Playing with History and Hiding Treason: Colonel Casado's Untrustworthy Memoirs and the End of the Spanish Civil War

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The influence of the memoirs of Colonel Segismundo Casado in explaining the end of the Spanish Civil War has been long-lasting in historiography, particularly in English-speaking countries. His writing attained an almost canonical character after the publication of one of the most confusing works ever written on the war, that of Burnett Bolloten.1 In his memoirs Casado argued that he rose up in arms against the republican Government in March 1939 because the Prime Minister and Minister of Defence Juan Negrín was ‘controlled’ by the communists. Negrín, as an alleged pawn of Stalin, was supposedly favouring staunch resistance in order to serve the interests of the Soviet Union. Casado also mentioned in passing that the communists, with Negrín’s consent, were ready to strike a forceful blow to obtain complete control of the republican army, thus ensuring the continuation of a hopeless struggle. Ultimately, Casado presented his rebellion as a demonstration of patriotism and anticommunism.2

In a series of books based largely on documents from Spanish (republican, Francoist, public and private), German, British, French, Italian and Russian

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1 Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester/Wheatsheaf, 1991), Chapter 64 (702–10), describes Casado’s coup. His reliance on Casado’s memoirs is clearly apparent (see pp. 929–30).

archives, I have refuted Bolloten’s interpretations, which have been recycled by Stanley G. Payne. Casado quite simply lied. He lied for two essential reasons: in order to justify his conduct and to make money.

The Facts

During the night of 5 March 1939, Colonel Casado, commander of the Army of the central region, carried out a coup in Madrid. With the collaboration of some socialist politicians—of whom Julian Besteiro and Wenceslao Carrillo were the only two of note—and middle-class republicans, and under the protective cover of the IV Army Corps commanded by the anarchist Cipriano Mera, he established what was called a national defence council, the Consejo Nacional de Defensa (CND). The alleged aim was to reach an honourable peace.
agreement with Franco, the virtual winner of a civil war that had lasted close on three years. The alternative was the continuation of a hopeless struggle and the shedding of more blood. Negrín’s government and the leaders of the Spanish communist party (PCE) had gone to Elda in the province of Alicante to oversee the anticipated evacuation of the political, military and syndicalist cadres of the Republic. Suddenly powerless as a result of the coup, they left Spain in order to avoid being captured, thus giving Casado and his CND a free hand. Those communist units which resisted and tried to secure Madrid were wiped out by the IV Army Corps. When Franco proved unyielding the CND abandoned negotiations, all its members, with the exception of Besteiro, escaping to France. On 29 March the victors marched into Madrid. The Civil War was over. These events, which are widely known, occurred in parallel with others which are much less so. Both Casado and Franco had reasons for concealing or distorting them.

A Little Help from MI6?

Naturally enough, Casado wished to avoid going down in history with the label of traitor\(^9\) that was immediately attributed to him by ‘Negrínistas’, communists and many socialists. He argued his case from exile in London in a book that was for many years regarded as an authoritative text.\(^10\) George Orwell lauded it. However, Casado had no hesitation in inventing facts, forgetting events and giving spurious interpretations. Almost thirty years had to pass before he privately admitted in his own words that his famous book was ‘trash’.\(^11\)

It is probable that in writing his book Casado’s interest in earning some money and clearing his name and the incitement of MI6 were all combined. For

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\(^9\) I use the same adjective. This has been harshly contested by some Spanish historians in the naïve belief that a historian must not be judgmental.

\(^10\) Segismundo Casado, The Last Days of Madrid. The End of the Second Spanish Republic, trans. and intro. Rupert Croft-Cooke (London: Peter Davies, 1939). The biographical references to Casado given by the translator contain several factual errors. Given that Croft-Cooke was unfamiliar with Casado the suspicion arises that they were provided by the colonel himself. One of the historians of Franco’s court confuses this book with the one published by Casado in 1968 (see Ricardo de la Cierva, La victoria y el caos. A los sesenta años del 1 de abril de 1939 [Madridejos: Fénix, 1999], 204 and n. 9). The same beginner’s mistake is made by Casado’s most recent ‘biographer’, Colonel Juan María Silvela Milans del Bosch, in the Diccionario biográfico español, where many entries on contemporary protagonists are a monument to Francoist interpretations of the Civil War. This is an indelible shame for the Real Academia de la Historia responsible for commissioning this work. In his book’s dedication to ‘M.O’ (unidentified) Casado portrayed himself as a hero: ‘I left my country because I committed the grave fault of ending a fratricidal struggle, sparing my people much sterile bloodshed’. His book, he added, was a ‘brief and clear narrative of facts which will be transcendent in the perspective of history; [it] wears no literary dress [...] but [...] has the merits of being written with the blood of a Spanish soldier who loves his country, and illuminated with the light of truth’ (The Last Days of Madrid, vi).

\(^11\) Casado to Fernández de la Calzada, 1 April 1967, AGMA, FCP, Box 1124, File 1.
a certain period of time he survived thanks to the cheques he was receiving. Formally they were issued by the British Committee for Refugees from Spain. However, Casado was given allowances on a higher scale than other beneficiaries. This was made possible thanks to a certain Miss Oliver whose identity remains unknown (might it be the M.O. of Casado’s dedication?). Obviously payments could be easily arranged via an intermediary. According to a letter addressed to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, the Foreign Office was believed to take a particular interest in Colonel Casado’s welfare.\footnote{12 TNA [The National Archives], FO371/24525, pp. 257–258. Letter by Wilfrid Roberts, Liberal MP, to R. A. Butler, 21 August 1940, and minute.}

Furthermore, in Madrid Casado had been in contact with a certain Howard Denys Russell Cowan. It would be very strange if Cowan had not worked for MI6. Unfortunately the MI6 records on the Spanish Civil War are completely inaccessible, and as long as they remain closed, it will be difficult to prove, or to demolish these suspicions.\footnote{13 Nor is the file accessible on the then Captain (not Major) Hugh B. C. Pollard who participated in the famous Dragon Rapide flight to take General Franco from Las Palmas to Spanish Morocco in July 1936. The notion that Pollard was an MI6 officer at that time is wrong, see my La conspiración del general Franco y otras revelaciones acerca de una guerra civil desfigurada, revised and expanded ed. (Barcelona: Crítica, 2012).}

Cowan, born on 23 October 1883, had joined the Foreign Office in September 1910 and was posted to Cuba. He resigned in October 1920. His name re-emerged in the Foreign Service List as an honorary attaché at the embassy in Barcelona in August 1938. He was in reality an integral member and liaison officer of Field Marshal Sir Philip Chetwode’s mission, which involved the organization of prisoner exchanges between Francoists and Republicans. Cowan was one of the few people who in theory could circulate within the two areas and, perhaps more importantly, cross from one to the other, although it is not known to what extent he did so. After the fall of Catalonia in early February 1939 he was posted to the Madrid Consulate. This was omitted in his statement of service. Furthermore, why the Foreign Office turned to Cowan is not documented.\footnote{14 Even a pro-Francoist military historian, Colonel José Manuel Martínez Bande, raised some suspicions about Cowan: see his El final de la guerra civil (Madrid: San Martín, 1985), 127. This is a point in which I happen to agree with Francoist authors.} Casado admitted having contacts with British agents when he tried to recruit more republican soldiers for his uprising. He did not identify any of them.

