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## The Ground Rules – Republican and Nationalist International News Management

The Spanish Civil War was a domestic conflict in name only. It attracted the attentions and interventions of many foreign governments, political parties, activists, workers, artists and intellectuals, most of whom engaged in propagandistic activity intended to influence attitudes, policies and outcomes related to the war. I examine some of this activity in a British context in Chapter 5 but the discussion here focuses solely on the propaganda of the local combatants in Spain. This is because, for all the geopolitical significance of the war, it is appropriate to conceive of the local antagonists as both the principal sources and preliminary mediators of the conflict. It was their actions, values, interests and ideologies that were the root referents for all other interventions and representations.

Furthermore, the discussion concentrates mainly on their internationally targeted propaganda, as opposed to their efforts to win, or terrorise, local hearts and minds. This is not to suggest that the local dimension is unimportant or that there is a neat and absolute distinction between these levels. News from abroad could sometimes stimulate hope or despair to those directly affected by combat, just as local rhetoric could resonate internationally and, indeed, through history. For example, when Dolores Ibárruri Gómez, ‘La Pasionaria’, delivered the first of her famous oratories in defence of the Republic on Madrid radio on 19 July 1936, her main concern was to exhort local ‘workers, peasants, anti-fascists and patriotic Spaniards’ to resist the rebellion (Thomas, 2003: 233). However, her rallying cry ‘*¡No pasarán!*’ (‘They shall not pass’) quickly acquired international fame as a clarion call for anti-fascism in Spain and beyond (ibid.). Nevertheless, there were major differences in the messages these warring parties sought to communicate at home and abroad.

Additionally, this discussion will concentrate on propaganda activities that were geared towards managing, controlling and influencing foreign media coverage. Such media-centrism is justified by the principal concerns of the book but it does mean that many locally initiated cultural and political activities that fulfilled propagandistic functions are excluded from discussion. (For a valuable review of the range of political and cultural propaganda produced in Republican and Nationalist sectors during the war, see Holguín, 2002: 168–94.)

One final point to explain concerns my use of the term ‘propaganda’ in this and subsequent chapters. To the extent that the term retains contemporary

currency, it is in a provocative capacity (see, for example, Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Pilger, 2005) and there are those who reject its usage, because of its pejorative connotations and lack of conceptual precision (see Corner, 2007). However, I have used it here for two reasons. First, it is the term that would have been employed at the time to label the matters under discussion. Second, although the term had started to acquire negative connotations from the end of the First World War (Taylor, 1999), it still had a more ambiguous quality in the 1930s than it does today and it was as commonly used descriptively to label promotional communication of any kind as it was to stigmatise particular forms of public discourse.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter is structured around two sections. The first outlines the broad themes that guided the communication and propaganda activities of the combatants in Spain. The second examines how these translated into the practical arrangements for foreign journalists on both sides of the war.

## Propaganda themes

It is easier to identify the core themes in the propaganda of the forces that rebelled than it is to precis the equivalent goals of the government they attacked. This is because of their different political structures. It is an oversimplification to characterise the Nationalists as a completely cohesive political and ideological force. Nevertheless, under Franco's centralised and hierarchical leadership, the different demands and disaffections of the constituents of the Nationalist rebellion were quickly contained and controlled. In contrast, the Republic was politically and geographically heterogeneous, particularly during the first year of the war, containing political elements with very different beliefs and objectives. At times, this affected the coherence of the messages they communicated.

### *Nationalist themes*

Three related themes dominated all Nationalist propaganda. The first was a visceral anti-Communism in which all creeds and factions on the left, and indeed political centre, were vilified as 'Reds' who threatened Spanish values and unity. As one foreign correspondent noted:

The Nationalist propaganda was concentrated exclusively on the fight against Bolshevism . . . I found, however, that Bolshevism was an elastic word, for it included democrats as well as Communists; in fact, everyone who did not support a totalitarian regime was lumped together as Red. (Cowles, 1941: 72)

The second theme was a self-conscious religiosity that characterised the Nationalist rebellion as a Catholic 'crusade' against atheistic hordes. This proved highly effective in mobilising support internationally for Franco, both domestically and among Catholic institutions and congregations across the

world (Thomas, 2003: 495; Flint, 1987). The final theme drew on reactionary conceptions of Spanish nationhood, which repudiated regional separatism and sought to associate Franco 'with the great heroes of Spain's past' (Preston, 1993: 290). Although dependent on the military and political support of Germany and Italy, the Nationalist leaders were sensitive to suggestions that they were mere clients of these fascist powers and conduits for their ideologies.<sup>2</sup>

Nationalist propagandists also had to attend to questions of self-legitimacy, particularly as the conflict extended and attracted more international attention. The military rebellion was always intended to be a coup rather than a civil war, achieving its political objectives through force of arms rather than ideas. It was only in the face of the Republic's enduring resistance that the Nationalist leadership had to grapple with explaining and justifying actions that could claim no 'objective legitimacy' (Ellwood, 1994: 78).

One of the initial means by which they did so was through atrocity propaganda, which highlighted the violent excesses of the Republic and thereby inverted the question of culpability. Writing at the time of the conflict, the pro-Republican journalist Arthur Koestler, argued that the Nationalists had no option but to dramatise and exaggerate the scale of the Red Terror as this was the only message likely to secure international support among general political and public opinion, internationally:

The rebels are fighting for a military dictatorship, for a corporate state, for clericalism – causes which are very unpopular in France and England . . . Genuine political arguments, therefore, with the exception of the Communist bogey, were of no use as propaganda to Franco in Western Europe. So he deliberately chose a form of propaganda that from the time of the ritual murder myths of the Middle Ages until the time of the Reichstag fire and the Abyssinian campaign has always proved an unfailing standby, whenever it has been essential to avoid awkward political discussions and to justify one's own terroristic acts by pointing to the other side . . . This was intended specially for English consumption . . . He preferred to tell them stories of mangled corpses, of the putting out of eyes, and of Red cannibalism. (1937: 128–9)

Alongside the atrocity propaganda, the Nationalists publicised documents said to prove that a radical takeover of the Republic was being planned at the time the rebellion occurred. Historical analysis has definitively exposed these documents as forgeries (Southworth, 2001) but they provided valuable ammunition for Nationalist apologists at the time, particularly internationally (see, for example, Gerahty, 1937: 214–9).

A clear indication of the Nationalists' concerns about their legitimacy was their sensitivity about the labels applied to them by foreign commentators. For example, a special correspondent for the *Daily Mail* recounted a conflict between a Nationalist censor, Captain Rosales, and John Whitaker of the *New York Herald Tribune* at the start of the war:

[I]n John's stories they are the 'rebel' armies and in fury Rosales tells him he will not stand for it. He will forbid the word 'rebel' to be used in stories hereafter. 'Patriot' armies, 'Nationalist' armies, 'White' armies – any man who used the term 'rebel' will have his passes revoked and will leave the country! (Davis, 1940: 131)

These semantic concerns were far more than just an idiosyncratic fixation of an overzealous press officer. Rather they were an abiding and strategic concern to Franco's forces throughout the war. The British Foreign Office was lobbied repeatedly on this matter and relayed the Nationalists' concerns to other British organisations with interests in the region, including the BBC.<sup>3</sup>

The international impression that the Nationalists sought to convey – that their rebellion was an act of legitimate reaction and that they represented a force for moderation in a tumult of extremism – contrasted markedly with their local propaganda, which was highly polemical and threatening in tone. Drawing on their experiences in Spanish Morocco, the Nationalist generals often sought to inculcate terror amongst their opponents through both their actions and pronouncements. For example, Franco sometimes decreed that official executions conducted by garrottes were publicised in Nationalist papers (*'garrote y prensa'*) to traumatise and demoralise the enemy 'with evidence of inexorable might and implacable terror' (Preston, 1993: 227). At the start of the war, General Queipo de Llano captured Seville for the Nationalists recruiting the assistance of military forces already based in the area. Establishing the city as something of a personal fiefdom, he became known as 'The Radio General' on the basis of his nightly broadcasts in which he both raged against Republican atrocities and threatened Nationalist atrocities in the future. One threat he often mentioned was the prospect of mass rape by African mercenaries fighting on the Nationalists' behalf.<sup>4</sup>

### *Republican themes*

As noted, summarising the core themes in Republican propaganda is complicated by the political diversity of the Popular Front government, which 'ran the gamut from "new Deal"-type republicans to revolutionary socialists, communists, and anarchists' (Jackson, 1972: 4). As Beevor comments, 'The Nationalists defended a common view of the past; the Republican coalition, in contrast, had widely different visions of the future' (2003: 411). An added complication is that the prominence of these themes changed over time, as the political balance of the Republic altered as military defeats and internal conflict took their toll.

