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Chapter 3:

The First Carlist War (1833-40), insurgency, Ramón Cabrera, and expeditionary warfare

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For all the diverse historiography concerning the reactionary current of the 1830s known as Carlism, the military historiography has been perhaps the least innovative. Military history has been generally out of fashion in Spanish universities, owing both to the ascendancy of social and cultural approaches and to Spain's unseemly and comparatively recent burden of militarism. This oversight would seem surprising. Carlism managed to mobilise regional armed support more successfully than the Cristino regime it fought, even though that regime increasingly claimed to represent the 'people' as it liberalised its institutions in the revolutions of 1835 and 1836. Certainly, the First Carlist War (1833-40) abounds in the Spanish historiography more broadly. For a century the war was presented in partisan terms, as traditionalists and liberals produced very learned if also tendentious histories. In the forbidding atmosphere after the Spanish Civil War, nineteenth-century history riled a Francoist dictatorship bent on viewing all Spanish history since 1812 in apocalyptic terms. Historians critical of nineteenth-century liberalism gained official blessing, especially the 'Pamplona school' of Jesuit historians who defended the 'renovating' power of the old order against the 'innovations' enforced by liberals who were supposedly besotted with 'Frenchified' ideals. Some of these historians were sympathetic to the most extreme form of the old order, Carlism.¹ These historians were countered by Marxian historians, many of whom were in exile, while others got by in Spain, who condemned the old order which spawned the Carlist insurgency while also explaining the shortcomings of Spain's 'bourgeois revolution'. Over the past forty years Spanish historiography has diversified as the old ideological straitjackets have mostly been discarded and new avenues of cultural, regional and social history opened up. But both Carlism and the First Carlist War in particular have never been the most popular subjects for contemporary Spanish historians, and hardly at all for foreign historians.

The First Carlist War historiography may be divided into five categories. The first comprised nineteenth-century dynastic and classical diplomatic, biographical and military histories, led by the historian, Antonio Pírala y Criado. The second comprised the panegyrics from Franco-era traditionalists who depicted Carlism as an organic

¹ E.g. Bullón de Mendoza, *Primera Guerra carlista* (Madrid, 1992).

Christian good resisting the onslaught of godless and ‘Frenchified’ Spanish liberalism. The First Carlist War was but one protracted episode in the wider war between Christianity and the Anti-Spain that was joined in 1808 and won by the crusaders only in 1939. The most impressive work in this vein was the 30-volume history of traditionalism edited by Melchor Ferrer from the 1940s, which was meant to be the Carlist answer to the Liberal Pirala, but which in fact lacked the latter’s balance and command of primary sources. The third category comprised the ‘Navarra School’ of Pamplona-based neo-traditionalists, led by Federico Suárez Verdeguer. These scholars sustained a far more sophisticated right-wing analysis based on modern empirical research.² Their contention that Spain remained royalist, or apolitical, throughout this period rendered Liberalism an artificial and arrogant innovation. As the best neo-traditionalist scholar of the First Carlist War, Alfonso Bullón de Mendoza, put it, the Cristino Liberals were waging war against their own people.³

The neo-traditionalists were challenged from their own ranks by a ‘heresy’ of neo-Carlists writing from the 1970s who reinterpreted the nineteenth-century Carlist struggles as ‘objectively revolutionary’, and from the non-Carlist left by liberal and Marxist historians. Both the ‘heretics’ and the ideologues were interested in the socio-economic drivers of counter-revolution, and much less in its military aspects. To a large degree this focus was justified by the complexity of 1830s Carlism. There were three major ‘focos’ of armed Carlism, most of Navarra and the upland Basque provinces, the Aragón-Valencia uplands centred on the Maestrazgo, and the smallest zone, the Catalan far west. The motives for armed counterrevolution have been shown to be complex, certainly more complex than the victorious Liberals allowed. A Barcelona newspaper in 1840 reflected on the recently extinguished civil war, attributing Basque Carlism to the defence of ‘liberties’ (especially the autonomous ‘fueros’), Catalan Carlism to ‘religious fanaticism’, and Aragonese Carlism to ‘banditry’.⁴ In reality the motivations for Basque Carlism were at least threefold: a foralist wing driven by defence of the region’s historical autonomy, a dynastic wing driven by ‘Castilian’ refugees from Cristino-held Spain, and an intransigent ultramontane wing with adherents from within the Carlist Basque country and from beyond. Catalan Carlism was driven in part by religiosity but also by economic decline in the interior where the insurgency would take hold, and socio-economic motives also pertained in the Aragón-Valencia insurgency. What united all insurgent regions was a popular tradition of armed insurrection, as witnessed in regional particularities in militia service which had been heavily bloodied

² Mark Lawrence, *Nineteenth-century Spain: a New History* (London: Routledge, 2019), p. 64.

³ Bullón de Mendoza, *Primera Guerra carlista* (Madrid, 1992), p. 685.

⁴ Núria Sauch Cruz, ‘Un retrat del general carlista Ramon Cabrera’, in Daniel Montaña i Josep Rafart (eds.), *El carlisme ahir i avui* (I Simposi d’Història del Carlisme, 11 de maig de 2013), p. 102.

in the national and civil wars of 1808-14, 1821-23 and 1827. This article examines how the regionalised Carlist war effort was ultimately incapable of defeating the larger and symmetrical forces available to the Cristino regime which also benefited from significant foreign support. Using British and Spanish archives, war memoirs, and secondary sources, including political science civil war theory, this article shows how the greater recourse to violence exercised by insurgents raiding beyond the Carlist regions alienated civilians support and hastened their strategic defeat.