Nothing is known about Cowan’s activities during the critical period between March and August 1939. According to British records he later joined the Ministry of Information (MoI) which was created at the outbreak of the war in September. Cowan was appointed head of the Spanish Section. In January 1940 he tried to help Sra. Casado (née Carmen Santodomingo de Vega) to obtain a passport through the press section at the British embassy
in Madrid. Apparently she could count on the support of two senior officers friendly to her husband (Generals Yagüe and Barron) and the former chief of Franco’s military intelligence service (Colonel Ungría) but she fell foul of the falangists (in particular the head of internal security Count Mayalde, who had succeeded Ungría). The British Ambassador, Sir Maurice Peterson, forbade any action on Sra Casado’s behalf. This episode could perhaps be interpreted as a normal interest by Cowan in Sra Casado’s welfare; however, another episode is less innocent.

In February the MoI decided to send Cowan on an official trip to Spain and Portugal. As soon as the Duke of Alba, Franco’s Ambassador in London, learned of the mission he raised objections. He indicated that Cowan was not particularly liked in certain government circles in Spain. A long correspondence ensued between the MoI, the Foreign Office and Peterson. From this it appears that in Madrid, Cowan was considered too sympathetic towards the defeated republicans. Cowan indignantly denied this. He asserted that he was a conservative and a Catholic who had only done his duty. He had helped some republicans but even more Francoists. In this context the Casado episode was mentioned in suitably couched terms. Significantly, a telegram sent by Peterson on 23 February 1940, in the middle of this bureaucratic squabble, included the statement ‘C informed’. ‘C’ was of course the standard shorthand for the head of MI6. In the end, Cowan’s mission was aborted and he was transferred to another post. There are rumours, so far unsubstantiated, according to which he died in the Blitz.

In any case, suspicions about MI6 are accentuated because Casado’s book, which also claims to offer the English reader a vision of what the war in Spain entailed, was based on a number of orientations (‘directivas’) which were retained by Fernández de la Calzada. Some of them were too sophisticated to have been conceived by Casado.

The first orientation underlined the necessity of ‘leading the attack against the Spanish communist party’. There is nothing surprising here. More subtle is its corollary. This attack should be combined with a softer approach ‘to whatever degree possible’ towards the Soviet regime. The subtlety increases when one considers that at the same time Stalinist policies were also to be attacked. A relatively benign approach towards the Soviet Union (against which NDC propaganda had been particularly strident) might be explained as serving the United Kingdom’s tactical interests in the run-up to the sending of a military mission to Moscow in August 1939. The second orientation was de rigueur. Negrín’s government should obviously be attacked as much as possible. However, the third orientation gives further

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15 TNA, FO371/175 contains the relevant information. MI6 activities in Madrid are absolutely covered in secrecy.
16 There is no reason to believe that ‘C’ was standing for Cowan.
17 For further information on this episode see TNA, FO 371/177.
18 AGMAV, Box 1124, file 9. Translation of final version by the author.
food for thought: ‘Reduce the attack on the other parties and trade union organisations but try to expose the leaders we will not be able to support in the future’. The words in italics are revealing. The big guns were meant to be aimed only at the communists and those backing them.\(^{19}\) The fourth orientation dealt with the international context and was also extremely suggestive: ‘Reduce the attacks on France and England’. Casado’s book could not avoid conveying the message that the lack of assistance from both countries to the Republic in the wake of the non-intervention policy had been harmful to the republican cause, but while this was undeniable it did not have to be stressed.\(^{20}\)

When the European conflict broke out in September 1939, Casado remained in London, where he worked as a military commentator for the BBC, one of the places which British Intelligence used to camouflage contacts that might be useful in the future.

### From London to Latin America and Finally Back in Madrid

In January 1947 Casado moved to Colombia for reasons which are not documented, although it is possible that he felt let down by the British failure to meet his expectations. Personal considerations may also have played a part. He had had an affair with an English woman and fathered a child; his correspondence shows that this had had unpleasant consequences.

In any case it seems that he had not been entirely let down. The Foreign Office instructed the British consulate in Bogotá to ensure that Casado would be treated hospitably and his UK entrance visa extended should he wish to return. London repeated this request a short time afterward. Although I have not been able to consult British records, it is obvious that something strange was going on, as the correspondence between Casado and Fernández de la Calzada shows. Thus, in 1949 Casado wrote:

> They tell me from Paris that the English have finally realized that the only solution left to them for finding an accommodation with Franco is through me. I am also told that within the next couple of months they will propose my return to London. If this is true, I will consider it. For ten years I have remained trustworthy and I am not ready for them to simply discard me.\(^{21}\)

Leaving aside the point of self-glorification, it is not unlikely that underlying all this was some British interest that Casado failed to identify correctly, perhaps because he was unaware of it or it was not clearly transmitted to him.

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\(^{19}\) AGMAV, Box 1124, file 9.  
\(^{20}\) AGMAV, Box 1124, file 9.  
\(^{21}\) Casado to Fernández de la Calzada, 22 March 1949, AGMA, FCP, Box 1124, File 1.
One can surmise that a semi-secret department of the Foreign Office (the Information Research Department [IRD]) was likely involved in this interest. Among its functions was the dissemination of anticommunist propaganda to counter that which was coming from the Kominform. IRD staff included Robert Conquest, who would go on to make a name for himself by uncovering the horrors of the Soviet purges, and also Brian Crozier, Franco’s later and highly unreliable biographer. If the approaches to Casado came from IRD, it would explain a certain persistence. IRD financed the publication of works by authors such as Bertrand Russell, who resonated with British and international left-wing circles. Many may, in any case, have published what they wished, but IRD ensured them a wider circulation, particularly abroad. This characterization, taken from Garton Ash, corresponds exactly with the information Casado transmitted to his friend:

These days I am very sought after by my friends over there. They insist I return to London because my place at this time—according to them—is there. If I decide to go, they would give me ALL KINDS of facilities to travel and live in London, without having economic concerns. I have resolutely turned them down. They should have thought of this in 1947, when they let me leave. They are also inviting me to write a book—‘Russia in Spain’—in Spanish and English. It would be a short but concrete book, to be distributed in English and Spanish speaking countries. They tell me that this could bring me considerable financial rewards and that if I do not wish to get involved in selling it they could buy it from me.

It is clear that Casado was not referring to a commercial publishing house. What is more, the offers were not made to Casado from London, but in Latin America through intermediaries. The following communication is clear enough:

Here they have spoken to me on the same matter. I am really not interested in talking with cohorts or coteries of varying reliability. I learned a lot over there. One of the things I learned best is how to make myself respected and demand to be treated with proper consideration. I

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23 Crozier was one of those odd characters who continued to cling to the Francoist legend about Guernica having been destroyed by the Basques themselves. See his review of Herbert R. Southworth’s La destruction de Guernica: periodismo, diplomacia, propaganda e historia (Paris: Ruedo Ibérico, 1977), in The Daily Telegraph, 27 October 1977.

24 Casado to Fernández de la Calzada, 15 June 1949, AGMA, FCP, Box 1124, File 1.
am not prepared to negotiate with intermediaries. If they regard me as indispensable to finding a solution—of which I have been convinced for a long time now—let them tell me [...] I have offered them a book I would like to write entitled ‘Russia in Spain’ provided that they buy it from me so they can publish it over there. If they accept, I shall publish it in Spanish for distribution throughout Latin America.25

The preceding quotation means that in a short space of time Casado had thought through the idea of the book and made it his own. However, he had not come to any agreement with regard to other things he was hoping the British would propose (no doubt the chance to play some role in connection with Spanish politics). In the end, no agreement was reached.

From Colombia, Casado moved to Venezuela, working in both countries for subsidiaries of the Swiss multinational Nestlé. He also played some part as an intermediary between the exiled socialist leader and fierce adversary of Negrín, Indalecio Prieto and Spanish monarchists. He probably exaggerated his own importance. Examples of a delirious narcissism emerge in his later correspondence.