At the start of the war, two competing discourses vied for prominence in Republican propaganda. The first advanced a revolutionary vision of Spain's future and characterised the rebellion as the beginning of a genuine social revolution in Spain, in which centuries of injustice would be swept away through the redistribution of land and industries to unions and workers syndicates. This was the view of Anarchists, Syndicalists and revolutionary Communists and it was

particularly prominent in Catalonia, which had been a stronghold of anarcho-syndicalism for many years prior to the war. The second was effectively counter-revolutionary and emphasised the democratic legitimacy and bourgeois credentials of the Republic. This was the view advanced by a coalition of liberals, left Republicans, Basque Separatists, right-wing Socialists and, crucially, the pro-Stalinist Communists whose transformation into social conservatives 'was partly in response to the policies of Stalin searching for support from Popular Fronts in respectable democracies' (Carr, 2001: 139).

These tensions were particularly evident and significant because of the greater communications dependency of the Republic. Whereas the Nationalist rebellion was not reliant fundamentally on popular mass organisation, the Republic could only sustain effective resistance by convincing local citizens of the need to fight. Internationally, too, 'the cause of the Republic depended on the world knowing the facts' (de la Mora, 1939: 288), particularly in trying to persuade democratic nations to intervene in support of the Republic. However, this created contradictions in the messages the Republic conveyed locally and internationally. As Hugh Thomas notes:

In republican propaganda, two pictures were counterposed as if there were always potentially a civil war within the civil war: one picture, for foreigners, depicted constitutional democracy struggling against international fascism; the second picture, for consumption at home, showed the Spanish people at one pace away from a new world: victory would lead to *la vida nueva*. (2004: 525)

To cover these contradictions, directives were issued by the central government to suppress news about any social revolution in Spain. On taking over as Republican Prime Minister in August 1936, Largo Caballero set aside his radical principles and instructed it was 'necessary to sacrifice revolutionary language to win the friendship of the Republic' (quoted in Conlon, 2001: 9). As one former minister noted at the time:

During the three months that I was director of propaganda for the United States and England under Alvarez del Vayo, then Foreign Minister for the Valencia Government, I was instructed not to send out one word about this revolution in the economic system of loyalist Spain. Nor are any foreign correspondents in Valencia permitted to write freely of the revolution that has taken place. (quoted in Chomsky, 1968: 96)

As the war progressed, the problems of reconciling the different visions of national and international communication became less acute for the Republic following the centralisation of political control by the more conservative forces and the active suppression of revolutionary advocates and discourses.<sup>5</sup>

However, there was one recurrent and consistent theme evident in all Republican propaganda, regardless of its level, source or timing. This was the theme of anti-Fascism that disregarded any political and ideological differences

within the rebellion and cast the Nationalists and their supporters as indistinguishable from Fascist regimes elsewhere in Europe. Anti-Fascism had resonance at both local and international levels. Locally, it fed fears that all the tenuous social and political gains made since the declaration of the Second Republic in 1931 would be lost as ‘the champions of the dark past of ignorance and illiteracy’ reasserted their command (Ministry of Public Information leaflet, 1937, quoted in Holguín, 2002: 177). Internationally, it provided a common ground for radical and liberal opinion to unite in support of the Republican cause.

From this discussion some parallels are evident in Nationalist and Republican propaganda, despite their ideological differences. Both sides stigmatised their enemies simplistically. Both sides had to communicate competing and essentially contradictory messages – local messages of radicalism or ruthlessness were never intended for international consumption where both sides sought to promote an image of moderation, responsibility and restraint. In the sections that follow, the discussion focuses on the international news management activities of both sides and their role in achieving these complex tasks in impression management. As will be shown, the respective strategies of control that emerged revealed the different political cultures from which they originated. However, these activities were also affected by technological factors and it is necessary to consider these material constraints first.

## International news management

Table 2.1 identifies the location and control of the key elements of the Spanish telecommunication structure during the war involved in *international* communication, which depended on four channels – telegraphy, telephony, radio and mail services. (Note that details of facilities used for internal communication within Spain are not included in Table 2.1.)

The first international cable connections to Spain were established in the nineteenth century and the three main international cable heads were located at Vigo, Bilbao and Malaga. Before the war, international mail was mainly routed from Barcelona, which meant the Nationalists had to improvise new routes by rail, by air to Rome and by sea to Genoa and Marseilles (Shelley, 1960). Prior to the 1920s, the Spanish telephone system was one of the most antiquated in Europe. However, a rapid process of expansion and modernisation began in 1923 under the military dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera. The following year, the *Compañía Telefónica de España* (CTNE) was established. A subsidiary of International Telephone and Telegraphy (ITT), the company had monopolistic control and, by 1929, 71,800 kilometres of local and long distance lines had been constructed and the number of telephones in the country had trebled (Little, 1979: 453). Nevertheless, international phone connections in 1936 were still tenuous, being limited to the main telephone exchanges in Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia.

*Table 2.1* Principal international communication and news censorship arrangements

<i>Republican sector</i>		<i>Nationalist sector</i>	
<b>Madrid</b>	For the entire war: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International Telephone</li> <li>• International Cable</li> <li>• Short-Wave International Radio Broadcasting</li> <li>• Foreign News Censorship offices</li> </ul>	<b>Salamanca</b>	For the entire war: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foreign News Censorship offices</li> </ul>
<b>Valencia</b>	For the entire war: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International Telephone</li> <li>• International Cable</li> <li>• Short-Wave International Radio Broadcasting</li> <li>• Foreign News Censorship offices</li> </ul>	<b>Vitoria</b>	For the entire war: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foreign News Censorship offices</li> </ul>
<b>Barcelona</b>	Until January 1939: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International Telephone</li> <li>• International Cable</li> <li>• Short-Wave International Radio Broadcasting</li> <li>• Foreign News Censorship offices</li> </ul>	<b>Vigo</b>	From September 1936: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International Cable</li> </ul>
<b>Bilbao</b>	Until June 1937: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International Cable</li> <li>• Foreign News Censorship offices</li> </ul>	<b>Burgos</b>	For the entire war: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foreign News Censorship offices</li> </ul>
<b>Malaga</b>	Until February 1937: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International Cable</li> </ul>	<b>Malaga</b>	From February 1937: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International Cable</li> </ul>
		<b>Zaragoza</b>	From September 1936: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foreign News Censorship offices</li> </ul>
		<b>Bilbao</b>	From June 1937: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International Cable</li> </ul>
		<b>Barcelona</b>	From February 1939: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International Telephone</li> <li>• International Cable</li> <li>• Short Wave International Radio Broadcasting</li> </ul>



Radio was the newest technology on the scene. Indeed, the Spanish Civil War has been labelled the first 'radio war' because it was the first conflict where the technology had a significant impact as a means of information transmission and of mass communication (Davies, 1999). However, the significance of radio mainly resided at local level.<sup>6</sup> For example, wireless telegraphy alerted sailors of the rebellion and prevented the navy from falling under insurgent control but it was never a significant means for the transmission of international journalists' copy during the war.<sup>7</sup> This was because of its unreliability over long distances and the concerns of authorities on both sides to avoid the unregulated transmission of information from their zones of control. In terms of broadcast programmes, the Republic transmitted foreign language programmes from Barcelona and Madrid throughout the war, recruiting help from volunteers from the International Brigade and, occasionally, foreign correspondents. But even those involved in these broadcasts remained uncertain about how clearly they were received overseas and whether they attracted an audience (Graham, 1999: 49). The Nationalists' international broadcasting was principally organised through The Radio Club of Tenerife, based in the Canary Islands, which was unreliable and often needed supplementing with amateur radio transmissions (Davies, 1999: 493).

The details in Table 2.1 reveal four points about the distribution of international communication resources in Spain during the war. First, the Republican side had considerable advantages over the insurgents at the outset. They controlled two of the three main international cable heads in Bilbao and Malaga, had the most powerful radio transmitters and also sole access to the international telephone lines. It took several weeks for the Nationalists to get the cable head at Vigo operational which meant that, at the start of the war, foreign news reports had to be couriered by car to France, Gibraltar and Portugal for dispatch (Davis, 1940: 154). The Republic also had advantages in its mail services. As Robert Shelley explains, apart from controlling the main international mail routes:

[t]he Republicans, because they possessed the printing works at Madrid and large supplies of stamps, were not philatelically embarrassed. Not so with the Nationalists, who in many cases had to improvise. It is not uncommon, therefore, to find during the early part of the war that some covers had the 'Mayoral mark' and words to the effect: 'I certify that there are no stamps, (signed) the Mayor.' (1960: 1)

Second, the transmission advantages of the Republic eroded as the war progressed. In December 1936, the headquarters of the new Nationalist radio network, Radio Nacional de España, based in Salamanca, took delivery of a 20kW transmitter from Germany, which meant Nationalist broadcasts could be heard clearly across Spain for the first time (Thomas, 2003: 504). This capacity was enhanced further by their acquisition of a 30kW station in Zaragoza the following year (Davies, 1999: 484). By mid 1937, the international cable facilities in Malaga and Bilbao were also in Nationalist hands, with their tie-ups to Italcable and Eastern Cable Services.

