplied to the rebels. The arrival of the German-made HE-111 and ME-109 rendered the entire Red Air Force fleet of bombers, fighters, and reconnaissance aircraft essentially obsolete. While the Nationalists were never able to match the Russians in armor, the dispatch of large numbers of witheringly effective German anti-tank guns rendered the issue moot.

In sum, after August 1937, even had a safe and efficient transit route from Russia been opened up, no matériel then being produced by the Soviet defense industry could have undermined the rebels' widening position of technological domination. In this light, it is hardly surprising that Moscow scaled back its aid in mid-1937. Near the end of the war, Moscow granted the Republic a large line of credit, and renewed arms shipments as late as December 1938, but it was too late to save the their ally.⁶⁰

The promise of Pascua's mission to Moscow was born at the Atocha station on 30 September 1936. The crowd of well-wishers, the collective optimism, and the hope for the Republic's salvation imbued the ambassador's journey to Soviet Russia with a rich symbolism that far exceeded what the embassy could ever achieve. More critically, it cannot be denied that the fate of the Republic was determined in the opening months of the war, in July, August and September, 1936. The fascist powers' commitment to General Franco, the signing of Non-Intervention by the West, and Stalin's decision to tie his military aid to the finite gold reserves of the Bank of Spain, meant that outcome of the Spanish Civil War would be dependent on a set of international conditions that evolved little even two and half years later. The Republic's fortunes may have hung in the balance through summer 1936, but Madrid's fate was sewn up before Pascua arrived in Moscow on 7 October 1936. The trials and tribulations of the Republic's embassy in the Soviet Union, and the ambassador's belief in a grand missed opportunity, would be of little consequence. Diplomacy was an illusion.

End of Part Two

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⁶⁰ The late dispatch of some \$55 million worth of Soviet arms, transferred on seven ships, was for many years considered a myth, yet today declassified documents from the Russian State Military Archive (RGVA) confirm that this did indeed take place. The logistics of the operation, and contents of the delivery, down to the precise number of shells (1,382,540), are revealed in manifests in RGVA f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1259, ll. 85-105.

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