In the first years of the Cold War, Casado showed himself to be somewhat fickle. On one occasion he announced that if it came to a real war he would offer his services to Franco: shortly thereafter he said he would take refuge in the farthest depths of South America. Meanwhile he had to put up with hardship, at times having to rely on the support of friends to survive, and in such poor health that at one point he was at death’s door. He considered going to a place where the cost of living was as low as possible, and towards the end of the 1950s he thought of returning to Europe, to Portugal, England, Spain. He had sounded out the Spanish consulates, and now intensified his efforts to obtain assurances that if he returned to Spain he would not be prosecuted. He pulled strings with old army colleagues, prominent generals in Franco’s army, but failed to obtain any firm guarantees. Nevertheless he returned to Madrid at the start of September 1961, duly authorized by the Inter-Ministerial Repatriation Commission.26 He presented himself to the police, who took note of his address but otherwise left him alone. Initially, Casado was exultant.

**Problems with Franco’s Military Justice**

Then followed a setback. On 28 June 1962 Casado officially applied for a pension as a former officer of the Spanish army, in which he had served

25 Casado to Fernández de la Calzada, 29 June 1949, AGMA, FCP, Box 1124, File 1.
26 Causa 1346–63. Reproduction of page 37 of the military indictment (auto de procesamiento) against Casado, 20 January 1964. This file was copied to me by the Spanish Ministry of Defence. It is available at the Archivo General e Histórico de Defensa (AHGD), Justicia Militar, Tribunal Militar Territorial 1°, Fondo Moderno, Box 607, Sumario 1346.
without interruption from 1911 until 1939.\textsuperscript{27} His finances were not exactly buoyant and he thought that some supplementary financial support would do him no harm. He was making a mistake. The bureaucracy of the Army Ministry became aware of his presence in Spain, and whatever arrangements had been made at some high level of the Francoist machinery had clearly not filtered downwards: the application resulted in the discovery that Casado had been condemned by the Special Court for the Repression of Freemasonry and Communism. Suddenly he was faced with the loss of all civil rights, including the right to a pension.

The military juggernaut went into action in October 1963. Proceedings were instituted to throw light on his actions during the Civil War. But although Casado was unsuccessful in halting these, his contacts in high places neither inhibiting nor preventing military justice from taking its course, he was, however, treated leniently during the proceedings. The Special Court indicated on 10 January 1964 that Casado should not be taken into custody. Quite suddenly, testimonies in his favour poured in from all directions, with even the military prosecutor declaring that Casado had removed the most important obstacle to peace, the Negrín government, ‘which obeyed foreign powers’.\textsuperscript{28} The interrogations were simply a formality. In them Casado asserted his militant anticommunism and referred to his 1939 book and his uprising against a government and a Republic allegedly dominated by communists.

Under such conditions, Casado made use of the articles in the Military Code of Justice which were most favourable to him. It seems clear from the military file that discreet pressures were applied to the judges and prosecutors. At the end of 1964 he was almost free.\textsuperscript{29} However, there must also have been opposing pressures as, on 15 July 1965, the Cabinet settled on a lenient prison sentence for his masonic affiliation. On 8 October of the same year, after an appeal by Casado, all charges against him were dropped, although he was unable to obtain either military and administrative reinstatement or a pension. He was finally denied both in 1967, and as far as we are concerned this is the important point.

During that long and difficult period Casado continued to battle with ill health as well as pressing, and deteriorating, financial problems. On 10 June

\textsuperscript{27} Note from the Personnel Section to the Undersecretary of War, 9 July 1962, AHGD (the file of Casado’s case is too large and poorly organized to make references to single documents).

\textsuperscript{28} That is, the USSR. According to the Francoist canon on the Civil War the 1936 uprising was prepared to prevent a communist insurrection. The war itself was styled as a ‘war of liberation’ from the communist/Soviet yoke. Even today echoes of this interpretation can be found in authors as different as Beevor and Payne.

\textsuperscript{29} On 5 October 1964 the notorious General Rafael García Valiño (1898–1975), Captain General of the First Military Region, decided to dismiss (‘sobreseimiento’) the military proceedings against Casado, in AHGD.
1965 he wrote that he had not left his flat in twenty months, and as his multiple conditions worsened this state of affairs remained unchanged. The medical treatment was expensive. He did not enjoy any social security benefits. The cost of living was rising. Even though he still received his pension from Nestlé, his savings were gradually evaporating.

The Genesis of New Memoirs

In this dire situation Casado came up with the idea of writing a new book about his famous coup. His unpleasant encounter with military justice had taught him the value of the two factors which had carried most weight in the proceedings. Of his anticommunism and the role he had attributed to Negrín as a Soviet lackey, it was the latter which had been the determining factor. Casado therefore had every interest in accentuating the Francoist interpretation of the Civil War as a ‘crusade against communism’.30

In the 1960s, Casado’s public testimony was likely to be more than welcome to Franco’s regime. It was the period during which the first foreign authors (Hugh Thomas, Gabriel Jackson and Herbert R. Southworth) had begun to question, to a greater or lesser degree, the Francoist interpretations of the Civil War. The Spanish government had, with much fanfare, launched a campaign boasting of having ensured ‘twenty-five years of peace’ for the first time in over a century. Casado was correct in believing that his idea was headed in the right direction, although, as was the case in London, the thought had come from someone else.

For a time I suspected that it might have come from the Ministry of (dis) Information and Tourism, which had conceived and implemented the campaign. The Ministry had a department of Studies on the Civil War entrusted with a dual task. First, to report on publications that appeared abroad, a Boletín de Información Bibliográfica was compiled and distributed amongst the regime’s elite. Second, a more sophisticated aim consisted in sponsoring studies that would present an image less anchored in old-fashioned myths and update an antiquated vision of the Civil War, even when that meant renouncing certain time-sanctioned theses. The person responsible for the practical and operational aspects of those tasks was a functionary of the same Ministry: Ricardo de la Cierva was to become the regime’s historian par excellence.

It is easy to ascertain the approximate date when the idea of writing a new book, and not just a re-issue of his shoddy 1939 offering, took hold:

30 In the then prevailing Cold War climate this interpretation found favour not only with the US Government, in particular after the 1953 agreement on US bases in Spain, but also among a number of Western European Governments.
To make up for the book I wrote in London, which lacked documentation and was undiluted and chaotic trash, I have now decided to write a reliable history, for which I have sufficient index cards so as to be sure it will sell like hot cakes.

For a sick and very weak man, confined for years to his flat, Casado proved to be a titan. He finished the new book, or implied he had practically finished it, within a few months:

I have written an interesting book and I believe it will be a success. I am going to negotiate its sale in Spanish and will hold back on negotiating it in the United States or in England. Wherever they offer the most [...] According to what I have been told, it has sparked interest in the US because of its political approach. Where I lacked details was in the communist uprising. Frankly, now I can recall very little.

This paragraph is revealing. It leads to the suspicion that Casado thought in the same vein as in 1939 and as the British had suggested to him ten years later. It also demonstrates that he needed money and that regarding what was to become one of the fundamental focus points of his work, the alleged communist reaction to the establishment of the Consejo Nacional de Defensa, the years had not passed in vain. However, he no longer recalled many things, which stands to reason.

Fernández de la Calzada advised Casado that the commander of one of the divisions of the IV Army Corps, the anarchist Major Liberino González, might be able to lend him a hand. The suggestion did not fall on deaf ears. Casado—or the ‘ghost writers’ who helped him finish his text in record time—fell on González and convinced him to collaborate. It is not known if González did so free of charge or out of loyalty to the anarchist interpretation of the end of the war. The fact is that the ex-major put at Casado’s disposal what the latter claimed were his war journals. They appeared, for the first time, in a series of articles Casado published in the newspaper of the semi-fascist trade union organization, Pueblo, between 26 October and 14 November 1967. The reader’s attention is drawn here to the speed of Casado’s reaction, inconceivable at that time for a seriously ill man.