Third, despite these changes, the Republic retained significant advantages in telecommunication throughout the conflict because of the Nationalists' failure to capture any international phone lines in Spain until the last months of the war. Telephony was a superior technology to wireless and cable telegraphy for a range of reasons. It was a far more stable and reliable means of transmission (Knoblauch, 1937: 133). It offered the opportunity for verbal communication, thereby avoiding the labour intensive and time-consuming tasks of encoding and deciphering messages in Morse code. It was far cheaper on a word-cost basis than cable and offered the potential for greater freedom of expression.<sup>8</sup> It could also be used for telegraphy. However, the principal advantage of telephony was the speed with which information could be dispatched. Telephone contact provided instantaneous communication between journalists in the field and their newsrooms, whereas telegraphic contact involved substantial time delays (see Bolín, 1967: 221).

Fourth, the mechanisms for the censorship and dispatch of foreign correspondents' copy were more closely integrated in the Republican sectors, which further increased the efficiency of their international news management. In Madrid, foreign journalists, censors and telephonists all worked in the imposing Telefónica building. Built in 1929, it was the city's first skyscraper and its location at the top of the Gran Vía provided an excellent view of the front lines to the west and protection from Franco's artillery. In Barcelona, too, journalists and censors worked in close proximity in the Telefónica building. In contrast, the Nationalists' international press and censorship offices were distant from the international dispatch points, which meant they depended on local telegraphy and telephone services that were notoriously unreliable and added further delay to international news flows from Franco's Spain (Bolín, 1967: 221). To give an example, in March 1937, Ralph Deakin, the foreign news editor of *The Times* conducted an internal audit of the thirty-two cables sent by the paper's main correspondent in the Nationalist zone between 22 February and 5 March 1937. The results showed the cables took an average of eleven hours to reach the news desk in London. Deakin initially surmised that the Nationalist censors were obstructing their dispatch, but eventually concluded that it was the inefficiency of the land connections that was the major reason for the delays (Deakin Papers, The Times Newspaper Limited Archive (TNL Archive), March 1937).<sup>9</sup>

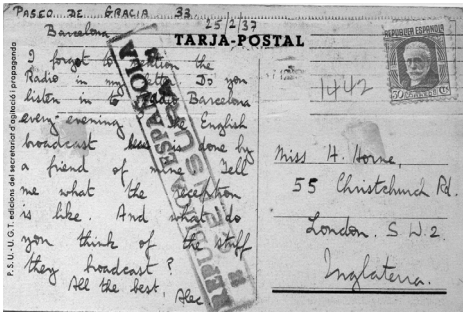
One of the solutions used by foreign correspondents to deal with the limited international communication facilities available in Spain was to travel over surrounding borders to transmit copy from France, Portugal, Gibraltar and Tangiers. Indeed, this was the only means of transmitting copy during the earliest stages of the war (Fernsworth, 1939; Delmer, 1961) and journalists continued to exploit the opportunities for sending uncensored copy throughout the war. However, authorities on both sides moved quickly to regulate over-the-border communication and this was just one aspect of the controls they imposed. It is to these matters that the discussion now turns.



(From the author's own collection.)

The Telefónica building, Madrid

Built in 1929 by Compañía Telefónica de España (CTNE), a subsidiary of International Telephone and Telegraphy (ITT), this was one of only three international telephone exchanges in Spain during the Civil War. It became a crucial hub in the dissemination of news from the Republic internationally.



(From the author's own collection.)

A postcard from Barcelona, February 1937

The full text reads:

I forgot to mention the radio in my letter. Do you listen in to Radio Barcelona every evening? The English broadcast is done by a friend of mine. Tell me what the reception is like. And what do you think of the stuff they broadcast? All the best, Alice

The Spanish Civil War has been called ‘the first radio war’ but radio played only a minor role in international communication and publicity.

## Nationalist news management

A considerable amount has been written about the policies and personalities involved in Franco's news management. Much of it was published during the war and its immediate aftermath in the personal testimonies of journalists who experienced these controls directly (for example, Cardozo, 1937; Davis, 1940; McCullagh, 1937; Cowles, 1941; Whitaker, 1943; Knickerbocker, 1936). These accounts have, in turn, provided the foundation for historical reviews of this subject (see, for example, Southworth, 1977: 45–59; Preston, 2004).

Although the eyewitness testimonies of the foreign correspondents in Nationalist Spain provide valuable insights, they have limitations when taken in isolation. The tour of duty for a journalist in Franco's Spain was typically shorter than for their colleagues in the Republic partly because of the propensity of the Nationalists to expel foreign correspondents on the slightest of pretexts and partly because the pressures of working in a controlled and often intimidating environment.<sup>10</sup> Thus, many accounts offer only brief snapshots of the Nationalist arrangements rather than lengthy perspectives. Furthermore, most journalists' accounts describe arrangements for the first year of the conflict, which invites a presumption, but not a demonstration, that news management remained constant throughout the conflict. However, if one looks closely at the specific temporal location of foreign journalists' written testimony, it is clear that there were three distinct phases to the foreign news management of the Nationalists.

### *Phase 1: confusion (July–September 1936)*

The first phase was the briefest in duration and was a period where the supervision and censorship of international media activity was weak and disorganised. Once the borders were opened, foreign journalists made regular and unsupervised forays into Nationalist territory from France, Gibraltar and Portugal and were free to return to send their uncensored reports.<sup>11</sup> Sefton Delmer of the *Daily Express*, Louis Delapré of *Paris Soir* and Hubert Knickerbocker of the Hearst Press chartered a plane and landed in Burgos without even knowing who controlled the city. Although arrested on their arrival, they were allowed to remain to report the rapidly developing events. Delmer recalled:

Delapré and I went into it in a spirit of whoopee that first day while Knickerbocker was away in Bordeaux transmitting our dispatches. We had no passes, no papers of any kind from the army. We were supposed to stay in our hotel. Instead we hired a taxi in Burgos and told the man to drive us up the road to Madrid. 'Arriba España!' we roared, waving our straw hats to everyone we met, including the men on the road blocks. And the sentries thinking we were señorito volunteers shouted back 'Arriba España' and waved us through. It was wonderful fun. (1961: 275)

The laxity of this situation revealed the confusion and chaos of the first weeks of the rebellion, when it became apparent that the coup had failed. As discussed, the rebels had not anticipated the need to explain themselves and the absence of any co-ordinated system of press accreditation and supervision was symptomatic of their broader failure to develop contingency plans to deal with communication matters.

*Phase 2: control (October 1936–late 1937)*

Inevitably, this situation did not last. As the insurrection developed into a protracted conflict, the Nationalist leadership began to appreciate the need for effective control of foreign journalists. As one military officer put it to Frances Davis of the *Daily Mail*, '[t]he press will have their place in the war but they will not move as they want. They will move as the army says they may. They will no longer cross the frontier carrying stories that are not permitted' (1940: 98; see also Knickerbocker, 1936: 50).

A particularly significant figure in this imposition of control was Luis Bolín. Prior to the war, Bolín had been London correspondent for the Spanish monarchist daily *ABC*. He was one of the conspirators who organised for a plane to be flown from Croydon airport to deliver Franco and General Emilio Mola from the Canary Islands to Spanish Morocco in preparation for the revolt. In the first few weeks of the war, Bolín was based in Seville with General Queipo de Llano and, despite ongoing uncertainties about the leadership of the rebellion, he urged that tighter and more effective press controls be imposed urgently:

I spoke to General Franco. Unless we acted promptly to establish our case, I said, the blame for what was happening might eventually fall on us . . . Meanwhile, not all correspondents attached to us were submitting their writings to censorship, as is customary and usual in all wars. In certain cases we could not even find their contributions in the papers they allegedly represented, which were printing stories with the dateline 'Seville' signed by names we had never heard of. It took time to sift credentials, the genuineness of which could not be doubted, from others, undoubtedly false, but we got to know that some of these journalists, after spending a few days with us, were taking advantage of the freedom which they enjoyed to file their pieces under other names in Tangier or Gibraltar, with complete disregard for the rules of fair play. I recalled the restrictions imposed on War Correspondents with the British during World War I. Measures similar to these, though far less strict, were rapidly introduced, and in Seville a Press Office was established, which I directed for a brief period. (Bolín, 1967: 186–7)<sup>12</sup>

In October 1936, Franco gained uncontested command of the rebellion. He moved his general headquarters to the Episcopal Palace in Salamanca and appointed General José Millán Astray as head of *La Oficina de Prensa y Propaganda* (The Office for Press and Propaganda), which was also located in

the building.<sup>13</sup> Millán Astray was already renowned as founder of the Spanish Foreign Legion and had lost an arm and an eye during military campaigns in Spanish Morocco in the 1920s, where his ruthlessness and fanaticism had started to coalesce into a distinctive 'ideology of death' that proved influential in shaping right-wing military conceptions of national identity during that period (Jensen, 2002: 147). Millán Astray was fiercely loyal to Franco and gave full vent to his enthusiasm and belligerence in his role as propaganda chief. He harangued and bullied the foreign press contingent on regular occasions and encouraged his senior press officers to do likewise. Bolín was placed in charge of the Nationalists' foreign press bureau and was bestowed with the honorific title of Captain of the Legion; and Captain Gonzalo de Aguilera, a retired cavalry officer and wealthy landowner, became a prominent figure in the organisation of foreign press relations in Northern Spain, working under General Mola's staff.