The growing insurgency

For the first year of hostilities in October 1833 witnessed the rise of the Carlist military genius, Tomás de Zumalacárregui, who used guerrilla tactics to carve out an expanding territorial control stretching from upland Navarra gradually into the neighbouring Basque provinces proper (Guipúzcoa, Vizcaya, Álava). The Cristino counter-insurgency efforts over 1834 progressed from policing measures (such as confiscating arms and horses) to raids and blockhouses.⁵ But in a series of defensive victories by the summer of 1835 Zumalacárregui expanded Carlist control over virtually all of upland Navarra and the Basque provinces minus the Cristino provincial capitals. Despite Zumalacárregui's death during the failed Carlist siege of Bilbao in June 1835, the Carlist military genius had bequeathed the insurrection a regular 'Royal Army' of about 35,000 men, supported by a significant local arms industry, irregular supplies from sympathisers breaching the French border and the Anglo-Cristino naval blockade, and conscription. By summer 1835 Spain's civil war had become a major feature of European diplomacy as Madrid secured indirect military support from France, Britain and Portugal (the recruitment of auxiliaries in those countries for service in the Cristino army and a naval blockade of coastlines close to the Carlist insurrection). The Carlists got fewer military volunteers from such anti-liberal powers as Prussia, Austria and the Italian states, but they never lost hope that Chancellor Metternich or the Holy See might defy the Atlantic powers by recognising the Carlists.

Carlist military successes fuelled the revolutionary crisis affecting Cristino Spain between 1835-37. Desertion became rife as government army logistics broke down while the Carlists took as much as they pleased, and military commanders always had one eye on the revolutionary threat posed by the National Militia, the liberals' paramilitary force which controlled urban spaces and pressed demands for political reform. The war by 1836 produced a subsistence crisis in government-held areas adjoining insurgent zones of control. In April 1836 a Cortes deputy from embattled

⁵ A.H.N., Estado, 8755: En territorio navarro, docs. 36 and 111: 14 April 1834 and 4 August 1834 letters from Viceroy of Navarra to comandante militar de armas de Puente de Reina.

Navarra, angered by the revolutionary rhetoric of Madrid, said “the best law is worse than useless if it distracts attention from the wants of a starving population overrun by a bloody and remorseless enemy”.⁶ The subsistence crisis was compounded by poor harvests which by 1837 had grown so severe that insurgents were even seizing oxen for food.⁷ Populations in conflict zones were frequently ‘reconcentrated’ to fortified centres, obliterating the subsistence base of one area and burdening the next. By March 1836 Carlist activities in Lérida province had driven some 4,000 families from their homes to fortified centres. Cortes deputy, Castells, complained how “300 villages have not eaten bread for three months”, and that the July harvest would be exposed to Carlist depredations.⁸

Cabrera and the insurgency in Valencia-Aragón

By 1836 the worst of the subsistence crisis was affecting eastern Spain. Unlike in the case of the River Ebro and the insurgent Basque provinces, clear areas of territorial control had not been established in the east, and the war continued to have a brutal character distinguished by raids and reprisals against both combatants and civilians. The Carlist zone in Aragón-Valencia was centred on the Carlist ‘capital’ of Morella (Valencia). It was intimately connected to the person of Ramón Cabrera, from 1835 commander-in-chief of Carlist forces in this zone, and second in Carlist legend only to the great Tomás de Zumalacárregui in terms of military prowess. Socio-economic motivations for supporting the Carlist revolt in Aragón-Valencia included defence of the use-ownership rights of peasants who enjoyed a *de facto* if not *de jure* ownership of the lands they farmed in a ‘common law’ arrangement which was threatened by the liberal property revolution’s drive towards contracts and cash transactions.⁹ Added to this was an active banditry tradition enabled by a culture of horsemanship and rugged terrain, as well as the enticement offered by the wealthy Valencian *huerta*. Rahden contrasted the sturdy religiosity of the Maestrazgo Carlists with the ‘volatility’ of the Cristino coastal plain.¹⁰ Whereas only 1.05% of the city of Valencia’s population became Carlist militants, and 2.2% in the Valencia countryside, in Teruel province (Maestrazgo), the figure was 4.6%.¹¹

⁶ T.N.A., FO/72/458, Doc. 92: 17 April 1836 letter from Villiers to Lord Palmerston.

⁷ Miraflores, *Memorias del reinado de Isabel II*.

⁸ T.N.A., FO/72/458, Doc. 92: 17 April letter from Villiers to Lord Palmerston.

⁹ Carlos Marichal, *Spain (1834-1844): A New Society* (London, 1977), pp. 118-123. Marichal suggests that the hostility of the peasantry in the Maestrazgo towards change was the main cause of popular Carlism here. Such contemporary liberals as Evaristo San Miguel, on the other hand, thought that “agricultural improvements” in this bleak, sparsely-populated, zone, could win over the population to liberalism (Pedro Rújula (ed.), *Historia de la guerra última en Aragón y Valencia (escrita por F. Cabello, F. Santa Cruz y R. M. Temprado)* (Zaragoza, 2006), LXXXVI-LXXXIX).

¹⁰ Rahden, *Cabrera*, p. 118.

¹¹ Antonio Caridad Salvador, ‘Los carlistas de Valencia. La reacción en una ciudad liberal (1833-40), *BROCAR*, 36 (2012), 161-183, pp. 181-182.