31 Casado to Fernández de la Calzada, 1 April 1967, AGMA, FCP, Box 1124, File 1. In Casado’s own words: ‘porquería de libro [...] que aparte de carecer de documentación no tenía ni pies ni cabeza’. I have long searched in vain for any Francoist or neo-Francoist historian who has characterized that book in such a harsh way.

32 Casado to Fernández de la Calzada, 5 June 1967, AGMA, FCP, Box 1124, File 1.

33 The anarchists put the blame for the defeat squarely on the shoulders of the Communists. This is an interpretation shared by non-anarchist authors such as Antony Beevor. It is essentially based on a priori conjecture. For a contrary view see my Las armas y el oro. Palancas de la guerra, mitos del franquismo (Barcelona: Pasado y Presente, 2013).
At that time the kind of censorship which had existed since the war had finally been modernized. The press and publishers, however, still put themselves at risk and could face severe penalties if what they published was at odds with a highly restrictive new law. Consequently, they were all too happy to submit their future publications to the censors’ authorization—euphemistically referred to as ‘prior consultation’.

The articles in Pueblo have gone unnoticed by historians, perhaps because they anticipated—in fact, this was their explicit intent—the subsequent memoirs. However, for the purposes of this essay they are of considerable importance. Pueblo enjoyed a margin of autonomy that other media were not so fortunate to have. Casado’s articles in fact proved something of a bombshell, prompting the ultra-falangist newspaper El Alcázar to announce a response, possibly to refute some of Casado’s major assertions, notwithstanding that these were rather right-wing and anti-communist in themselves. The person in charge of the response was none other than de la Cierva. A heated public exchange between the two newspapers and the Ministry led to El Alcázar’s abandoning its plans for publication.

This storm in a teacup reinforces the view that Casado counted on powerful support. Fernández de la Calzada wrote that a friend of theirs—José del Río, an ex-member of the CND—had told him during a visit to London that ‘the book you [Casado] are proposing to publish, giving details of the events of March and April 1939, will be supported by an organization or department of the Spanish government’. Fernández de la Calzada immediately understood the danger:

There is no doubt that since all governments, from all countries and all the regimes of the world, have neither conscience nor heart when it comes to achieving political propaganda ends it is possible that should this plan come to fruition your name and the degree of honesty you have maintained for nearly thirty years could be irreparably damaged, historically speaking […] On the other hand […] it is possible that there are other pressures I am unaware of which are forcing you to take this step.

Clearly we must look to other channels not dependent on the Ministry of (dis) Information and Tourism. Here I would like to rectify what I have written in the past. Whoever financed the assistance on which Casado was undoubtedly counting remains unidentified. It could have been a military department but I am rather inclined to bet on the intelligence services connected with the Presidency of the Government or one of the military ministries.

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34 Not so by Bolloten who naïvely thought they revealed the truth incarnate.
35 Fernández de la Calzada to Casado, 27 July 1967, AGMA, FCP, Box 1124, File 1.
36 Fernández de la Calzada to Casado, 27 July 1967, AGMA, FCP, Box 1124, File 1.
A Second Book but by Whom?

While the articles in *Pueblo* brought Casado a measure of financial relief, this could obviously not last long, nor could he avoid writing new memoirs, a project he had already communicated to his former aide-de-camp. He had his Nestlé pension of 10,000 pesetas per month and, with his savings, he thought that he could manage for ten or twelve more years, especially if he was granted a military pension. When this was refused his situation became dire as the Nestlé pension covered only half of his financial necessities; he had been forced to fall back on savings which were rapidly being depleted. Although profits from the book might possibly be his salvation, Casado was conscious of the game he was entering into:

> If I publish the book as I have conceived it I will have to leave Spain, a move I cannot make because of my delicate state of health, among other things. Therefore I have to publish it here, with all the considerable inconveniences that this entails, but such is the situation that if I am to have the necessary success they have to give me the means. And these I cannot obtain in any other way than by making compromises. What else can I do?

He had tried an alternative. He appealed to the Central Administrative Court against the rejection of his pension, a rather desperate move given that the likelihood of the Court going against a Cabinet decision in a case like his was miniscule. Naturally it was not difficult to block his appeal. The Court simply dragged its feet. Casado wrote that he was on tenterhooks: ‘Regarding the book, for now, I do not dare publish it here but neither can I do so elsewhere while I am living in Spain. I do not know what to do.’

It is in this context that we must place the publication of the articles in *Pueblo*. Casado also told Fernández de la Calzada that he had resorted to that means in case the censors forced him to postpone the book. It was Casado’s first step on the path of active collaboration with the regime. He clearly had no alternatives. Bedridden for too long, he had to have someone write the part of the book that had not appeared in the *Pueblo* articles. He lived to see *Así cayó Madrid. Último episodio de la guerra civil española* appear in 1968 but died several months later without having obtained either approval or rejection of his final desperate appeal for a pension.

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37 This assertion means that Casado had another view about the book. Unfortunately there is no evidence to show what that view might have been.

38 Casado to Fernández de la Calzada, 2 August 1967, AGMA, FCP, Box 1124, File 1.

39 Casado to Fernández de la Calzada, 19 September 1967, AGMA, FCP, Box 1124, File 1.

40 Published by Guadiana de Publicaciones. It has since been reprinted by other publishers.
In October 1968 in one of his last letters to Fernández de la Calzada he admitted that he was feeling the strain brought on by the six years and four months in which he had not left his flat. When his former aide-de-camp received a copy of the book in London, he replied:

Your description of the events of that time is accurate and historical and I am certain that the Spanish public has not up to now had the opportunity to learn of the causes and effects of the movement of March 5th. It is possible that some sectors of opinion will respond unfavourably, out of prejudice or ignorance, but what must be taken into consideration is that the facts you describe in detail are supported by documents and references which, by now, are already historical.41

This assessment can only be accepted to a very limited extent. It is true that Casado provided some facts concerning the end of the war that were not common currency in the literature which had been published in Spain up to that point. However, he did so within such narrow boundaries that the Francoist dogmas were never called into question. It might be argued in Fernández de la Calzada’s defence that he was most likely unaware of what Casado had painstakingly concealed. What was that? Simply all those intimations of Casado’s willingness to betray the republican resistance well before March 1939 which would eventually lead him to cooperate with the Francoist fifth column in Madrid.

In his second book the dominant orientation was the emphasis on the alleged pawn-like behaviour of Negrín towards the Soviets and on the invented attempt by the communist party to take control of the army in order to continue a hopeless struggle designed to serve Stalin’s malign interests.42 All this was consistent with what Casado had learned from his experience in dealing with Franco’s military justice. In all likelihood it was impressed upon him by some discreet services. Casado remained in Franco’s service until the bitter end.