Both men shared Millán Astray's extreme and reactionary views and their free articulation of these opinions shocked many of the foreign correspondents under their supervision. Noel Monks, correspondent for the *Daily Express*, witnessed Bolín spit on the corpses of executed Republican prisoners on several occasions, disdaining them as 'Reds' and 'vermin'. Monks concluded that Bolín 'had a cruel streak in him that was essentially Spanish' (1955: 73). Aguilera famously bragged to international journalists that he had shot six of his workers on the day the rebellion occurred 'pour encourager les autres'. John Whitaker, correspondent for the *New York Herald Tribune*, recollected several others of Aguilera's more memorable statements:

'We have got to kill and kill and kill, you understand' . . . 'You know what's wrong with Spain?' Aguilera used to demand of me. 'Modern plumbing! In healthier times – I mean healthier times spiritually, you understand – plague and pestilence could be counted on to thin down the Spanish masses.' . . . 'It's our program, you understand, to exterminate one third of the male population of Spain. That will purge the country and we will be rid of the proletariat.' (1943: 108)

Similar sentiments were also voiced by other Nationalist press officers – indeed, correspondents soon realised that these opinions were entirely typical of the officer classes on the Nationalist side (Preston, 2004). Noel Monks noted how openly officers boasted 'of what *they*'d done when they took over from the Reds. But they weren't *atrocities*. Oh no, señor. Not even the locking up of a captured militia girl in a room with twenty Moors. No, señor. That was fun' (Monks, 1955: 79). However, this candour was intended for private consumption only as journalists were prohibited from making any reference to these views or actions in their editorial copy (*ibid.*).

Consideration of the major personalities involved in Nationalist news management is important because it demonstrates how this activity was rooted in a military culture that was instinctively suspicious and antagonistic towards journalists. Of the senior press officers, only Bolín had any previous journalistic experience which he chose to play down, revelling instead in his *faux* military status,

which invited derision from genuine soldiers and foreign correspondents alike. Foreign journalists were expected to work in the service of the Nationalist authorities and convey their propaganda uncritically. Legitimate journalistic inquisitiveness was readily cast as espionage and independence of thought and action construed as insubordination – both heinous sins to the military mindset. The new stringent restrictions aimed to control these aspects. As René MacColl of the *Daily Express* recalled:

A new British correspondent turned up from London and requested credentials. The suspicious Franco H.Q. man subjected him to a long questionnaire. Finally, the Englishman produced a letter from his head office, which set forth his qualifications. The letter described him as being a 'strictly objective reporter'. When he came to this passage, the Franco official started and looked up in horror. 'Objecteeve!' he cried. 'But that is inadmissible!' Those who were not with Franco were against him. (1956: 82–3)

Once the cable head at Vigo became operational in late August 1936, correspondents were discouraged from couriering their copy by hand for transmission at locations beyond the Nationalists' control. Although they could never completely stop this outlet, copies of international papers were scoured to identify any transgressions and transgressors. Strict censorship rules were imposed forbidding any reference to the presence of German and Italian forces or Nationalist atrocities. At times, the authorities could display a neurotic sensitivity about the nature of their representation. For example, Sefton Delmer of the *Daily Express* was expelled from the Nationalist sector in October 1936 because of a story he filed about a civilian plane that had been mistakenly fired upon by anti-aircraft gunners as it approached Burgos. He reported that the British pilot only became aware of the danger after he landed which, in the Nationalists' opinion, both encouraged aerial attacks on Burgos and made their air defences seem inefficient.<sup>14</sup>

Strict accreditation of foreign journalists was also introduced. Correspondents could no longer gain retrospective permission for their presence and were required to obtain clearance formally from Franco's representatives located on the Spanish borders. Journalists could be denied accreditation for a range of reasons. Any evidence that a correspondent had previously visited the Republican sector was normally sufficient grounds for a refusal, although some correspondents – Virginia Cowles and Denzil Batchelor, for example – managed to get around this prohibition (see Cowles, 1941; Batchelor, 1961). The Nationalists also began to proscribe news organisations deemed unsympathetic to their cause. For instance, in the earliest days of the war Arthur Koestler had interviewed General Queipo de Llano in Seville on behalf of the *News Chronicle* but, in October 1936, Bolín rejected the paper's request for permission to send a further representative and threatened that, if one of their correspondents was found in Nationalist territory, 'it would be the worst for him' (Weaver, 1939: 111). Other liberal papers that were banned included the *Manchester Guardian* and the





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### A Nationalist press tour, Northern Spain, September 1936

After an initial chaotic period, a strict censorship regime was introduced by Nationalist authorities and foreign correspondents were only permitted to go to the front on collective visits organised and chaperoned by Nationalist press officers. Harold Cardozo, Special Correspondent for the *Daily Mail* is third from the left and Frances Davis (the *Daily Mail* and *Chicago Daily News*) is fifth from the left.

*Chicago Daily News*. The consequences for entering Nationalist territory without official clearance could be severe, even for those sympathetic to Franco. For example, Hubert Knickerbocker of the Hearst Press reported extensively from the Franco's side during the first months of the war and wrote approvingly of the Nationalists' cause (see Knickerbocker, 1936) but this did not prevent his imprisonment when he was caught entering Northern Spain without authorisation in early 1937 (Preston, 2004: 299).

Gaining entry was just the first barrier. There were no blanket passes for foreign correspondents and every major trip required special permission from the military authorities specifying points of departure and destination. Many journalists became extremely frustrated at these bureaucratic procedures and the amount of time they wasted chasing paper, getting nowhere (see Davis, 1940: 130–1, 165, 171; McCullagh, 1937: 111–12; Cardozo, 1937: 220–1).

The Nationalists authorities not only sought to control what journalists said but also what they saw. Even when permission was granted, foreign correspondents were not allowed to travel unchaperoned. The fact that so few Nationalist press officers feature so frequently in so many journalists' accounts reveals the strict pool system that was introduced. Foreign correspondents were billeted around the main Nationalist press offices in Salamanca, Burgos, Seville, Vitoria or Zaragoza and their visits to the front were collective affairs led by press officers



who arranged transportation, offered translation support and censored their copy. These trips were often anodyne exercises involving tedious journeys, although Aguilera in particular gained a reputation for recklessness in approaching the front which meant that the correspondents in his company often saw more of the action than they were prepared for or comfortable with. On 31 December 1937, three journalists' luck ran out on a Nationalist press visit to the front at Teruel when their car was hit by shrapnel from a Republican shell. The blast killed Bradish Johnson of *Newsweek* outright and mortally injured Richard Sheepshanks of Reuters and Edward Neil of the Associated Press. Kim Philby, who was then Nationalist correspondent for *The Times*, escaped with minor injuries.

The intimidation of foreign journalists was systemic in the Nationalist sector during this period. Threats ranged in severity from reprimands to execution threats, expulsions, imprisonment and worse (Millán Astray encouraged his press officers to threaten to shoot correspondents who transgressed rules). In the early days of the war, Guy de Traversay, correspondent of *L'Intransigeant*, was killed in Nationalist-held Majorca and several other journalists nearly shared his fate. In September 1936, René Brut of the *Pathé Gazette* was imprisoned for three weeks after pictures were released of the Nationalist massacre at Badajoz. Bolín repeatedly threatened to shoot him but was unable to prove that Brut was responsible for the footage (he was). The following month, Denis Weaver of the *News Chronicle*, 'Hank' Gorrell of the United Press and James Minifie of the *New York Herald Tribune* inadvertently strayed from Republican territory and were captured by Nationalist forces. For several days, they too feared execution but were eventually ejected over the French border. The most notorious case involved the imprisonment of Arthur Koestler in early 1937. Koestler and Bolín had met earlier in the war in Seville, before Koestler was forced to flee after being spotted by an ex-colleague from a German newspaper who denounced him as a Communist. Bolín said he would shoot Koestler should they ever meet again and fate delivered this opportunity when he arrested Koestler as the Nationalist forces entered the Malaga. The presence of another British national at the scene stayed his hand but Koestler was imprisoned for several months afterwards and only escaped execution after concerted international pressure.