Ramón Cabrera showed genius for maximising a limited economic base for the needs of his war effort. Like his comrades in the larger zone of Basque-Navarra Carlism he had the advantage of internal lines. The powerful British ambassador, George Villiers, commented on the Carlists' use of intelligence, including spy networks and flash telegrams, to offset their numerical disadvantage. The Cristinos, according to Villiers, 'are facing a harder task than even the French occupation forces twenty-five years earlier'.¹² The Cristino press compared Cabrera's organisational genius to that of Abd el-Kader, the emir proclaimed sultan of Algeria in 1832 waging defensive war against the French conquest.¹³ Cabrera's forces fortified villages in the Maestrazgo, and turned the invariably wealthy homes of cowed, killed or fled liberals into barracks, stores or blockhouses. Rahden remarked on the 'cemetery-like' appearance of the Maestrazgo villages, including a complete absence of windows and chimneys. Upon the poor roads connecting Carlist villages depended the entire Carlist logistical efforts. In front-line areas Carlists used hillpaths driving precarious mule-trains in dangerous single file while the valley-bound Cristinos passed below.¹⁴

Cabrera's efforts were often discredited by the Cristino government which continued to associate the Aragón-Valencia Carlism with banditry. Certainly the proximity of the bandit-friendly Maestrazgo to the wealthy citrus groves of the Valencian *huerta* offered huge scope for wrongdoing, not least because the *huerta* itself was worked by labourers who traditionally suffered some of the worst feudal conditions in Spain and thus had little incentive to defend landowners' property. A month after the war ended in 1840 the Barcelona press lamented the failure of Cristino militia detachments to protect the *huerta* from Carlist raids. Whereas villages loyal to Madrid faced constant depredations, villages in the Carlist Maestrazgo flourished, witnessing unprecedented flows of cash in its villages. At the centre of these ill-gotten gains was Cabrera's capital of Morella, flowing with cash and chattels to pay soldiers and protect the civilian economy.¹⁵ Cabrera's punishment system relied heavily on pillage. Loyal villages were protected and rewarded for steadfast defence, whereas hostile villages faced attacks and depredations, compounding the logic driving violence in supporting Cabrera's cause.¹⁶ The primitive war effort in the Maestrazgo was bolstered by another 'logical' result of violence, the enlistment of Cristino prisoners of war who, according to Rahden 'always

¹² T.N.A., FO 72/459, Doc. 149: 18 June 1836 letter from Villiers to Lord Palmerston.

¹³ Núria Sauch Cruz, 'Un retrat del general carlista Ramon Cabrera', in Daniel Montaña i Josep Rafart (eds.), *El carlisme ahir i avui* (I Simposi d'Història del Carlisme, 11 de maig de 2013), p. 100.

¹⁴ Rahden, *Cabrera*, pp. 77-90.

¹⁵ *Diario de Barcelona*, 12 August 1840.

¹⁶ Núria Sauch Cruz, 'Un retrat del general carlista Ramon Cabrera', in Daniel Montaña i Josep Rafart (eds.), *El carlisme ahir i avui* (I Simposi d'Història del Carlisme, 11 de maig de 2013), p. 101.

abounded in our depots' and who needed little persuasion given that that they could lawfully be executed at any time, as the quarter offered by the 'Eliot Treaty' did not apply to the east. During 1838 a Carlist siege train was constructed by prisoners of war.¹⁷ Territorial control was maintained by arming farmers to protect 'roads' linking Morella to Cantavieja, and to Teruel and Daroca, confining Cristino security to the environs of the provincial capitals of Valencia and Zaragoza. Closer to Cabrera's capital of Morella permanent fortresses became a more common way of protecting territory and communications in interlocking patterns dominating vantage points and maximising the defensive firepower of artillery. The more remote hilltop areas were secured by guerrilla patrols which often engaged with Cristino raiding parties.¹⁸ Mutually reinforcing insurgent fortifications and flying patrols made it impossible, according to a German Carlist volunteer, for the Cristino forces to take either Cantavieja or Morella on their own: both needed to be taken simultaneously.¹⁹ Cristino Captain-General San Miguel's success at storming Cantavieja at the end of October 1836 occurred only due to the diversion of insurgent troops employed in the Gómez Expedition.

Even though Cabrera's system of territorial control was remarkable, anti-Carlist commentators ridiculed the 'banditry' of Cabrera's Carlists. George Villiers in 1835 commented upon Cabrera's '4,000 vagabonds armed with pikes, sticks and knives ... led by officers whose only care is to plunder and desolate the countryside'.²⁰ Cabrera himself came to personify the barbarism associated with Carlism, as the Cristino press dubbed him the 'Tiger of the Maestrazgo', an adage that stuck. Villiers wrote that Cabrera came from the 'dregs of the people', but also warned that the infamous execution of his mother, a high-profile victim of the 'law of hostages' operated by both sides, 'placed the Cristino executioners on his level'.²¹ Much of the brutality in the eastern zone was caused by the absence of any covenant safeguarding the lives of captured prisoners. The Basque-Navarra zone of operations from April 1835 was covered by the 'Eliot Treaty', named after the emissary of the Duke of Wellington who brokered a deal in which both sides agreed to respect the lives of enemy soldiers captured in the northern zone to receive quarter and imprisonment in depots from where they would be exchanged at regularly agreed intervals. No such covenant covered Cabrera's zone. Moreover guerrillas, militiamen and foreign auxiliaries were excluded from the Treaty's provisions even in the north. Casa-Eguía, Cabrera's chief minister in the east, was unbending in his response to the Cristino Commander-in-Chief's

¹⁷ Rahden, *Cabrera*, p. 81.

¹⁸ Rahden, *Cabrera*, pp. 110-117.

¹⁹ Rahden, *Cabrera*, pp. 66-68.

²⁰ Mark Lawrence, *Spanish Civil Wars*, p. 66.

