IB History Outline:

The Spanish Civil War: factions, fault lines, and civil war

I. Overview of the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939

* Fought between forces loyal to the elected government (loyalists) and those seeking to overthrow that government (Nationalists)
* Factions helped bring about the war without a political mechanism to manage those divisions
* The war exposes important strategic consideration of the European powers
* Prime example of how a deeply divided society can erupt into civil war when there is no governing entity to stop them
* Civil wars: armed disputes that erupt over often radically different ideas about the direction, governmental system or composition of a country
* If Spain had a political mechanism to either address the concerns of its factions or to force compliance, divisions would not have created the civil war

II. Background:

* While parts of Spain were economically strong and dynamic, other areas were backward in terms of industrial/agricultural production methods
* Anarcho-syndicalism: form of anarchism that was based on trade union principles; advocated decentralized, worker control of factories, as well as the other stock and trade unions—shorter working weeks, higher wages, and better working conditions
  + Strong in Andalusia: sought a revolution leading to combination of land reform, decentralized authority, and freedom of taxes
* Triad of landowners, church and army anchored the political right in Spain
* Variants of Marxism and socialism had been struggling for support from the late 19th century; dissenters came about

Political Parties in Spain:

1. Left Wing: anarcho-syndicalists, militant anarchists, communist party, Marxist-socialist workers party, Spanish socialist party, socialist trade union, Catalonian socialist party

2. Center Wing: Basque nationalist party, anti-fascist army, syndicalist party, moderate republican party

3. Right Wing: King—church party, right wing coalition, Spanish fascist party, anti-parliamentary party, monarchist party, fascist army officers organization

III. Immediate Causes: the failure of the Second Republic and the Popular Front:

* By April 1931, there was no popular support for the monarchy in Spain
* New government under Azana wasted no time in enacting agricultural, labor, and anti-clerical legislation; while such changes made those of the left happy, they did not go far enough for those on the extreme left; conservative right was furious
* Civil Guard rose in rebellion in August 1932 under Sanjurjo and illustrated the degree of opposition that the government faced; was put down
* While middle class liberals supported the Republic, the radical left and the conservative right were not convinced; strikes continued through 1933
* Elections of Nov. 1933 brought a right wing coalition to power; new wave of unrest
* Strikes and disturbances reached a crescendo with a short-lived declaration of autonomy by Catalonia and a revolt in the region of Asturias
  + Crushed by Spanish troops; to some on the Spanish left, this revolt was an attempt to avoid the fate of the German left who had failed to resist the rise of the Nazis; to others, it was the confirmation that the radical left in Spain had abandoned the const. and couldn’t be trusted to govern

The Popular Front and the generals; uprising:

* 1936: Spain was back to the left; embraced electoral strategy encouraged by the Comintern and was known as the Popular Front
* a defense strategy designed to stop the extreme right from taking power, as Hitler had done
* lack of stability led to an organized military insurrection led by Goded, Mola, and Franco; British Navy helped relay messages for the rebels; Moroccan troops were the most experienced and would prove vital to the success of the Nationalist cause
* once the scope of the crisis became clear, the UGT, CNT, and other left wing organizations who had manpower but insufficient fire power to resist the rebels
* pattern produced a patchwork of rebel and loyalist holdings early in the insurrection; the rebels heled the Andalucian coast, including Seville; Madrid maintained control, benefiting from the poor organization and hesitation of the rebels; east of the country also remained loyal
* as the tide turned in favor of the loyalists, General Goded himself urged the rebels to surrender; Barcelona was the heart of loyalist Spain
* pattern was clear: the government would only retain control where it would accept the help of non-govern. Organizations or in places where the army was too poorly organized to establish control; government was weak (centralized control)

IV. The Combatants and international reaction:

The Republicans:

* comprised the elements of the military that remained loyal to the gov’t, as well as various militias associated with working-class organizations such as POUM
* managed to arm themselves with weapons they had accumulated over the years before the war and with those they managed to take from the army
* volunteer members lacked training and leadership; political and strategic differences made coordination between the militias very difficult—exploited by the Nationalists

The Nationalists:

* made up of the military units that had rebelled in July 1936, augmented by volunteers from right-wing organizations such as the Falange and the Carlists
* by introducing conscription, they mobilized over a million men; supported by Catholic Church and other conservative elements such as landowners who were scared by Republican land seizures and collectivization
* components were under Franco who emerged as both the military and political leader of the forces

The International Brigades:

* US and UK adopted non-intervention policies but unofficially hoped for a Nationalist victory, but also didn’t want the spread of communism
* Although US and UK prohibited volunteers to travel to Spain, 30,000 people smuggled themselves into the brigades; organized by communist organizations and coordinated by the Comintern

German support:

* Franco sought aid from Hitler in 1936; Hitler saw that Germany could benefit from Spain’s instability and a Nationalist victory could give Germany access to Spanish natural resources
* Germany supplied them with artillery, small arms, tanks, and vehicles
* German Luftwaffe formed the Condor Legion to fight in Spain: fighter planes, transport planes and bombers, personnel to maintain and operate them