The intimidation of journalists was not restricted to those working in areas under Nationalist control. In late 1936, Franco issued a decree that any journalists who had reported from the Nationalist side ran the risk of execution if they were subsequently captured on the Republican side (editorial department memo, Reuters, 4 May 1937, Christopher Holme's Personnel File, the Reuters Archive). Specific personal threats were also made to individual journalists working in the Republican sectors. In November 1936, Lester Ziffren, Madrid correspondent for United Press, reported that Franco's forces failed to capture the capital because of weaknesses in their military intelligence. A month later, he was informed by his London office that Franco had told the UP representative in Salamanca that he would be 'taken care of' once they captured Madrid (Wurtzel, 2006). Similar threats were issued to Ernest de Caux, the Madrid correspondent



Catastrophe at Caude



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On 31 December 1937 a car carrying foreign journalists on a Nationalist press tour was hit by artillery fire. Richard Sheepshanks of Reuters (top left), Edward J. Neil of Associated Press (top middle) and Bradish Johnson of *Newsweek* (top right) died of their injuries. Kim Philby of *The Times* (not pictured) escaped with minor head injuries.

of *The Times*, Christopher Holme of Reuters, George Steer also of *The Times* and Noel Monks of the *Daily Express*.

Holme, Steer and Monks were specifically targeted because of their involvement in the international controversy caused by the destruction of the Basque town of Guernica by Luftwaffe pilots on 26 April 1937. All three journalists were dining in nearby Bilbao when news came through of the attack in the early evening, and, accompanied by Mathieu Corman, correspondent of *Ce Soir*, they rushed to the scene to find the town still ablaze. On returning to Bilbao they immediately filed accounts of what they witnessed and their interviews with

survivors and identified German aviators as responsible for the attack. Their reports appeared in the later editions of the British newspapers on 28 April 1937 and caused an immediate international outcry. George Steer's account in *The Times* was particularly influential because of the authoritative international status of the paper and the fact that the article was reprinted in *The New York Times*, a title of equivalent repute.

It is clear that the Nationalists were unprepared for the 'world wide eruption of indignation caused by the original news stories' (Southworth, 1977: 32), no doubt assuming that their tight control of the activities of foreign correspondents in the region would prevent any coverage of what was originally deemed a very successful military exercise. However, they had not bargained for the presence of the British and Belgian journalists in Bilbao and, although it may seem distasteful to refer to such an iconic atrocity as a 'media event', that is precisely what it was. As Southworth notes, had it not been for the chance witness of these international journalists:

the Guernica story the world knows would never have existed. There would have been delayed news stories; the press services from the frontier would have sent their telegrams, but the story would never have had the same impact . . . The bombing of Guernica was a lot like the tree that falls in the forest. If nobody hears it fall, does it make any noise? (ibid., 374)

Bolín was the main architect of the Nationalists' response to the escalating diplomatic storm and its contradictions belied the haste of its construction. At first, it was claimed that no Nationalist planes had flown on the day of the attack due to bad weather but this assertion was dropped when it became clear that many had witnessed substantial air activity on that day. It was then conceded that some Nationalist planes had bombed the town but that these were attacking legitimate military targets and had not been responsible for the devastating conflagration in the town centre. Nationalist estimates of the proximity of their forces to the town at the time of the attack were adjusted from fifteen kilometres to six kilometres, to increase the plausibility of this new emphasis on the town's military significance. The crux of the Nationalists' defence, however, remained constant throughout. This was that the town was burnt to the ground by retreating Republican forces, replicating the destruction of Irun by Anarchist forces earlier in the Basque offensive. As soon as Guernica fell to Nationalist forces, select groups of foreign journalists were given guided tours of the town, closely chaperoned by Aguilera, and some of their censored dispatches lent support to the Nationalists' version of events by raising the possibility that the aerial attack had not been the principal cause of the destruction.

A lengthy cablegram sent by Bolín to Franco's representative in London on 23 May 1937, which, until recently, was held in the archives of the Cervantes Institute in London, provides further insight into how he elaborated the defence over the following weeks. The cable claimed to represent both elite and general Nationalist opinion and Bolín urged that it be circulated as widely as possible. It began with a denial of the presence of any foreign troops in Nationalist territory

and expressed concern at the 'GULLIBILITY [of] PUBLIC OPINION'. Bolín claimed confidently that the 'GUERNICA MYTH HAS NOW BEEN BURIED ABROAD AND FRAUD PRACTISED ON HONEST FOREIGN OPINION BY MERCENARY JOURNALISTS SHOWN UP STOP NUMEROUS AUTHORITATIVE FOREIGNERS NOW HAD TIME EXAMINE RUINS GUERNICA ESTABLISH TOWN WAS DELIBERATELY BURNT'. The cable then referred to Republican attacks on civilian areas, including the shellings of Zaragoza, Cordoba and Toledo, which failed to excite equivalent media outrage. It continued:

LATEST OUTRAGE DASH WHICHLL PROBABLY BE PATIENTLY WITNESSED BY SAME FOREIGN OPINION WHICH EXALTEDLY PROTESTS AGAINST MYTHS AND LEGITIMATE ACTS WARFARE DASH IS BOMBARDMENT GIRLS SCHOOL AT PAMPLONA WHERE THREE GIRLS KILLED.

The cable concluded:

PUBLIC OPINION NATIONAL SPAIN PERPLEXEDLY ASKS WHETHER ABROAD THERES TENDENCY ACCEPT ANY BASELESS CALUMNY SPREAD BY RED PROPAGANDA WHETHER ABROAD THERES INABILITY DISTINGUISH LIES FROM TRUTH WRONG FROM RIGHT STOP

The reference to 'mercenary journalists' is significant as it shows how the Nationalists sought to defame the reputations of the journalists who had first reported the attack on the town as well as to intimidate them. Noel Monks was condemned by Bolín as a drunkard, despite being teetotal, and a regrettable error in the Reuters newsroom in London gifted the Nationalists an opportunity to question Holme's credibility. On 29 April 1937, Reuters filed a further report from Holme rebutting Nationalist denials of the attack in which he identified the types of German aircraft involved (Heinkel He-111 and Junkers Ju-52 bombers and Heinkel He-51 fighters). Unfortunately, a subeditor misread these as indicating the number of planes. As Holme's namesake explains:

The mistake was corrected within an hour but it was nonetheless a gift to the German Press. The *Frankfurter Generalanzeiger* called Holme an idiot and the Nazi *Völkischer Beobachter* called for his dismissal claiming he was in the direct pay of the Bolsheviks. (Holme, 1995: 275)

In addition to this, Nationalist sources told the British ambassador in Hendaye that Holme had fought for the Basques in the last phases of the battle for Bilbao. According to Reuters' own report of the claim:

The ambassador emphasized that he could not control the truth of this report, but he felt bound to pass it on for the information of the Foreign Office and ourselves, as Holme being already far from *persona grata* to General Franco, such conduct on Holme's part, if true, would doubtless

lead to a disagreeable incident, were he to fall into the insurgents' hands. The Foreign Office suggest we should warn Holme to be careful. (Foreign Office Report, 22 June 1937, Holme Personal File, the Reuters Archive)

But the main journalist the Nationalists sought to discredit was George Steer of *The Times* and the smears against his integrity, frequently championed by Franco-supporters based in Britain, continued for years. In 1939, he took legal action against an author who claimed that he had only been a minor freelancer with *The Times* when he filed his Guernica report and that he had been sacked because of the report (see Rankin, 2003: 142–7).

### *Phase 3: conciliation (mid 1937 to April 1939)*

The months after the Guernica controversy there was an intensification of significant changes in Nationalist news management that had first become apparent at the start of 1937 with the deposition of Millán Astray as head of the Propaganda and Press department.<sup>15</sup> As the Basque offensive concluded in mid 1937, Aguilera became sidelined and Bolín fell into active disfavour with his political superiors. In June 1937, he was sent to London and had three meetings with the foreign news editor of *The Times* in which he denied making any threats against the newspaper's Madrid correspondent, Ernest de Caux. When informed of this, de Caux replied to the foreign news editor:

What you say about Bolín is most interesting and not a little intriguing. Do you know that he was finally turned out of Salamanca, given £300 and told to go and travel the world? Nobody there wants to see him again. It was not easy to get rid of him.' (letter from Ernest de Caux to Ralph Deakin, 15 June 1937, Deakin Papers, TNL Archive)

The sidelining of these controversial figures reveals Franco's growing appreciation that their actions and rhetoric were bringing the Nationalist cause into disrepute (Preston, 1993: 190). Around this time, a pamphlet was published in Britain that highlighted the plight of 'Foreign Journalists Under Franco's Terror' ('A Journalist', 1937). The author, 'a bona fide journalist' whose anonymity spoke of the culture of intimidation that existed, catalogued the humiliations and threats meted out to foreign journalists by the Nationalist authorities and Bolín in particular during the first year of the war. Bolín's reputation suffered further damage as the international scandal about Guernica persisted and his role in Koestler's detention and death sentence became internationally publicised. Around the same time, Hubert Knickerbocker of the Hearst Press exacted revenge for his detention by the Nationalists by publishing an article in the *Washington Times* that outlined the extremism and bigotry of a 'Captain Sanchez', a thinly disguised reference to Aguilera, whom he blamed for his incarceration. The article was quoted in detail in the US congress in May 1937 and represented 'a significant propaganda blow against the Francoists, coming as it did shortly after the bombing of Guernica' (Preston, 2004: 299).