²¹ T.N.A., FO72/458, Doc. 51, 7 March 1836 letter from Villiers to Lord Palmerston.

complaint at the egregious killing of captured foreign auxiliaries: “If they did not come, they would not meet it. The remedy is in their hands, but they wish for it, and are doubtless excited thereto by they receive and have enlisted themselves as adventurers and mercenaries”.²²

Cabrera’s ruthlessness was matched by audacious military strategies which exploited the insurgent advantages of interior lines and initiative. Carlist Prussian volunteer, Wilhem von Rahden, identified two typical Cabrera strategies: 1) to attack enemy forces as quickly as possible in order to wrong-foot their usually superior numerical superiority, and 2) to entice enemy forces by apparently offering an exposed flank (a tactic known in Spanish as the ‘llamada’).²³ Cabrera executed this strategy using tactics which seemed to hail from a bygone era of warfare. Such tactics as driving herds of cattle to leave false footprints to shake off pursuing enemy troops, or ordering caracole cavalry charges against Cristino infantry in order to cover a retreat across a river, supported the strategy of deflecting superior enemy numbers.²⁴ For their part, the government’s National Militia adapted its regulations in order to meet the challenge of multiple Carlist threats. The legal exclusivity was entrenched early in 1837, when National Militia members were given their own prisons, exemptions from billeting soldiers, and the power to designate a fortified safe-house in each village in the event of invasion by insurgents.²⁵ The spatial aggression of the Carlist insurgents thus forced the nominally superior government forces onto the defensive. Carlist tactics served to win numerous engagements with usually larger Crisitno forces and to expand Carlist control over the Maestrazgo. By 1837 Cabrera’s success had become prominent enough for the king to include Cabrera’s forces in his calculations to win the war via a march on Madrid, known as the ‘Royal Expedition’.

Limits of territorial control

As in several other civil wars involving an insurgent side, the Carlist methods of controlling civilian populations ranged from ‘hearts and minds’ to indiscriminate violence. As Stathis Kalyvas has explained, insurgent violence arises in inverse proportion to their territorial control. Kalyvas identifies five types of territorial control, ranging from areas entirely controlled by the incumbent side, to areas entirely insurgency, with three progressive types in between, including, significantly for this

²² T.N.A., FO/72/459, Doc. 107: 2 May 1836 letter from Villiers to Lord Palmerston.

²³ Pedro Rújula (ed.), *Cabrera*, pp. 143-44.

²⁴ Pedro Rújula (ed.), *Cabrera*, p. 39.

²⁵ Bullón de Mendoza, *Primera guerra carlista*, pp. 204-206.

study of raiding into ‘neutral’ areas, the third type of fully contested territory where neither side seemed to have the upper hand.²⁶ Fully contested areas, or areas mostly or entirely controlled by the Madrid government, were more likely to be subjected to indiscriminate Carlist violence. In these areas civilians and especially their paramilitary National Militia proxies were identified as a collective enemy because of their geographical location and political affiliation. By contrast, areas fully under Carlist control, like large areas surrounding rural Navarra, and to a lesser extent areas mostly under Carlist control, such as the fortified villages between Cantavieja and Morella (Aragón), were subjected to a range of political and religious forms of propaganda designed to shore up support, maximise military resources, and minimise defection. Carlist violence in these areas tended to be selective, akin to law enforcement.

The Royal Expedition

In May 1837, in response to revolutionary crisis and diplomatic feelers to the Queen-Regent about a compromise peace, the Carlists launched the ‘Royal Expedition’. This large-scale raid towards Madrid also served the logistical problem of Carlist Spain’s embattled redoubts in the Basque country and Maestrazgo. Both the Carlist Basque country and Maestrazgo were straining under the demands of the war economy and militarisation. Hence the paradox of the strategic need to revert to the raiding and insurgency styles of warfare that characterised the first 18 months of Zumalacárregui’s command.

The difference during the ‘deep war’ of 1835-37 is that the raids would be long-range and strategic in aims. The earliest raid launched in 1835 from the Basque country into Catalonia had been predicated on meeting substantial indifference or defection from the government forces. The Carlist court had calculated that some 3,000 out of the 15,000 enemy militia garrisoning Catalonia were royalists forced to take up arms, and a further 5,000 indifferent, leaving 7,000 ‘fierce liberals and murderers’.²⁷ The 1836 Carlist Gómez Expedition had successfully traversed Spain and fascinated the world. Galicia in north-western Spain had been the strategic aim of this raid witnessed localised insurgencies which the Carlist leadership could never fully exploit owing to fragmentary support from Portuguese legitimists (*miguelistas*) across the border and

²⁶ For a conceptual explanation of the Kalyvas thesis, see Stathis Kalyvas, *Logic of Violence in Civil Wars* (2006); Kalyvas, ‘Micro-Level Studies of Violence in Civil War: Refining and Extending the Control-Collaboration Model’, *Terrorism and Political Violence* (Sep/Oct. 2012), Vol. 24, Issue 4, pp. 658-668.

