

Why did Germany get involved in the Spanish Civil War?

Overview

When Franco began his uprising in Morocco, he wrote a letter to Hitler asking for assistance. Germany immediately sent transport planes to get Franco's forces to Spain. Over the next few years the Nazis continued to support the Nationalists. What did Hitler hope to achieve?

Task: Research, Summarise, Categorise

a. Research:

Read through the sources overleaf. Make a list of all the reasons given in the sources for why Hitler got involved in the Spanish Civil War.

b. Summarise:

Look at the list again. Reduce the list to **FIVE** factors by (a) Grouping together similar factors under a more general heading and / or (b) Removing factors from the list which you do not think are very important.

c. Categorise:

Now that the list is reduced to FIVE factors, decide upon a keyword for each factor (e.g. "Resources", "Weapons" and so on). Then, take the first letter of each of these five words and use them to spell out an overall memory word (you may have to change some of your original word choices to get this to work!).

When you have finished, draw your findings up in a table headed "Why did Germany get involved in the Spanish Civil War?".

Example: Here is a similar table answering the question "What were the main terms of the Treaty of Versailles?"

What were the main terms of the Treaty of Versailles?		
T	erritory	Alsace Lorraine to France; Polish Corridor to Poland
R	eparations	"Blank Cheque" signed, later settled as £6,600 million
A	rmaments	100,000 men, 6 warships, no airforce or conscription
W	ar guilt	Article 231 blames Germany
L	eague of Nations	Germany not allowed to join

Sources

A. German Ambassador in Italy writing to Hitler (December 1936)

Germany has in my opinion every reason for being grateful if Italy continues to interest herself deeply in the Spanish Civil War...the struggle for power in Spain highlights the natural opposition between Italy and France; at the same time the position of Italy as a power in the Mediterranean comes into competition with Britain. All the more clearly will Italy recognise the advisability of confronting the Western powers shoulder to shoulder with Germany...

B. Hermann Goering, statement at Nuremberg War Crimes Trial (October 1946)

When the civil war broke out in Spain Franco sent a call for help to Germany and asked for support, particularly in the air. Franco with his troops was stationed in Africa and he could not get his troops across ... The Führer thought the matter over. I urged him to give support under all circumstances: firstly, to prevent the further spread of communism; secondly, to test my young Luftwaffe [airforce] in this or that technical respect ... we set a number of experimental fighter units, bombers, and anti-aircraft guns; and in that way I had an opportunity to ascertain, under combat conditions, whether the material was equal to the task.

C. William L. Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich (1959)

German aid to Franco ... gave France a third unfriendly fascist power on its borders ... and thus weakened Germany's principal rival in the West. Above all it prevented the rebuilding of the Stresa Pact of Britain and France with Italy, and drove Mussolini into the arms of Hitler. Hitler wanted to prolong the Spanish Civil War to keep the Western democracies and Italy at loggerheads and draw Mussolini toward him. This would make Hitler's task of taking over Austria without Italian opposition much easier.

D. Patricia Knight, The Spanish Civil War (1998)

At the Nuremberg Trials, Goering claimed that the chief motive of Germany was to use Spain as a testing ground for the German airforce, but this seems to have been a very minor reason. Hitler's thinking had much more to do with promoting a favourable balance of power in Western Europe and using a Nationalist-run Spain to weaken France, thereby allowing Germany to expand unopposed into Eastern Europe. His main aim was to prevent the emergence of a Spanish-French bloc which might be directed against Germany.

E. Andrew Forrest, the Spanish Civil War (2000)

Spain provided a combat environment in which weapons and tactics could be refined and tested. For example, two advanced monoplane fighter aircraft were tried out. The Heinkel 112 was sent for experimental missions, but it was the Messerschmitt 109 that proved the more impressive. In the Spanish arena four types of Messerschmitt were put through their paces, and "Blitzkrieg" tactics in aerial combat were developed and established.

F. Frances Mohan, Germany and the Spanish Civil War (2006)

Hitler considered the Popular Front left-wing legitimate government of Spain – a potential "Soviet Spain" – to be a threat to Europe, so he was thinking along ideological reasons when he chose to intervene. Hitler was strongly anti-communist, so although other factors certainly played a prominent part in

Hitler's decision to continue intervening in Spain, these only became obvious to him later. Hitler explained that Germany intervention was "an attack upon Bolshevism...a world peril for which there must be no toleration".

G. George Esenwein, the Spanish Civil War in Context (1995)

The principal financial reward the Germans sought was acquiring greater access to Spain's mineral resources – Hitler was particularly interested in obtaining the rich deposits of iron-ores and copper under Nationalist control to bolster Germany's rearmament industry. In June 1937, Hitler bluntly stated that "Germany needs to import ore. That is why we want a Nationalist government in Spain, so that we may be able to buy Spanish ore". The Montana Project of 1938 gave Germany control of 75% of Spain's mineral resources.