The new personnel who assumed control of the Nationalists' press and propaganda operations in Salamanca were different characters from their predecessors. Pablo Merry del Val was promoted to head of Propaganda and Press and, as the Oxford-educated son of a senior diplomat, he conveyed an altogether more urbane impression, although the whiff of menace remained. Alan Dick of the *Daily Telegraph* recalled his first meeting with him in July 1937:

Outwardly he was the complete Spanish aristocrat. A stiff red Requete beret – insignia of the Royalists of Navarre – sat like a pancake on his small, oiled head. His lean face rarely abandoned its expression of tolerant hauteur. His voice was clipped and precise. 'I think we understand one another,' he said as we paced slowly round the external balcony overlooking the academy quadrangle. The voice was friendly, but the words sounded to me remarkably like a threat. I could imagine the friendliness fading abruptly if we ever failed to 'understand' one another. (1943: 109)

Other new appointments in the Nationalists' press operations during this period included Manuel Arias Paz and Francisco de Buis, editor of the Spanish newspaper *El Debate*.

The promotion of individuals with more diplomatic demeanours marked a distinct shift away from the rigid militarism evident in the previous phase and a greater willingness to accommodate the professional needs of the foreign journalists. For example, Bolín's visit to *The Times* in June 1937 was followed soon after by a visit from Arias Paz, who replaced Vicente Gay as the head of the Delegation of Press and Propaganda, which was responsible for controlling print and broadcast media within Spain (Southworth, 1977: 33). Whereas Bolín's attempts to build bridges with the paper amounted to little more than blatant lies about his earlier actions, Arias Paz offered some significant concessions and reassurances on the part of the Nationalist authorities. Further details of the meeting were included in a letter sent by the acting foreign news editor in Deakin's absence to the paper's Madrid correspondent:

He was obviously anxious to do anything he could for *The Times*. He indicated that Salamanca would not object to your remaining in Madrid 'after it fell', if your messages until then had been 'objective'. They were quite willing to understand the limitations that the Madrid censorship would impose. I pointed out that if they wanted to get an idea of what your messages from Madrid would be like they might as well look back and see what they had been like. The Director of the Salamanca Press Bureau then admitted he had never read any of your uncensored dispatches. I immediately sent for the cuttings book and showed them to him and it was almost impossible to get him out of the building.' (letter from Burn, the acting foreign news editor, to de Caux, 4 July 1937, de Caux Papers, TNL Archive)

A symbolic example of the Nationalists' less confrontational approach to foreign journalists came in their response to the death of Richard Sheepshanks,

Edward Neil and Bradish Johnson on an official press tour of the front at Teruel on New Year's Eve 1937. Whereas months before Bolín and Aguilera had been freely threatening to execute foreign journalists, *La Oficina de Prensa y Propaganda* provided a detailed ten-page report of the incident and the medical treatment given to Neil before he succumbed to his injuries. Merry del Val personally escorted Sheepshanks's coffin over the French border and Kim Philby of *The Times*, the only journalist to survive, received a medal from Franco.<sup>16</sup>

In noting the emergence of a more conciliatory approach to the foreign media, it is important not to overstate the changes. Essentially, these represented a shift in style rather than content. The censorship restrictions remained in place, journalists were still chaperoned and their movements continued to be restricted. They could also be debarred on the flimsiest pretexts. For example, Hessel Tiltman of the *Daily Express* arrived in Zaragoza in December 1938 but was prevented from witnessing the Nationalists' entry into Barcelona and accompanying their advance to the French border. He was then summarily expelled and only received an explanation from Franco's envoy when he arrived in France:

'My government instructs me to inform you that they have no complaint to make concerning your personal conduct in Nationalist territory. Nor with any of the despatches you have written. Apparently the difficulty arose owing to something published in your paper from another source for which, of course, we had to hold you responsible. Burgos desires me to state, further, that if you will sign a written statement guaranteeing not to write anything for the *Daily Express*, you may at once be readmitted to Spain.' (quoted in Tiltman, 1940: 187)

## Republican news management

Whereas, in the Nationalist sector, foreign correspondents were barely tolerated, in the Republic, they were encouraged. As noted, to some extent this accommodation was necessitated by the material needs of the loyalists and their recognition that the recruit of international support would be essential for resisting Franco and his Italian and German allies. However, this greater receptivity also revealed the political sensibilities and professional background of major figures in the administration, particularly during the early part of the war. As Southworth comments:

Despite the discontent expressed by certain correspondents concerning the conditions of work and the censorship rules in the Republican zone, relations between the foreign reporters and the Republican authorities were much closer than those between the foreign pressmen [sic] and the Nationalists. Men in the Spanish government like Alvarez del Vayo, Pietro, Zugazagoitia, and others were former newspapermen themselves and sympathized with the problems of the press. (1977: 54)



The greater acceptance of journalists' presence and needs in the Republican sector manifested itself in several ways. Journalists were granted more freedom of movement than they were in the Nationalist zones. Although *salvoconductos* were required, their monitoring and use was often haphazard. Virginia Cowles, who was a freelance journalist working for *The New York Times* and *The Sunday Times*, was surprised by the ease with which she was able to visit the military front at Madrid in April 1937:

Although journalists were supposed to get a proper authorization, few of the Spanish sentries could read and almost any bit of paper (no matter how far out of date) would do. When you wanted to go to the front, you just got into a car and went. (1941: 21)

Foreign journalists were not routinely accompanied by press officials on their news-gathering trips and there was no formal pooling system. When journalists worked together, as they often did, it was out of choice as they engaged in the kind of 'relations of mutual benefit' so frequently noted among specialist correspondents (Cottle, 2007: 9). One factor that encouraged such collectivity was the limited availability of cars and petrol which hindered the mobility of the foreign press corps. The Republican authorities provided press cars and chauffeurs but demand always exceeded supply and many journalists became extremely frustrated at the way these resources were reserved for the more senior and sympathetic correspondents (Herbst, 1991). However, differential allocation of this kind was inevitable given the severe transport and petrol shortages in the Republican sector.<sup>17</sup>

The Republic was also willing to tolerate journalists who had reported from Nationalist sectors and representatives from newspapers ideologically antipathetic to their cause. For example, journalists from the *Daily Mail* were present in the Republic throughout the war, despite the paper's ardent support of the Nationalist rebellion and uncritical reproduction of their atrocity propaganda during the early stages of the war. Some foreign journalists, particularly those with strong personal and political affiliations to the Republican cause, found this indulgence bewildering. Claud Cockburn, who reported the war for the *Daily Worker* under the byline 'Frank Pitcairn', described the bemusement of a Republican press officer at the publication of a string of specious atrocity stories in the British press:

Like innumerable Spaniards on the Government side who ought to have known better – it was one of their great weaknesses – he found it quite impossible to take the British right-wing newspaper propaganda seriously. He shrugged and laughed 'Funny people,' he said, shaking his head and re-reading the newspaper story in front of him, 'Very funny people.' (Pitcairn, 1936: 65–6)

Republican news management was also more internationalised in its structure than that of the Nationalists. Scores of foreign volunteers were involved directly in Republican propaganda activity – sometimes to such an extent that their



involvement occasionally caused a degree of local resentment. As Constanca de la Mora, a senior Republican censor who worked for the Foreign Press Bureau of the Republic, retrospectively remarked:

Our office was over-run with well-meaning foreigners of distinguished reputation who had come to help us counteract the campaign of lies and slander the British Foreign Office and the Nazis were spreading about the Spanish Government. Actually, we needed no outside advice. (de la Mora, 1939: 285–6)

Foreign volunteers were also involved in censoring journalists' copy, which proved an effective means of preventing foreign correspondents from using slang phrases and colloquialisms to evade censorship. Republican press provision also extended physically beyond Spanish borders. For example, the press office of the Spanish Embassy in London provided a considerable amount of pamphlets and briefings promoting the Republican case throughout the war (see, for example, de los Rios, 1937). In Paris, the Agence Espagne was created as a pro-Republican news service and it recruited the services of several renowned foreign correspondents, including Claud Cockburn, Arthur Koestler, John Langdon-Davies and William Forrest.<sup>18</sup> Although a front organisation for the Comintern and constituted by international sympathisers, the Spanish news agency worked closely with the Republican authorities and, in 1937, Rubio Hidalgo, Chief Censor and Head of the Foreign Press Bureau in Valencia, went to Paris to work within it.

Of course, foreign journalists were not given carte blanche in the Republic. Their activities were monitored and it was said that the secret police kept personal dossiers on all of them. Several journalists reported occasions when they were followed, threatened and detained but expulsions and incarcerations were never as defining a feature of Republican press relations as they were in the Nationalist sector. Generally, intimidation was intimated rather than stated.

Control was principally achieved through close monitoring and censorship of all material dispatched by the journalists. As with the Nationalist authorities, certain topics were forbidden – in particular, sensitive military information, references to foreign military involvement, speculative political conjecture, references to internal political factionalism and division, and any discussion of revolutionary developments within the Republic. As discussed earlier, the Republic's exclusive access to the international telephone lines gave them considerable advantages in terms of the speed with which news could be disseminated internationally. But foreign correspondents were never allowed to use the flexibility of the technology to extemporise or digress in their calls to their news desks. Prior to its dispatch, their copy had to be submitted to censors who then listened in to the phone calls to ensure that there was no deviation from the cleared text. Even slight transgressions led to the immediate mechanical termination of the call.