²⁷ Bullón de Mendoza, *Primera guerra carlista*, p. 213.

government interceptions of privately-contracted arms supplies by sea.²⁸ But General Espartero, Commander-in-Chief of the government Army of the North, pursued the Expedition across the north, preventing Gómez from consolidating the insurgency in Galicia. The Carlist raiders were deflected southwards, where Gómez met lighter resistance and where he managed a series of temporary occupations urban centres, including provincial capitals and Mediterranean ports, embarrassing the Cristino regime and poisoning the revolution in its liberal politics.²⁹ But, strategically, the Gómez Expedition achieved very little. Even though the raiders returned to the Basque country intact, having dazzled the rest of Europe, they had achieved no strategic breakthrough. The Basque country remained blockaded, and the Cristino Army of the Centre had made gains against the denuded Carlist forces in Aragón.³⁰ Cabrera was ordered back from the Expedition with a token guard and an assumed name ('Llorens'). But despite a number of tactical successes in minor battles en route, his arrival was too late to save Cantavieja.³¹

In May 1837 a new raid was planned, this time with greater strategic aims as betrayed in its 'Royal' title (the Royal Expedition). Don Carlos's advisers were acutely aware of the blockaded facing the Basque country. In March 1837 mutinies over pay affected the Carlist Royal Army, and the king was told that the Basque country could sustain only 15 days' more operations.³² Other calculations were diplomatic: feelers between agents of the Cristino government and the Queen-Regent's native Naples had concluded that Marí a Cristina was willing to strike a peace involving her exile and her daughter's future marriage to a Carlist prince. Metternich's Europe pledged no more financial support for the Carlists unless they established themselves beyond the River Ebro, and King Louis-Philippe of France hinted that he might liberate France from the pro-Cristino 'Quadruple Alliance' if Don Carlos could clear the French frontier of Cristino control. Europe's conservative powers riled at Liberal Spain's proclamation in the summer of 1836 of the revolutionary Constitution of 1812, and proved more willing to challenge Anglo-French supremacy in Spain. Thus when the Royal Expedition was launched from the Carlist capital of Estella on 15 May 1837, it looked in some ways more like a regime in waiting than an invasion. It had no artillery arm until it reached the stores at Cantavieja (Aragón), and was overburdened by Carlist bureaucrats and their dependents who were already sizing up the furnishings they were expecting in Madrid.

²⁸ Alfredo Comesaña Paz, 'Armas inglesas para don Carlos: el incidente de la *Express Packet*', *Hispania*, 2018, vol. LXXVIII, n.º. 260, septiembre-diciembre, págs. 731-758.

²⁹ Bullón de Mendoza, *Expedición de Gómez* (1984).

³⁰ Rahden, *Cabrera*, p. 46.

³¹ Piralá, *Guerra Civil*, III, pp. 284-289.

³² Mark Lawrence, *Spain's First Carlist War*, p. 167.

The debilitation of the Cristino army, caused by a year of liberal revolutions and mutinies, could not disabuse the Carlists of their notions. The Carlists also had a moral firepower to compensate for artillery: religion. Two years of legislative and violent anti-clericalism in Cristino Spain had plunged ordinations to the priesthood, alienated monastic properties, and disturbed the religious practice surrounding parish priests (who, for example, were barred from practising if they did not swear allegiance to the queen). The Carlist press had trailed stories of abandoned parishes in the wake of the schism with Rome, the powerlessness of the bishops, the expulsion or imprisonment of priests by Cristino soldiers and militia, and, above all, the *mendizabalista* disentanglement: indeed some 400 parishes closed due to lack of ministers during the first half of 1836 alone.³³

Despite the mobilisation of some 12,000 National Militia from Huesca and Zaragoza, and the pursuit of General Espartero's Army of the North, the first Expedition victory went to the Carlists. At the battle of Huesca on 24 May 1837, some one thousand Cristino soldiers and militia were either killed or captured as the Carlist invaders turned difficult terrain and a swollen river to their advantage. The Cristino political community evacuated Huesca ahead of the insurgents' occupation, leaving the bishop (who had protested his 'ill health') behind. Perhaps the religious strategy was working. Don Carlos remained for three days in the city before moving on to take Barbastro, which surrendered without a shot being fired. En route the hungry Carlists resorted to routine excesses against villages. Don Carlos again heard Mass in this ancient city's cathedral whilst the Cristinos tried to regroup. General Oráa, respected by the Carlists as the 'grey fox', rushed forward with 12,400 infantry, 1,400 cavalry and artillery towards the Carlist forces which were now fortifying Barbastro. The Carlists during this battle on 2 June 1837 were in roughly equal numbers to the Cristinos, though vastly inferior in artillery. But despite this disadvantage, the Carlists proved to be expert in active defence, defeating the Cristinos advance in detail by again using the geographical contours of the river bank to their advantage. The Carlist victory was marked by a 'civil war within a civil war', as the Carlists' 'foreign legion' (some 850 defectors from the foreign auxiliaries) exchanged fire with their former comrades, and the killing zone echoed with cries in French and German.³⁴

Violence beyond the insurgent community

³³ *Gaceta Oficial*, 9 August 1836.

³⁴ Lawrence, *Nineteenth-century Spain*, p. 81; Felix Lichnowsky, *Erinnerungen aus den Jahren 1837, 1838 und 1839* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1841), Vol. I, p. 137.