**Casado, Franco’s Tool**

At the end of October 1938, Franco’s unofficial representative in Paris, the former monarchist ambassador José María Quiñones de León, told the British ambassador in Rome, Lord Perth, who was passing through the French capital, that among the republican military there were many who had

41 Fernández de la Calzada to Casado, 4 May 1968, AGMA, FCP, Box 1124, File 1.
42 Who would think today of reviving the legend of the alleged communist/Negrínista *coup de main*? The reader does not need to look far: Colonel Silvela Milans del Bosch and the Royal Academy of History. Even in 2011–2013 William Faulkner’s *dictum* that ‘the past is never dead. It is not even past’ still applies in Spain: see *Requiem for a Nun* (New York: Random House, 1950), Act 1, sc 3.
built up their hopes about the possibility of ending the Civil War *dans l’honneur* through negotiations with their Francoist fellow officers.\(^{43}\) Therefore it is probably putting it a little late to date Casado’s first steps towards treason to the start of November 1938.\(^{44}\)

Franco was not unaware of certain specific actions by Casado when the latter met with Negrín and the then commander in chief of the armies of the central-south region, General José Miaja.\(^{45}\) Casado raised the possibility that the communists might revolt if Negrín left the government, and asked what to do in that event. This question meant that Casado knew very little about Negrín’s personality, the reasons for his behaviour, or the political dynamic of the republican zone. Nor did he need to, although he expanded on these topics in his books. Casado seemingly wished to explore the possibility that the military should take power. Otherwise Miaja’s presence is not easily explained. Although it would be too hazardous to jump to radical conclusions on the basis of this episode alone, doubts arise in light of a report, dated 20 October 1938, in which the republican Servicio de Información Militar (SIM) in Madrid announced the arrival of a Francoist emissary to Casado to negotiate the surrender of the capital (the SIM suggested holding back).\(^{46}\)

One might be tempted to speculate that by mid October 1938 Casado had already begun to map out the major lines of his subsequent actions. His rationale must have been as indicated to Lord Perth by Quiñones de León: an honourable surrender between old brothers-in-arms. However, after the defeat in the battle of the Ebro in October 1938 and the earlier international abandonment of the Republic after the Munich Agreements it was a fantasy that could easily have taken root in the minds of republican officers.

Always interested in disguising his actions for future history, Casado acknowledged none the less that by the end of January 1939, that is,

\(^{43}\) Viñas, *El honor de la República*, 436–37. Lord Perth immediately transmitted the information to London (TNA: FO371/22661). As with the preparation for the 1936 coup the British Government was always able to keep abreast of further developments. No wonder that Cowan was posted to Madrid. For the belief in a peace with honour see also Graham, ‘Casado’s Ghosts’, 255–78.

\(^{44}\) An escapee from Madrid declared on 6 November 1938 in Salamanca that Casado feared that the capital might become encircled and be left without food. The escapee offered his services for a mediation. This might have reinforced the existing impression at Franco’s headquarters.

\(^{45}\) As pointed out by Ángel Bahamonde and Javier Cervera, *Así terminó la guerra de España* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 1999), 296, Franco’s biographer Ricardo de la Cierva replaced Miaja with General Manuel Matallana and silenced Negrín’s presence in his account of this episode, which he thoroughly distorted. It has been alleged that Matallana (in the Eastern Army Group) was probably working underground for Franco at that time.

\(^{46}\) Bahamonde and Cervera, *Así terminó la guerra*, 259. The latter author has also argued that the Francoist intelligence service (Servicio de Información y Policía Militar [SIPMI]) entered into contact with Casado in September/October 1938, in *Madrid en guerra*. *La ciudad clandestina, 1936–1939* (Madrid: Alianza, 2006), 386. Casado never said a word about this in his ‘memoirs’. 
relatively late in the day, he had taken his decision to put an end to the
war as soon as possible. This conveniently coincided with the formal
declaration by the republican Government a few days before the fall of
Barcelona on 26 January that a full state of war existed in Spain. In
Casado’s interpretation real power had passed therefore into the hands of
the military authorities. He was not entirely wrong, but he was the only
commander to justify his actions in this way. From Casado’s point of view
there was a need for further justifications. He found them in a legend
which he spent a lot of energy trying to bolster up. He had come into
possession, he said, ‘of irrefutable proof that the communist party was
preparing a coup d’état, with the intention of carrying on the struggle, in
agreement with Dr Negrín, who was in the service of Russia’. Casado
never presented this proof. It would have been difficult to do so since it was
pure invention.

According to a report from Franco’s fifth column in Madrid, some time
around 26 January 1939 Casado had made contact with Besteiro, who had
been being ‘prepared’ by the Francoist agents for the past year. On 30
January, in accordance with instructions from Franco’s Headquarters,
Casado received two written pages from the fifth columnists. It is difficult
to believe that Franco could extemporize such extensive and precise
conditions for surrender without some kind of prior contacts with Casado,
whose conspiratorial activities between November 1938 and the end of
January 1939 have not yet been sufficiently explored. The key points of the
two pages were the following:

National Spain confirms the several offers of pardon conveyed via
announcements and the radio that it will be generous to all those who,
without having committed crimes, have been dragged deceitfully into
the struggle. For the leaders and officers who voluntarily lay down their
arms, and who are not guilty of the death of their comrades, or
responsible for other crimes, apart from preserving their lives, our
goodwill shall be that much greater the more meaningful and
productive the services they offer to the cause of Spain in these final
days, and the less their participation and ill-will in the war. Those who
surrender their weapons to avoid futile slaughter and who are not

47 Casado, Así cayó Madrid, 301. In his ‘Foreword’ to Bolloten’s The Spanish Civil War,
Payne underlines among its most outstanding contributions ‘the final controversial
Communist reassignments in military commands’, x–xv (p. xv).

48 According to a report by Antonio de Luna, who was a member of the Francoist fifth
column and professor at the University of Madrid. For this particular point, widely quoted, see
de la Cierva, La victoria y el caos, 214.

49 Bahamonde and Cervera, Así terminó la guerra, 266 and Cervera, Madrid en guerra,
393–440. The promises are reproduced in Documentos inéditos para la historia del
Generalísimo Franco, 4 vols (Madrid: Fundación Nacional Francisco Franco, 1992), I, 292–
93, doc. no. 78; the reader will observe that Franco referred to military personnel only.
convicted of murder or other serious crimes shall be able to obtain a safe-conduct that will allow them to leave the country, enjoying meanwhile complete personal safety [...] Neither service with the reds alone nor having simply been an active member of political parties other than the National Movement will be a cause of criminal liability. For the crimes committed while the reds held power, only the Courts will be competent. The resulting political liabilities will be handled in a humane way in relation to the families of the convicted. Nobody will be deprived of freedom because of criminal activities for any longer than will be necessary for their correction and re-education [...] 50

The magnetic pull of such ‘promises’ is understandable. If the leaders and officers had not been found guilty of blood crimes, not only would they have nothing to fear with respect to their lives but they would also gain additional benefits the more they assisted in bringing the war to a swift conclusion. They could even escape abroad. Furthermore their families would have nothing to fear. Any sentences would be proportionate since they would only last for the strictly necessary time.

Why should Casado not have faith in Franco’s promises? He probably wanted to. Everything would be straightforward if he succeeded in ‘fixing’ an accommodation with the former comrades. There was, however, a dilemma: believing in Franco’s word was like diving off a cliff; but continuing the struggle also posed a serious problem. The final paragraph of the offers asserted, in effect, that ‘delayed surrender or futile resistance to our advance will incur serious liabilities, which we will make them answer for in the name of the blood needlessly spilled’. 51 Just to be certain, Casado immediately asked for confirmation. He obtained it along with a more formal memo than that of 30 January. It was also drafted by the fifth column following the guidance from Franco’s Headquarters. Franco reiterated his offer to the republican soldiers. He made two qualifications. On the one hand he stressed through his mediators that ‘You have completely lost the war. Any prolongation of resistance is criminal. National Spain demands your surrender’. 52 In this respect there was no way Casado could claim he had been deceived. However, Franco tried to ‘alleviate’ the previous harsh words by mentioning those who ‘lay down their arms voluntarily’. In other words he broadened the scope of his offer. 53 Straightaway, on 3 February 1939, Casado formally made contact with Besteiro with the purpose of organizing

50 Documentos inéditos, I, 292–93, doc. no. 78 (my emphasis).
51 Documentos inéditos, I, 292–93, doc. no. 78.
52 Documentos inéditos, I, 292–93, doc. no. 78. For a full discussion see Bahamonde and Cervera, Así terminó la guerra, 314–16.
53 The reader should be aware that Francoist historians have distorted the whole episode, conflating the two notes into the second one. For a full discussion see Bahamonde and Cervera, Así terminó la guerra, 314–16.
the uprising according to Franco’s wishes. It is impossible not to conclude that Casado thought that most would receive protection under the victor’s goodwill. From one of the reports by Franco’s fifth column Casado’s state of mind can be assessed:

Neither desertion nor treason. Immediate surrender [...] Honourable surrender of the whole Central region, with the undertaking to maintain complete order until the transfer of authority and leadership is effected, in exchange for generosity in the actions of the Generalísimo’s Government, generosity that will be limited to measures against the perpetrators of misdemeanours and common crimes. They will have to endure the sentences that the competent Courts will impose upon them.