Among the foreign correspondents who worked in the Republic opinion is divided as to whether the censorship restricted their professional practices. Herbert Matthews of *The New York Times* never felt that the restrictions


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#### Foreign correspondents with Republican forces on the Ebro, 1938

British and American journalists often collaborated closely and several submitted copy to newspapers on both side of the Atlantic. This picture was taken by Henry Buckley of the *Daily Telegraph* and features, from right to left, Vincent Sheean (the *Chicago Tribune*), Herbert Matthews (*The New York Times*) and Ernest Hemingway (the *North Atlantic News Alliance*).

impeded his work to any significant extent. Claud Cockburn even suggested that the censorship procedures were too relaxed (Pitcairn, 1936). In contrast, Edward Knoblaugh of the Associated Press railed against the ‘censorship barriers’ in Madrid (1937: 137) and Ernest de Caux of *The Times* repeatedly complained to his foreign news editor about the constraints that he had to contend with. It is noticeable that correspondents’ opinions about the censorship rules often correlated closely with their general political opinions about the Republic. As is shown in the next chapter, Matthews developed a considerable admiration for the Republic and Cockburn was an active propagandist on its behalf. In contrast, Knoblaugh and de Caux, whilst publicly dispassionate about the conflict, were privately unsympathetic to the Republican cause.

It may be that correspondents simply exaggerated or underplayed the significance of the censorship practices for ideological purposes to highlight the democratic or illiberal qualities of the Republican government. Alternatively, it could be that they had qualitatively different experiences that developed through their ongoing interactions with Republican press officers. Correspondents sympathetic to the Republic were more likely to submit palatable and unthreatening copy to the censors, which, in turn, would generate greater official trust and

co-operation. In contrast, sceptical, even hostile, journalists would be more inclined to test the censors' tolerance through their work thereby increasing the authorities' suspicion and obstructiveness.

The memoirs of Constanca de la Mora, who replaced Rubio Hidalgo as head of the Foreign Press Bureau, are instructive on this point. Published just after the end of the war, her account describes the close working relations the Bureau had with individual correspondents and the strong opinions that were held about them. Many, such as Ernest Hemingway, Herbert Matthews, Henry Buckley, Lawrence Fernsworth and Vincent Sheean, were held in high esteem whereas others, such as Sefton Delmer of the *Daily Express*, were 'disliked and distrusted' (de la Mora, 1939: 290). What is clear is that these judgements were based on close observation of the personal conduct and editorial copy of the correspondents rather than the ideological orientations of the news organisations they represented. De la Mora's comments on Henry Buckley of the *Daily Telegraph* offer a case in point:

He knew Spain inside out from years of work and study here . . . He had lived the war from the very outset, Madrid, Valencia, Barcelona. His dispatches appeared under a Valencia dateline – his stories always carefully described the Spanish Government as mildly liberal. But the editorials in the same edition of the paper called the Spanish Government 'communist' and the fascists 'religious crusaders'. It was a case of the left hand not knowing what the right hand doeth. (de la Mora, 1939: 291)

As with Nationalists, Republican news management did not remain static throughout the conflict although the transitions were not as clear-cut. In the first few weeks, journalists enjoyed considerable freedoms in the Republic although travel was not without risks and they regularly travelled over the Spanish borders to transmit their uncensored copy (see, for example, Fernsworth, 1939). Restrictions were soon imposed when the authorities became alarmed at the sensitivity of the information that was being publicised freely abroad. However, the establishment of a centralised and cohesive system of control was often confounded by the political heterogeneity of the Republic, especially during the first year of the conflict. Regional autonomy in the Basque country and Catalonia, in particular, meant that political factions had separate propaganda and press arrangements which overlapped with, and occasionally challenged, official directives. In Barcelona, this created a highly bureaucratic censorship system that inhibited the flow of foreign news. The Madrid correspondent of *The Times* described the arrangements in Barcelona in 1937:

There are two censors in different offices in Barcelona. One has to submit messages to each in turn. They close down at 9pm so any news breaking after that hour must remain over until the next day. Then, sometimes another censor intervenes. On August 3<sup>rd</sup> I was just about to begin dictating when a listener in the telephone building cut me off and further revised my message . . . I have discussed the stringency with both censors here.

They are intelligent men, with enough knowledge of journalism to realise where the shoe pinches, but they are held down by their instructions. (letter to Ralph Deakin, 21 August 1937, Deakin Papers, TNL Archive)

In contrast, in the Basque country, journalists were permitted considerable freedom of action. For example, George Steer of *The Times* was astounded by the candour and openness of the Basque government. Here he describes an occasion when prisoners in Bilbao were massacred by citizens enraged by the air attacks:

At this time, it should be remembered, true stories of killings in Madrid could only be smuggled out as uncensored articles by unknown correspondents: with Franco, the situation was even worse. If a foreign newspaper dared to publish any statement about atrocities in his territory, its correspondent – whether responsible or not – was immediately expelled.

For the Basques, the word conscience was possessed of dynamic meaning. They had, as best they might, to expiate the horrible crime committed by the air maddened population of Bilbao. Though they were at war, they gave orders to the censor to let all truthful descriptions pass.

Leizaola, at his Ministry of Justice and Culture, affixed a list of all the dead. At the bottom he admitted eight names ‘mutilizados’ – the dead who had also been mutilated. The representatives of the foreign press were allowed to broadcast all these facts, and so was Bilbao radio. (Steer, 1937: 119)

In Steer’s opinion, such openness was both a great virtue and failing of the Basque state. Although the Basques perceived no need for ‘a new fangled hortatory organisation’ that would ‘lay down the lines of each day’s press’, Steer believed their failure to fortify public morale through effective propaganda in the face of the Nationalist military onslaught fostered a sense of defeatism that contributed to the capitulation of the Basque republic. In his view, the lessons of their defeat stand ‘as a warning to democracy – that some freedoms should not be tolerated in war’ (Steer, 1937: 182).

These regional and political variations were reduced by the start of the second year of the war as a consequence of military defeat in the North and the political suppression of radical groups in Catalonia. Indeed, the decision of the Valencia government to place major elements of the telecommunications system in Barcelona under the control of the *Ministerio de Propaganda* was the catalytic event that started the fighting between the central government and anarchist and radical groups (Davies, 1999: 484). (Until May 1937, the telephone exchange in Barcelona was controlled by a joint committee of the anarchist Confederación Nacional de Trabajo (CNT) and the socialist Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT).) However, political and regional sensitivities did not disappear completely. For example, when the main Republican Foreign Press Bureau was moved from Valencia to Barcelona in 1938, there were concerns that this could encroach on the operation of Catalonia’s own censorship office and, hence, ‘the privileges granted to the Catalans by the Cortes’ (de la Mora, 1939: 339).

## Concluding remarks

This chapter has examined the political and propaganda objectives of the main combatants in the Spanish Civil War and how these affected their international news management arrangements. It has also considered the technical constraints that affected their ability to communicate internationally.

Inevitably, questions arise as to which side won the propaganda battle for international opinion and which news management regime was most effective. Answering the first question raises a wider range of issues than can be addressed in a media-focused book of this kind. To answer the second question requires the consideration of more evidence – in particular, closer analysis of the opinions, actions and responses of the foreign correspondents themselves and of the terms of international media representation. These are all considered in subsequent chapters. However, evidence presented in this chapter suggests that any answer to this question is unlikely to be straightforward and that it is only appropriate to talk of degrees of success rather than outright victory. For example, the rigid and aggressive news management of the Nationalists in the first year of the war alienated many foreign correspondents and began to damage the reputation of Franco's regime internationally. Nevertheless, it proved crudely effective in preventing foreign journalists from witnessing and testifying to the full brutality of Nationalist forces in action. In the Republic, by comparison, the greater preponderance of journalists and their greater freedom of movement meant that news about killings and atrocities could not be so easily suppressed, which, in turn, led to their relative over-reporting in foreign news coverage (Beevor, 2007: 272). Having said this, the Republic's more permissive approach also offered salvation, most dramatically in the case of the destruction of Guernica where, had it not been for the freedom and mobility of a small number of foreign journalists, the world would never have received news of the event so swiftly nor had the perpetrators identified so convincingly. It is difficult to overestimate the damage the event did to the Nationalists' cause at the time.

However, there is one fundamental point that needs to be appreciated in any assessment of who won the propaganda war in Spain. This is that the criteria for victory were not the same for both sides. The Republicans had the most daunting challenge as they had to convince international opinion of the need to intervene in their defence. The Nationalists, in contrast, merely needed to maintain the status quo and ensure the democracies stayed out of Spain. Thus, while the Republic needed to win arguments, the Nationalists only needed to relativise them. And even in the case of Guernica, where their actions seemed so indefensible, the evidence against them so strong and their political defence so inconsistent and unconvincing, managed, with the assistance of ideological sympathisers abroad, to do just enough to cloud the issue and thwart a growing momentum in international opinion that such actions were intolerable and that something needed to be done in the Republic's defence.