The Carlists' onward march into Catalonia was conditioned more by environmental than military factors. As the Carlists were always a battlefield state, exposed at any moment to Federal incursions, the fluidity of territorial control dictated options for repression and control. Where Carlists expected to remain largely in control, as one of the two of the five zone models described by Stathis Kalyvas, the Carlists were incentivised to behave as 'stationary' insurgents, moderating their military and logistical demands as much as possible in order to shore up popular collaboration and the intelligence networks this offered. The short-term costs for 'stationary' insurgency in terms of forgoing pillage were high, yet the long-term benefits promised to be substantial. By contrast, areas beyond Carlist political control which offered only temporary occupation at best, were more likely to be used for short-term benefit, namely by pillage and intimidatory killings, prioritising the short-term gains over long-term costs. In these areas, Carlists were indeed 'bandits' for they were targeting individuals either explicitly beyond the insurgent political community (in the case of volunteer army officers and National Militia more than the case of conscripts) or implicitly by being civilians under Cristino control.³⁵ The Madrid government often exercised the same implicit calculations in their strategy. When General Espartero's forces occupied the key Basque coastal town of Guetaria, he believed the inhabitants could be won to the Cristino political community, and accordingly ordered draconian executions of some of his scouts who had been found guilty of brutalising civilians and their religion.³⁶ But the Carlist mountain fastnesses of Catalonia and Aragón seemed resolutely outside the Cristino community, and government actions reflected this. Deforestation edicts in the Catalan far west aimed to rob the insurgents of natural cover and also equated the savagery of the landscape with that of the insurgents.³⁷ The Prussian volunteer for Carlism, August von Goeben, recalled how Cristino counter-insurgents behaved with more brutality the further into enemy territory they reached, solidifying victims' support for the insurgency in the medium and long term: '(Cristino) troops used terror; all inhabitants, it was said, were Carlists and had to be destroyed, plundered, violated, and their homes burnt down. Several hundred, left with nothing,

³⁵ For a conceptual analysis of the short-term versus long-term 'investment' made by insurgents, see Megan A. Stewart and Yu-Ming Liou, 'Do Good Borders Make Good Rebels? Territorial Control and Civilian Casualties', *Journal of Politics*, Jan. 2017, Vol. 79, Issue 1, pp. 284-301.

³⁶ *Eco del Comercio*, 2 January 1836.

³⁷ Mark Lawrence, *Spain's First Carlist War*, p. 125.

later joined the Carlists'.³⁸ But the insurgent Carlist side, unlike the incumbent nominally in control of most territory, had to make these calculations on a daily basis.

Particular tragedies, like the loss of 300 men drowned crossing the swollen Cinca, mixed with the general war for food. Wilhelm von Rahden's fond memory of Don Carlos subsisting on a pan of fried potatoes per day obscures the calamity facing villagers in the invaders' path.³⁹ Meanwhile, the entourage of favourites, place-seekers, priests, wives and other dependants gave a desperate – and hungry – quality to the insurgents' political community which was only partly obscured by the ostentatious thanksgiving and Masses held in 'liberated' villages in their path.⁴⁰ One ironic feature of religious liberation was the tendency for insurgents to deface churches by fortifying them as strongpoints and smelting their bells to forge artillery.⁴¹ The illusions of a receptive political community were frequently burst when villagers tried to conceal foodstuffs from their 'liberators' and exposed themselves to outright pillage.⁴² Other inhabitants staved off the worst by ostentatiously welcoming the expedition, in reality to keep the Carlists as much at arms' length as possible. A visiting Polish aristocrat reported how villages were so exhausted by marches and countermarches that they kept a secret dual regime for appearances' sake. The approach of Cristino troops would be greeted by the local constitutional authorities, whereas the approach of Carlist insurgents would be greeted by a priest released from hiding for this purpose.⁴³

Proximity and clerical militancy made the Catalan far west the first destination for the expedition. But northern Aragón had first to be traversed and the king's subalterns complained that agriculture in the Huesca area was too poor to support a sudden human influx. The Carlists' raiding strategy worked to their advantage. As the British ambassador and key ally of the Cristinos observed: '(The Carlists') system in Aragón is the same as in Navarra: to deceive the Queen's Generals by false information, and to harass the troops by constant marches and countermarches and then to beat them in detail'.⁴⁴ Carlist movements proved self-sustaining, either by not overstaying their welcome passing through friendly villages or by pillaging conquered population centres outside their political community. The Cristino counterinsurgency, by contrast, was stymied by poor intelligence and logistics, and a pay crisis which drove a series of army mutinies amidst the wider political upheaval of Liberal Spain.

³⁸ August von Goeben, *Vier Jahre in Spanien*, p. 338.

³⁹ Rahden, *Cabrera*, p. 220.

⁴⁰ Pirala, *Guerra civil*, IV, pp. 108-115.

⁴¹ Rahden, *Cabrera*, pp. 49-50.

⁴² Felix Lichnowsky, *Erinnerungen* (Paris, 1844), Vol II, pp. 238-245.

⁴³ Carlos Dembowski, *Dos años en España durante la guerra civil, 1838-40* (Madrid, 2008), p. 40.

⁴⁴ T.N.A., FO 72/483: 1 September 1837 letter from Villiers to Palmerston.

The Carlist expedition, for its part, managed to keep advancing on a nutritional shoestring. Either conviction or coercion brought peasant guides to the aid of the invaders, who scouted out isolated food sources, especially sheep, ahead of the vanguard.⁴⁵ They also complained that the region was thickly garrisoned by Cristinos whose strength threatened to turn the merest defeat into a rout. In reality, the revolutionary crisis affecting the cities during 1836-37 paralysed the government counter-insurgency, as Captains-General, like the Baron Meer in Barcelona, feared deploying more than token forces in the countryside for fear of losing control of their population centres to the radicals.⁴⁶ Thus the insurgents, untroubled by political factionalism while on campaign or by responsibilities for garrisoning cities, retained the upper hand when raiding. After traversing deep into Catalonia, the insurgents succeeded in making contact with the next Carlist safe zone in the Maestrazgo.⁴⁷ Linking up with Cabrera's vanguard at Xerta (Catalonia) on 29 June, the whole Expedition managed to cross the River Ebro, frustrating the Catalan counter-insurgency. Only the large towns and coastlines seemed beyond the insurgents' reach. The former were well garrisoned and possessed urban geography which rendered superior Carlist tactics as useless, and the latter could always count on amphibious supplies and reinforcements landed by the British and Cristino navies.⁴⁸