It would appear therefore that Casado completely swallowed the bait. It will come as no surprise that, under such conditions, Franco should call a halt to the general advance against the republicans in the central-south region of the country and, thanks to Colonel Casado’s manipulations, prepare to wait for the internal collapse of the republican resistance.

The Deceiver, Deceived

Franco did not have the slightest intention of honouring his undertakings. He demonstrated this immediately with the promulgation of the Law of Political Responsibilities of 9 February 1939. Casado and his acolytes decided to ignore this, thinking perhaps that the ‘guarantees’ offered by Franco via the fifth column to the professional soldiers would take precedence. If this was the case, they were seriously mistaken.

An unexpected problem arose when Casado had to contend with the Prime Minister, Juan Negrín, who arrived in Madrid. Everything Casado asserted in his memoirs about the contacts between them must be taken with a large pinch of salt. In any case there still remained the ‘minor’ difficulty of justifying the atmosphere necessary for betrayal to flourish. This was covered by the legend that Casado’s coup was meant to prevent the communist takeover of the republican Army. Such an invention served everyone well: first of all Franco, because it reinforced an interpretation in keeping with the one he had always given for the military uprising of July 1936, that it was to prevent an alleged communist revolution, second, many of the republicans,

54 Martínez Bande, El final de la guerra civil, 130. One should note that this stalwart Francoist historian did not deem it necessary to reproduce the first notes exchanged between Casado and Franco’s Headquarters. Bolloten did not even consider them (The Spanish Civil War, 706).
55 Martínez Bande, El final de la guerra civil, 137.
56 This legend was put to rest by Herbert R. Southworth, Conspiracy and the Spanish Civil War. The Brainwashing of Francisco Franco (London: Routledge, 2002). Even at the time of writing, this ludicrous notion has made a come-back in the entry on General Emilio Mola.
because it made it possible to clearly identify the ‘guilty’ (Negrín and the communists); third, the anarchists in particular, who were freed from having to explain Mera’s betrayal; last, the non-Negrínist socialists, who were thereby allowed the possibility of glorifying Besteiro and escaping their own responsibilities. However, the cover story does not stand up when subjected to a rigorous examination of the available documentary evidence.

The debate has traditionally focused on the significance of five rounds of military appointments. Negrín had been working on the reshuffling of commands since before the last Cortes (Parliament) meeting in Figueres at the beginning of February. He promoted, for example, Miaja and Vicente Rojo to the rank of Lieutenant General (Gaceta of 12 February 1939). On the 24th (Gaceta of 25 February) he raised Casado to General (a promotion which Casado rejected angrily after his revolt, even though he had no objection to ‘reclaiming it’ during his testimony before the Francoist military tribunal). Furthermore, Negrín combined the Commissariats of the Navy, the Air Force, and the Army into a General Defence Commissariat. The Gaceta of 1 March also published the promotion to General of Antonio Cordón, a communist and Undersecretary of the Army. All this is well known.

The fourth round has generated heated controversy because Casado directly founded on it the justification for his uprising. In this he achieved success in spite of making the numerous factual errors which ought to have alerted historians. Mera, ever inventive, saw in the appointments a set of orders ‘which tended to turn the republican Army into a blind instrument of the communist party’. This controversy flourished in part because of the difficulty in retrieving any copy of the Diario Oficial del Ministerio de Defensa, in particular that of Saturday 4 March. However, it was eventually found. Negrín’s own notes explaining the appointments have also been located. It can be asserted with finality that Casado plainly and simply lied. By these appointments Negrín intended to control the relevant military commands that were to secure the territory for the evacuation of republican politicians, officers and trade union cadres, the categories liable to become


57 In Viñas and Hernández, El desplome de la República, Chapter IX, 219–41, there is a detailed discussion of the five rounds and their meaning. Casado’s and Mera’s distortions of the rounds are also highlighted.


59 The handwritten notes by Negrín are available in AMAEC: Archivo de Barcelona, Juan Negrín Papers, Box RE 149, file 6, and in Negrín’s personal archives in Paris.

60 This assertion is something that Bolloten is not able or willing to make, even though he adheres to the thesis of a pro-Francoist historian, Colonel Ramón Salas Larrazábal, that there was no communist coup (The Spanish Civil War, 713).
victims of future Francoist reprisals. In the territory spanning the whole arc between Alicante and Murcia, reliable troops, regardless of whether their commanders were communist, republican, anarchist, or apolitical, were meant to protect the exodus. At the same time, the full powers which had been granted to General Miaja were removed.\footnote{This writer is happy to acknowledge a previous mistake in this respect. A Colonel Casado was to be appointed director of the Artillery Academy. He was not our Casado but an officer with the same family name. My thanks to Fernando Rodríguez Mata for clarifying this point in his book Testimonios y remembranzas. Mis recuerdos de los últimos meses de la guerra de España (México D.F.: Colegio de México, 2013).}

The fifth and final round of appointments was signed by Negrín on 5 March. When researcher Juan Miguel Campanario uncovered a copy of the ministerial \textit{Gaceta} whose distribution was prevented by Casado’s uprising one might have thought it would contain the final key to the alleged communist coup if such existed.\footnote{Juan Miguel Campanario, \textit{Los ascensos y nombramientos de militares comunistas en marzo de 1939, la sublevación del coronel Segismundo Casado y el hallazgo de un ejemplar del Diario Oficial del Ministerio de Defensa del día 5 de marzo cuya existencia se desconocía.} Professor Campanario was kind enough to allow me the use of his paper for \textit{El desplome de la República}. It is now accessible at <http://www2.uah.es/jmc/an40.pdf>.} Regrettably for myth- and legend-makers, this was not to be the case.

The most important appointment was that of Jesús Hernández, up to then political commissar of the already dissolved Group of Armies of the central-south region. He was to move to the position of Inspector Commissar General of the Army under the command of a staunch republican politician, Bibiano Osorio y Tafall. An anarchist, Avelino González Entrialgo, would go to the Cartagena Naval Base with the rank of a divisional commander. José Ignacio Mantecón, another republican, was designated Chief Inspector of the Levante Army. Virgilio Llanos, a Catalan communist and commissar of the Cartagena Naval School, and the communist Francisco Ortega were put under Hernández’s orders. The fact that Ortega was replaced by Mantecón is highly significant. As soon as the latter arrived in Valencia the first action he took was to sound out who might be sympathetic to Casado’s plans. During the morning and evening prior to Casado’s uprising, Mantecón focused all conversation on Casado’s military and personal excellence, his indisputable authority and so on, to the point that the acting commander was utterly surprised and commented upon it with Francisco Ciutat, a communist professional officer.\footnote{Ciutat’s report to the Central Committee (CC) of the Spanish communist party has been reproduced in the CD accompanying Viñas and Hernández, \textit{El desplome de la República}, 223–24, doc. no. 8.}
In other words, contrary to what is traditionally claimed, with his final round of appointments, Negrín was attempting to start taking measures which would actually reduce the communist influence within a sensitive sector of the republican Army responsible for securing the territory in which the evacuation had to be organized. This also explains Negrín’s refusal to appoint Pedro Martínez Cartón, a communist, as military commander of Almería. The Prime Minister and Minister of Defence did not make any distinction among the political affiliations of his commanders, relying instead on their loyalty. And given that Negrín was trying to cover himself against all eventualities neither is it surprising that he acted cautiously, even delaying the rounds of appointments.