-Republicans had no air force to match this

* Prove vital to the Nationalist’s victories

Italian support:

* Mussolini pledged aid, material, and personnel to the monarchists
* Secret agreement 1936: Mussolini made an agreement with Franco by which Mussolini would receive Spanish support in case of a war with France in return for an increase in aid to the Nationalist army
* Italian formations such as the Corpo Truppe Volontaire would contribute to a number of important battles such as Guadalajara

Soviet support:

* Soviet material was arriving in Spain to bolster the Republican forces; unlike the Germans and Italians, who allowed the Nationalists to purchase material on credit, the Republicans had to pay for Soviet aid with Spain’s gold reserves
* Most of the Republican’s tanks and planes came from USSR; much of the recruiting and control of the brigades was handled by Soviets
* This influence combined with ideological divisions between militias in the Republican side hindered the war effort

The Western democracies and non-intervention:

* Non-Intervention committee: barred the sale of arms to either side in the war, a stipulation that was upheld by the UK and France and ignored by Germany, Italy and the SU
* US also refused to sell arms to the Republicans; Roosevelt’s hands were tied with the Neutrality Acts; American oil companies still sold oil on credit to the Nationalists; non-intervention damaged the Republican war effort but had no real effect on the Nationalists
* The most international brigades came from France and all international brigades supported the Republicans

V. Progress of the War:

* Citizens on both sides took the opportunity to settle old scores with any number of political or even personal enemies; this led to violent retribution whenever one side conquered new territory, increasing the suffering of non-combatants
* Republican targets: Falange members and Catholic Clergy
* Nationalists sought out anarchists, communists, and trade union members; both sides used sham legality in the form of tribunals to lend an air of legitimacy to the violence
* Republican forces were mainly on the defensive
  + Ex. Managed to stop a Nationalist offensive towards Bilbao and repulse the first of several attacks on Madrid
  + Resistance of Madrid would continue for three years and became the emotive rallying point for the Republic
* Franco’s army was bolstered in 1937 by the arrival of more Italian and German troops and material; led to attacks on Madrid, both of which failed
* On 26 April, German Condor Legion launched air attack on Basque city of Guernica: huge atrocity and deliberate targeting of civilians in order to create terror and break their will to resist, a tactic the German air force would continue to use in Spain and in WWII
  + Picasso’s *Guernica*
* As the year of 1937 progressed, the Republican forces gained more battle experience, fighting more effectively and launching offensives of their own but were undermined by the tension between the left wing parties
* Concentrated and organized military effort against the Nationalists could not be pursued while the Republicans were fighting with each other

Why the Republicans lost:

* By October 1927, they had been reduced to a large territory to the south and east of Madrid and a much smaller piece of land surrounding Barcelona; tried to reconnect these two areas but failed
* Early 1939: last of the Republican strongholds fell, save for Madrid and Valencia, which cont. to resist
* Despite Republican control of the capital, in Feb. 1939, France and the UK officially recognized the Franco regime as the legit government of Spain
* The last Republican defenders surrendered on 2 April 1939

Reasons:

1. Lack of effective central command and control

2. Political infighting

3. Insufficient arms and material

4. Anarchists fought with communists and Marxists/Trotskyists fought with Stalinists

5. Weaknesses forced the Republicans into a defensive posture from which victory was impossible

6. Offensives in 1937 were costly and ineffective

7. Nationalists were able to make use of the foreign aid they received, mostly the German Legion

8. use of Moroccan soldiers gave the Nationalists efficient fighting capability from the start of the war, whereas the Republican militias and other forces had to gain valuable experience at the expense of territory

VI. Aftermath and significance of the war:

* The immediate cost of the war: 500,000 people died between 1936-9
* Carpet bombing of civilians, violent ideological beliefs, reprisals linked to military operations, and the integrated use of airpower, armor and infantry made their depot in Spain
* The war was a clarion call for the international left to confront the threat posed by expansionary fascism, a fact realized by Spain three years before the democracies of the West
* To the West, the war was a struggle of the forces of repression on the one side and freedom on the other
* To the working class, it was about landed/industrial interests versus workers and unions
* Industrialists saw the war as a struggle against communism and the brand of economic and proprietary authoritarianism
* Prominent writers: Orwell, Hemingway, Guthrie, Parker
* The war brought fascism to both of France’s major borders and gave the fascists direct access to the Atlantic, so vital to Britain’s interests
* Franco’s reluctance to throw his lot with Hitler and Mussolini spared the Grand Alliance of the WWII the reality of dealing with Spain as an enemy
* Franco’s regime survived into the 1970s due to right-wing support and authoritarian tactics
* Franco persecuted political opponents, repressed the culture and language of Spain’s Basque and Catalan regions, censured the media and otherwise exerted absolute control over the country