But the further away from its political community that the insurgents raided, the more formidable the resistance they faced. At Chiva (Valencia) on 15 July 1837 the exhausted and badly supplied bulk of the Carlist army was defeated by a smaller Cristino force, and only a rearguard action led by Cabrera himself prevented the flight from turning into a rout.⁴⁹ The insurgent retreat northwards through the Maestrazgo inflicted the direst suffering on soldiers and civilians alike of the whole 1837 campaign, as villages were subjected to pillage twice over by both sides. The better logistics supporting Generalísimo Espartero's counterinsurgency won over villagers outside the Carlist home region, as the Cristinos offered producers warehouses and receipts for impounded harvests, better prospects than those offered by famished insurgent raiders. Only reliable insurgent political communities, such as the devastated Teruel region, continued to aid the insurgents, further help coming from a careerist dispute on the Cristino side between Generalísimo Espartero and his jealous subordinate, General Oráa. Thus when Don Carlos halted his retreat at Villar de los Navarros (Aragón) in

⁴⁵ T.N.A., FO 72/483, No. 269: 9 September 1837 letter from Villiers to Palmerston.

⁴⁶ Pirala, *Guerra civil*, IV, pp. 115-122.

⁴⁷ Pirala, *Guerra civil*, IV, pp. 127-132.

⁴⁸ Pirala, *Guerra civil*, IV, pp. 154-160.

⁴⁹ Pirala, *Guerra civil*, IV, pp. 144-154; Oyarzun, *Historia del carlismo*, p. 81.

order to give battle on 24 August 1837⁵⁰, the Carlists secured a major defensive victory including a booty of prisoners and badly-needed guns and supplies.⁵¹ Carlists for once had numerical superiority in this battle: 11,000 infantry and 1,000 cavalry defeated slightly more than half the number of Cristino attackers over the course of five hours.⁵² The fate that befell the Cristino prisoners who were moved around the starved countryside performing forced labour was horrific in the extreme. Most would die of hunger and typhus over the next months, as starvation rations forced them to scavenge for unripe root crops and, eventually, to commit cannibalism against their demised comrades. Cabrera condemned to execution some cannibals caught *in flagrante*, and yet the emaciated men could not even stand to receive the bullets who were finished off after hours of cruelty. Six months later, after an outcry from both sides, the surviving minority of captives were exchanged.⁵³

The fateful Carlist victory at Villar de los Navarros coincided with another raid launched by a smaller force of launched from Navarra under the command of Juan Antonio Zaratiegui. Originally intended to operate as a feint, Zaratiegui's forces faced denuded Cristino opposition and therefore acquired a momentum of its own. Traversing parts of Castile yet unmolested by war, the raiders made rapid progress. Early in August Zaratiegui conquered Segovia on the approaches to Madrid around the same time as the Royal Expedition approached the capital from the east.⁵⁴ News in the capital of Zaratiegui's approach caused panic. The Cristino front appeared to be evaporating across Castile. Cabrera's occupation of Guadalajara on the approaches to Madrid turned the political community Carlist, as the *caudillo* greeted the inhabitants from the town-hall balcony amidst public dances and open shops whilst the small Cristino garrison cowered in a tower one hundred metres away.⁵⁵ On the 6 August the government imposed a state of siege in Madrid, decreeing a wide range of pro-Carlist activities and opinions to be punishable by councils of war.⁵⁶

With insurgent momentum restored deep into the enemy's political community, the Cristino side regrouped in the capital and often surrendered surrounding population centres after offering token resistance.⁵⁷ Valladolid was occupied in a gentlemanly manner, conforming to the dual regime observed by the Polish aristocrat, as Liberal

⁵⁰ The battle of Villar de los Navarros is also known as the Battle of Herrera.

⁵¹ Pirala, *Guerra civil*, IV, pp. 154-160.

⁵² T.N.A., FO 72/483: 1 September 1837 letter from Villiers to Palmerston.

⁵³ Lawrence, *Nineteenth-century Spain*, p. 83.

⁵⁴ Jaime del Burgo, *Historia de la primera guerra carlista*, p. 247; Pirala, *Guerra civil*, IV, pp. 177-183.

⁵⁵ Rahden, *Cabrera*, p. 60.

⁵⁶ Bullón de Mendoza, *Primera guerra carlista*, p. 191.

⁵⁷ Pirala, *Guerra civil*, IV, pp. 193-199.

members of the local government resigned and retired to Madrid whilst pro-Carlist administrators took their place at Zaratiegui's service. This accommodation spared the city from pillage and atrocities.⁵⁸ But good manners ceased once a Cristino counter-thrust obliged Zaratiegui to abandon Valladolid and to strike southeast to join the Royal Expedition to Cristino counter-occupation, and to join Don Carlos' expedition. The Cristino defence continued to be paralysed: only General Zurbano, a 'mere guerrilla chief' according to Ambassador Villiers, showed consistent success launching raids into the Carlist Basque Country, playing the insurgents at their own game.⁵⁹ But Cristino units were mostly paralysed on the approaches to Madrid itself. Generalísimo Espartero thought his command too weak to dare to punish a spate of politically-charged Cristino mutinies outside Madrid. Evaristo San Miguel, Madrid's military governor, admitted that the gravity of the Carlist invasion outweighed the need to punish indiscipline.⁶⁰