What Sparked off Casado’s Coup of 5 March?

At this point the reader may have come to the conclusion that the Casado story about the prevention of the alleged communist coup rests on weak ground. A personality so little suspect as the anarchist minister Segundo Blanco reported at the National Committees of the Libertarian Movement of 3 March that he felt optimistic as regards the communists’ attitude. He claimed that the situation was not favourable for them. Furthermore, plans were in the making with certain foreign countries to prepare for the evacuation. Instructions had been sent out to all provincial governors for passports to be issued. The military outlook was dismal. The scant reserves meant that the struggle could not be sustained beyond three months. All this was according to the facts. The Government was aware of it, as was the top leadership of the political and trade union organizations.

Casado must have been concerned about the promise made to Franco’s Headquarters. Needless to say he could not afford to gamble. Almost three weeks had already gone by since he committed himself to handing over the republican zone. Franco had refrained from offensive actions but Casado had not yet made his move.

Negrín, meanwhile, carried on. He never had any suspicions about another of the main conspirators, General Manuel Matallana, and even wrote in his notes a whole series of questions to discuss with him as future Chief of the General Staff. Among the items was the creation of a manoeuvre army; the dispatch of one or two chosen brigades to Cartagena; giving a command to the communist General Juan Modesto and appointing another

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65 The italics are mine. This can be found in Checa’s report to the CC, in Viñas and Hernández, _El desplome de la República_, 248, doc. no. 9. Incidentally, Checa was the Politburo member who, at the ‘invitation’ of NKVD agents in Madrid, set in motion the communist machinery which led to the infamous Paracuellos massacres in November 1936.

communist, Enrique Líster, as commander of the Andalusian army; choosing the commander of the Army General Staff and making other appointments in the military administration. A final item stated simply: ‘Inform: resistance plan.’ 67 Presumably he wanted to discuss it with Matallana, since the republican radios had been announcing that Negrín was going to give an important speech.

After Azana’s resignation, the president of the Cortes, Diego Martínez Barrio, had refused to take on the position of acting President of the Republic. After some resistance, on 3 March Martínez Barrio contacted Negrín from Paris, asking him whether the Government would agree to the political line of settling the Spanish issue with the least possible damage and sacrifice. Martínez Barrio specified that if Negrín did not accept he would, regrettably, feel obliged to decline. 68 On 5 March Negrín responded through the former ambassador to Paris, Marcelino Pascua:

The Government policy and, I can assure you, that of all the parties therein, without exception, is to put as swift an end as possible to the war. The only condition deemed indispensable is that of guaranteeing that there will be no persecutions or reprisals and that the evacuation of those who are most jeopardized will be facilitated. 69

In other words, almost the same thing that Franco had offered Casado! In the political context of the time the reference to ‘all the parties’ is very significant because by implication it also included the communist party. This coincides with some statements made by Dolores Ibarruri (‘Pasionaria’) that have caused great hilarity among pro-Francoist historians: the PCE would adhere to the Government line, be it resistance or the quest for peace. It was Negrín who determined the tactics to follow.

Negrín asked Martínez Barrio for assistance. If the latter had refused, Negrín would have reached the appropriate conclusions. As Martínez Barrio did not refuse, it does not take a genius to imagine that he would have returned to Spain. In a sense, Casado’s coup would have been unnecessary.

It is obvious that this exchange of telegrams gave Casado the final push. At that time all communications to and from the outside world passed through Madrid, where the military censorship, on the colonel’s orders,

67 Notes in Negrín’s Archives, Paris: mentioned in Viñas and Hernández, El desplome de la República, 239.
68 For this fundamental episode see Viñas and Hernández, El desplome de la República, 247–57.
69 Negrín’s archives, Paris. Enrique Moradiellos has reproduced a slightly incomplete copy which is available in the Fundación Juan Negrín, Las Palmas. See his Don Juan Negrín (Barcelona: Peninsula, 2006), 445.
was working vigorously. Casado knew about the most important messages and, on occasion, delayed their dispatch to the recipients. In this situation he suddenly saw himself confronted with the possibility that the Negrín-Martínez Barrio duo would ask for peace and, if this were to happen, where would that leave him and his plans? What would become of Franco’s promises? Casado might wave a fond farewell to his opportunity to go down in history as a peacemaker. It is not surprising that he prevented Martínez Barrio’s telegram being sent to Negrín and decided to take action. It was also on 5 March that the republican radios transmitted messages to the Francoist zone announcing the following: ‘Attention. Attention. Spaniards of the invaded areas. Doctor Negrín, president of the republican Government, will speak tomorrow to all Spaniards. Stay alert for the voice of our Government’. This anticipated broadcast had to be stopped at all costs. In any case, the preparations for the coup had reached a point of no return just a few days earlier.

By 5 March Casado could wait no longer. The plans were playing out well in Madrid, but very badly in Cartagena, where the republican fleet was anchored. Taking advantage of a poorly organized pro-Francoist uprising, Admiral Miguel Buiza put to sea. He had been in close contact with Casado and the latter was probably counting on the ships to evacuate those who wished to leave. Buiza betrayed him in turn and set a course for North Africa, carrying the ship’s crews, their relatives, and anyone who managed to get on board. He did not bother about the rest. Casado never tried to explain Buiza’s defection, which must have cut him to the quick, in the event—still undocumented—that he would have tried to copy Negrín’s plans to use the fleet to save the republican military.

Explaining the Francoist Legend

One point remains to be clarified. There is no longer the slightest doubt that when Casado wrote his first book he was fully aware that his actions had not only failed to avoid casualties but had also led to the massacre of the political, military, and trade union cadres whose only hope of escaping the victors was by sea. Neither was Casado unaware that he had delivered many of his comrades to the executioner, although in his own case Franco had allowed him to leave Spain.

Casado reflected his thoughts in letters that have recently come to light. The one that stands out is addressed to Franco and was transmitted through the Duke of Alba, the ambassador to London. It read:

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70 Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica/Archivo General de la Guerra Civil, Salamanca: PS-Madrid, 2015.
Your Excellency:

It is with deep sadness that I learn of the execution of the heroic General Escobar. It is possible that he has been shot for the crime of military insurrection against the nationalist movement, but nobody will be able to assert that he betrayed his fatherland. General Escobar served the Republic loyally because he was a republican, because he had promised to and because he was defending a cause that nobody could claim was illegal. General Escobar was one of the good Spaniards who, far from encouraging ambitious communists and libertinage, risked his life to stop them.

He followed my orders in the final days of our brutal war and I can absolutely assert that he never deviated from thinking without hyper-patriotism of Spain’s salvation. A faultless gentleman, intensely Spanish, who prevented many acts of violence by paying the price with his own, generously spilled blood. He saved the lives of thousands of Spaniards, many of them spiritually related to the nationalist movement.

The Nationalist Government knew all this. And yet the overflow of passion and an unprecedented rage has made it possible to extinguish the life of one of the few Quixotes remaining in Spain.

*General Escobar was a symbol of all the good Spaniards who, keeping their hands clean of blood and their heart full of love for Spain, have been sacrificed on the altar of an illusion, and Your Excellency broke the word given in the peace concessions.*

Without passion that might blind my understanding, and without rancour that might poison my heart, but with my spirit calm and my conscience clean I say to you for the good of Spain: put a stop to such outrages because if they continue Spain will not find the man capable of making it possible for Spaniards to live together in a coexistence urgently needed for the physical and spiritual reconstruction of our unfortunate country. In other words, Spain will founder and for this you alone will be the one responsible.