## Notes

1. For example, throughout the 1930s the British Foreign Office unselfconsciously discussed the need for 'cultural propaganda' to promote British values and interests internationally.
2. From the start of the war, foreign journalists were aware of tensions between the Nationalist leadership and their Italian and German allies. For example, in December 1936, Christopher Holme, then Reuters correspondent in the Nationalist sector, briefed the British Embassy in Hendaye, France that '[r]elations between the Spaniards on the one hand and the Germans and the Italians on the other are not too cordial . . . General Franco definitely does not want the foreigners there for ever and intends to be master in his own house one day' (The National Archives (TNA), FO 371/20553, Paper W17655/62/4). This message was reiterated the following year in a further Foreign Office briefing by another Reuters correspondent, Richard Sheepshanks (TNA, FO 371/21301, paper W19746/1/41). Also in 1937, a correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph* was encouraged by the Nationalist high command to write an uncensored dispatch exposing the falsity of Italian claims about their military successes. He declined the opportunity because he feared retribution from Italian authorities (Dick, 1941: 131).
3. For example, in November 1937 the Foreign Office advised the British Chamber of Commerce for Spain to use 'Nationalist' rather than 'Insurgent' in describing Franco's authorities (TNA, FO 371/21382, Paper W20044/40/41). See also the confidential meeting between Sir Robert Vansittart, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Lord Reith, the Director General of the BBC, which is discussed in Chapter 5.
4. Another famous example of the use of local communication to spread alarm and fear is a radio speech delivered by General Emilio Mola in 1936 in which he claimed that pro-Nationalist supporters within Madrid would rise up as 'a fifth column' to support his four army columns that were then converging on the capital. The term 'fifth columnist' quickly passed into general usage as a term for any clandestine agents who assist invading forces.
5. One aspect of this involved placing the major elements of the telecommunications system under the control of the Ministerio de Propaganda (Davies, 1999: 484).
6. Before the war, the government had kept control of high-powered transmission services and spectrum allocation but encouraged the installation of low power transmitters by independent operators to provide the basis for local radio services (MBC, 2007). This meant that a wide variety of small and large radio stations engaged in propaganda activities at the start of the war but, by early 1937, both sides started to centralise control of their radio networks to increase the coherence and effectiveness of their propaganda activities and to suppress dissident voices within their rank.
7. Davies (1999) mentions that US journalists occasionally used shortwave radio to transmit messages in Morse to the US but, as I have only identified two reference to wireless telegraphy in the dozens of journalist memoirs written about Spain, it was evidently a peripheral method of communication (Knoblaugh, 1936; MacColl, 1956).
8. Foreign correspondents were often urged by their editors to use cables sparingly and only prioritise messages when it was strictly necessary. To economise further, journalists also wrote in 'cable-ese', a form of writing that compressed essential words, omitted non-essential words and ignored conventions of punctuation. These messages were then 're-inflated' when received by home news desks.

9. Nationalist censorship practices of domestic and international mail were also more stringent than those of the Republic, which would have further delayed their dispatch. According to Robert Shelley:

There was a rigid censorship throughout the war, in fact nearly every Nationalist town and village had its own censor office manned from an officer and several men in the larger towns to a sergeant or corporal in the villages. The village censor office probably dealt with only internal mail and sent letters written in a language other than their own to the larger offices in the Provincial capitals . . . The Republicans did not have such a rigid censorship. Letters for abroad were censored at their port of departure and internal ones, in the main, passed uncensored. (1960: 3–4)

10. The personnel files of Richard Sheepshanks held in the Reuters' archive provide testament to the pressures of reporting from the Nationalist side. He was sent to Salamanca as Reuters' 'Special Correspondent with General Franco's forces' in June 1937. In late August he cabled Sir Roderick Jones, head of Reuters, expressing concerns about his ability to fulfil his brief. The precise details of his worries are unknown as neither his original cable nor Jones's response have survived but they were clearly severe. In a subsequent letter to Jones he wrote:

I must thank you for your very charming letter of September 6, which has just reached me here. Of course, I entirely agree with everything that you say, and I can only repeat that I do sincerely regret the momentary loss of nerve-control that made me send so unnecessary a telegram. Please be reassured that I will do my utmost to prevent such a thing happening again. (letter from Sheepshanks to Roderick Jones, 27 September 1937, Sheepshanks file, the Reuters Archive)

He briefly returned for home leave in October of that year but returned to report the fighting on the Teruel front and was killed on an official press tour on 31 December 1937.

11. Journalists required passes (*salvoconductos*) to travel in Nationalist Spain even at the start of the war but the permissions process was often conducted retrospectively after journalists had arrived and was organised on a piece-meal basis (see Taylor, 1939: 56).
12. International press exposure of the Nationalists' massacre of more than a thousand defenceless prisoners held in the bullring at Badajoz in mid August 1936 was a specific catalyst for the change in the Nationalists' strategy.
13. In January 1937, the Nationalist high command established 'The Delegation of Press and Propaganda' headed by Vicente Gay. The Delegation's responsibilities solely concerned printed and broadcast media within Spain (Southworth, 1977: 33).
14. Delmer claimed the real reason he was expelled was because of the arrival of the Germans, who believed he was a British spy.
15. The most serious propaganda disaster Millán Astray presided over was a public ceremony organised in Santander on 12 October 1936. Titled the *Día de la Raza* (the 'Day of the Race'), the celebration commemorated Columbus's discovery of America and sought to demonstrate the credentials of the emerging Nationalist state. The ceremonies concluded at the local university where a succession of intemperate speeches vilified the Republic and Basque and Catalan nationalism. Caught up in the



excitement, Millán Astray stood to echo the foreign legion battle, *!Viva la Muerte!* (Long Live Death!), that was being chanted by sections of the crowd. At that moment Miguel de Unamó, the rector of the university and a famous Basque philosopher, started to speak. To the growing apoplexy of the General and the audience, he castigated the previous speakers and directed particular scorn towards the propaganda chief:

It pains me to think that General Millán Astray should dictate the pattern of mass psychology. A cripple who lacks the spiritual greatness of Cervantes is wont to seek ominous relief in causing mutilation around him. . . . You will win because you have more than enough brute force. But you will not convince. For to convince, you need to persuade. And in order to persuade you would need what you lack: reason and right in the struggle. (quoted in Thomas, 2003: 113)

It is said that only the presence of Franco's wife prevented Unamó from being summarily executed for this extraordinary act of defiance. He was subsequently dismissed as rector of the university and died several weeks later, an isolated and broken man.

16. There has since been speculation that Philby caused the explosion by placing a grenade in the car boot because he feared that Sheepshanks was about to expose him as a Soviet agent (see, for example, 'Was Philby Guilty of Murder?', *The Evening Standard*, 21 October 1991: 6). However, the evidence to support this claim is not strong. First, there were four Nationalist press officers on the scene at the time, supervising four cars of journalists. Second, there was more than one explosion during the attack. In the Nationalists own official report on events they testify that a first shell fell a few hundred yards away from the car, before the second explosion hit the car. Third, photographs held in the Reuters Archive show that the car in which the journalists were sitting when the bomb hit was extensively damaged down the entire nearside. The car boot, however, remained intact. Fourth, the injuries that killed the journalists were entirely consistent with a shrapnel explosion to the side rather than the rear of the car. Fifth, Bill Carney of *The New York Times* arrived at the scene of the accident just after it had occurred and confirmed to the foreign editor of *The Times* that Philby had a significant scalp cut and other minor injuries contradicting claims that he had faked his injuries.
17. On occasions, the services offered to high-profile journalists and celebrities were abused. In 1937, the film star Errol Flynn flew to Valencia and demanded that the press office provide him with immediate transport, guides and passes to go to Madrid, promising the donation of a substantial amount of aid and publicity for the Republic. Despite an acute petrol shortage, he was granted a car and a chauffeur and, when he arrived in Madrid, he sent a pre-arranged message to Paris that prompted a series of hoax reports stating that he had been killed on the Spanish front and then that he had been seriously injured. The Valencia government frantically wired the Madrid authorities to find out what had happened to Flynn (de la Mora, 1939: 297–8). It transpired that the Hollywood star had spent no time at the front, preferring instead to visit a local brothel and that his 'injuries' amounted to no more than a self-inflicted scratch. He flew out from Barcelona, thereby avoiding the irate Valencian authorities, and his promise of delivering substantial aid to the Republic never materialised. The American press corps were scandalised by his actions. The journalist



George Seldes later described him as 'one of the most despicable human beings that ever lived' (1987: 325).

18. Agence Espagne was established at the start of the war to promote the Republican cause. Headed by Otto Katz and principally based in Paris, it was heavily controlled by Communists (Cesarani, 1998: 123).