London, 9 March 1940.

71 Colonel Antonio Escobar was one of the key players of the Guardia Civil who smashed the military uprising in Barcelona on 19 July 1936. On 28 June 1937 he was promoted to Commanding General of the National Republican Guard. On 23 October 1938 he became commander of the Extremadura Army. At the end of the war he was taken prisoner and demoted to colonel. In December 1939 he appeared before a court martial which sentenced him to death, a foregone conclusion. He was executed on 8 February 1940; see Antonio Nuñez Calvo, ‘Antonio Escobar Huerta’, in *25 Militares de la República*, coord. García Fernández, 323–53.

72 AMAV, FCP, Box 1125, File 5. This document is obviously a draft. The original was probably sent but whether Alba forwarded the letter to Franco cannot be ascertained. The letters of Casado to Alba and Franco are reproduced here in facsimile (see pp. 321–23). The italics above are mine.
The paragraph in italics shows that Casado had reached the conclusion that Franco had duped him. Of course he must have realized it long before March 1940, but it seems obvious that in 1939 he had believed what the victor had told him through the fifth column. Casado was blinded by his obsession with the possibility of a surrender *dans l’honneur* between professionals. His hatred of communists, and his delight in being able to hand them over to Franco as scapegoats, as Helen Graham has put it,73 did the rest. Naturally, he did not accept any responsibility for what happened. All he did was to cover his tracks. Who wants to go down in history as a traitor?

And Franco? It suited him very well that Casado’s coup and the Navy’s simultaneous double betrayal of both Negrín’s Government and Casado made the republican resistance crumble and deprived the socialists, communists, anarchists, liberals, freemasons, and the rest (all the ‘anti-Spain’ he wanted to destroy) of the possibility of fleeing *en masse*.

The end of the war did not bring peace but victory. This was confirmed by an order of the military government of Huelva to the Civil Guard post commanders on 23 June 1939: ‘although the war is over, the campaign goes on’.74 It went on for many more years—years of assassinations, of massive incarcerations and of political, civic, economic, social and moral repression. All this had to be carefully hidden. It is perhaps not surprising that Colonel Silvela Milans del Bosch (completely unknown in the world of historical writing) should, today, make Casado’s self-exculpation his own:

> He could not allow Negrín to turn Spain into a satellite of the USSR. The prolongation of the war in a futile attempt to link it with the anticipated world conflict also seemed atrocious to him. He was convinced that all resistance was pointless and felt himself obliged to avoid more bloodshed […] Among the majority of historians the idea has finally prevailed that Casado should be given credit for his realism and humanitarian feelings.75

Well, not quite. In fact the contrary would be more exact. History should not always be written by the victors.76

**Conclusion**

The defeat of the Spanish Republic was a multi-faceted process. As a major historical event, a number of social, political, economic, military and

75 José María Silvela Milans del Bosch, ‘Casado López, Segismundo’, *Diccionario biográfico español*, 50 vols (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 2010), XII, 82–86.
76 No congratulations are due to the Real Academia de la Historia for sponsoring this kind of right-wing and neo-Francoist interpretation.
psychological forces combined to produce that outcome. However, Casado, Besteiro, and Mera were the major protagonists alongside those sectors among the socialists, left republicans and anarchists which coalesced behind the National Defence Council. All of them, without exception, rendered a pitiful service to the Republic. We shall never know whether Negrín’s plans for a staged withdrawal of the military, political and trade union cadres of the embattled and isolated Republic might have come to fruition. Nor can we speculate about whether the continued armed resistance would have crumbled, and how soon, in the face of a determined Francoist offensive. These theoretical possibilities were never put to the test. What is clear is that neither Casado nor the CND were ever in a position to negotiate anything with Franco. All the naïve, hyper-nationalistic and hysterical anti-communist rhetoric which filled the radio waves and the newspapers coming out of Madrid for three weeks after Casado’s coup was meant to disguise this stark fact. However, the historian must explain what happened, and why, on the basis of the best relevant primary evidence of the time.

This evidence shows that Casado and his co-conspirators cannot be exonerated from responsibility for their contribution to opening the doors to the most savage repression in contemporary Spanish history. On the other hand, it also shows how well and meticulously Franco played his last card. His plan was to ensure that his political-military strategy to end the war delivered into his hands the broad mass of modern-thinking and left-wing Spaniards. This outcome set back the democratization and modernization process of Spain by more than thirty years. No wonder Casado’s coup has lent itself to legend-building, disinformation, and today’s political struggle.

Casado is not a particularly interesting figure in his own right. Before the coup he was not in the first rank of the republican Army, although some of his biographers have claimed otherwise. Nevertheless, he had his brief moment of historical ‘glory’ before vanishing into obscurity, and his books have certainly influenced history writing. Few authors, however, have endeavoured to bring him to the court of history. This perhaps says more about historians than about Casado himself.
Londres, 9 Marzo 1940.

Excmo. Sr. Duque de Alba.
Ambassador de España en Londres.

Muy Sr. mio:

Como no es posible hacer llegar por correo directo a su destinatario, el escrito que se adjunta, recurro a V.E., por si juzga procedente darle curso.

No se trata de una habilidad política, ni menos aun de una impropiedad de mal gusto. Pretendo rendir homenaje a la memoria del heroico General Escobar, y de aquellos otros que, sirviendo a la República con lealtad absoluta, tuvieron la gallardía de ayudar a impedir que la ola comunista aniquilara a todos aquellos que no consilgaban con su idea.

Creo sinceramente que V.E. prestara un relevante servicio dando curso al adjunto escrito, que está inspirado en mi amor a España.

Muy atentamente

Letter from Casado to the Duque de Alba. Reproduced by permission of the Ministerio de Defensa de España.
EXCELENCIA!

Con honda amargura me entero del fusilamiento del heroico General Escobar. Es posible que haya sido fusilado por el delito de rebeldía militar al movimiento nacionalista, pero nadie podrá afirmar que traicionó a su Patria. El General Escobar sirvió con lealtad a la República, porque era republicano, porque lo había prometido, y porque defendía una causa que nadie podrá mantener que fuera ilegal. El General Escobar fue uno de los buenos españoles, que lejos de alentar las audacias comunistas y el libertinaje, arriesgó su vida para impedirlo.

Sirvió a mis órdenes en los últimos días de nuestra guerra salvaje, y mantenía con absoluta solvencia que siempre se mantuvo con la mirada en alto, pensando: sin patrioterismo en la salvación de España. Caballero sin tacha, recientemente español, evitó muchos actos de violencia, con el tributo de su sangre, generosamente derramada. Salvo la vida de muchos miles de españoles, muchos de ellos incorporados espiritualmente al movimiento nacionalista.

Sabía el Nacionalista lo que el Gobierno español. Sin embargo, el desbordamiento de la pasión ha hecho posible que se quite la vida a unos de los pocos Quijotes que quedan en España.
El General Escobar simboliza a la totalidad de los buenos españoles, que teniendo sus manos limpias de sangre, y su corazón lleno de amor a España, han sido inmolados en el altar de una quimera, faltando a la palabra dada en las concesiones de paz.

Sin pasión que ciegue mi entendimiento, sin rencor que envenene mi corazón, sino sermones, os digo, que para bien de España, pongais coto a tanto desman, pues de seguir así, España no encontrará el hombre capaz de hacer posible la convivencia entre españoles, convivencia de necesidad urgente, para que pueda realizarse la reconstrucción material y espiritual que España necesita. De otro modo, España se hundirá y de ello volverán serios los responsables, únicos responsables.

Londres, 9 de Marzo de 1940.

S. E. el Jefe del Estado Español.