By 10 September 1837 the insurgents seemed to about to achieve a victory beyond comprehension. They stood in front of Madrid's city walls in an eerie standoff amidst vague reports of a diplomatic solution.⁶¹ Whilst the Cristino civil and military authorities made a show of strength, some radicals even demanding the preparation of the city for siege warfare, the Queen-Regent played her double game. Ultimately the diplomatic initiatives came to naught. In a curious series of events which began as a civil-military dispute in Madrid, Espartero's Army of the North succeeded in putting the Carlist vanguard into flight. Espartero had been drawn into a standoff with the capital's revolutionary dictatorship of General Seoane over the political leadership of the revolution, which since 18 July 1837 had seen its Constitution of 1812 moderated by a bicameral legislature and other brakes on radicalism that were part of the Constitution of 1837.⁶² Espartero's mobile forces marched on the capital in a show of strength against the revolutionary elements in Seoane's garrison. Fearing the worst, Don Carlos ordered a retreat from the city walls. Espartero inadvertently was heralded as the saviour of the liberal revolution and the Cristino regime, and the Queen-Regent hurriedly buried her diplomatic scheme.⁶³ Don Carlos, for his part, finally lost his nerve, and withdrew from the capital, even though the king's belligerent nephew, Prince

⁵⁸ Oyarzun, *Historia del carlismo*, pp. 79, 82-83. Pirala, *Guerra civil*, IV, pp. 206-207.

⁵⁹ T.N.A., FO 72/483, No. 269: 9 September 1837 letter from Villiers to Palmerston.

⁶⁰ Pirala, *Guerra civil*, IV, pp. 215-218.

⁶¹ Janke, *Mendizábal*, pp. 250-252.

⁶² This charter provided one Cortes representative per 50,000 inhabitants, enfranchised all men paying at least 200 reales in annual taxes or receiving an annual private income of at least 1,500 reales, which amounted to 1 inhabitant in 48 enjoying full citizenship (whereas under the 1834 Royal Statute this figure had been 1 in 213) (Vicente Palacio Atard, *La España del siglo XIX* (Madrid, 1978), pp. 200-202).

⁶³ Manuel Espadas Burgos, *Baldomero Espartero: un candidato al trono de España* (Biblioteca de Autores Manchegos, 1986), p. 61; Pirala, *Guerra civil*, IV, pp. 431-439.

Sebastián, had wanted to fall on Espartero's flank.⁶⁴

Redeploying to Alcalá in a bid to fall on Espartero's flank, the Carlist army then received an order to retreat further still, causing outrage in the ranks. Rumours ran that Don Carlos had ordered the retreat to a more salubrious location in order to hear Mass. Others asserted that he wanted to avoid bloodshed. Madrid was now free of external threats. Antonio Quiroga made a triumphalist victory declaration couched in terms of popular defence and remarking the Queen-Regent's constitutional patriotism by having inspected the capital's Militia in person.⁶⁵

The Carlists now lost all momentum in retreat, suffering rearguard defeats and an emboldened counter-insurgency. Villiers reported: 'Espartero has completely dispelled the prestige which the Carlists had created in the different villages where from the vast numbers in which they presented themselves they were looked upon as invincible'.⁶⁶ The panicked Carlists lost arms and men in growing numbers. In desperation, the king invited Cabrera to replace Moreno as the Carlist Commander-in-Chief but Cabrera – who had also reached Madrid was poised to storm the capital as part of a pincer action – refused in thinly-disguised disgust at the failure of the king's leadership. Cabrera, after all, had wanted a lightning descent on Madrid lasting only two weeks as opposed to the leisurely, "throne-and-altar" carnival march which the army's supreme commander, Prince Sebastián, had undertaken under the king's influence.⁶⁷ Carlist foreign auxiliaries, especially the sizeable German contingent were exasperated with the absence of the strategic vision worthy of Cabrera.⁶⁸ The artillery expert, Wilhelm von Rahden, did not understand the decorative time-wasting of the Carlist political community, and was already demoralised that earlier Carlist victories had been squandered with Masses and festivals of grace rather instead of a purposeful thrust.⁶⁹ Meanwhile the Carlist retreat ploughed north to the safety of the Basque provinces, Espartero hard on its heels. Although the Cristinos could not prevent the Carlist forces of Zaratigui and the king regrouping in their retreat, Espartero was ruthless in his pace and in the way he treated civilian populations in his path (not least because an unusually high number of Castillians had defected to the Carlists), sometimes promising the death penalty against hoarders of food and drink. Routed Carlists stumbled aimlessly into villages, and those who fell out from fatigue were shot by their own side in order to

⁶⁴ Aróstegui, Canal, Calleja, *Guerras carlistas*, p. 61; Clemente, *Guerras carlistas*, pp. 111; Pirala, *Guerra civil*, IV, pp. 227-228.

⁶⁵ Pirala, *Guerra civil*, IV, pp. 230-231.

⁶⁶ T.N.A., FO 72/483, No. 272: 23 September 1837 letter from Villiers to Palmerston.

⁶⁷ Holt, *Carlist Wars*, p. 172.

⁶⁸ Lichnowsky, *Erinnerungen*, p. 134.

⁶⁹ Jaime del Burgo, *Historia de la primera guerra carlista*, pp. 212-213.

discourage desertion.⁷⁰ The dark side of raiding backfired onto the unhappy Carlist soldiers, as ruthlessness hitherto imposed on enemy communities now backfired onto their own in retreat. But Espartero faced problems of his own. His campaign was slowed down by the desperate hunger and neglect faced by his own men, as even the shoes which the hated *asentistas* (private contractors) supplied often had wooden or even cardboard heels which fell apart soon into campaigning.⁷¹ Despite, this Espartero still managed to work wonders for the Cristino cause. On 4 October he gained a close victory at Retuerta after committing his reserves at the most opportune moment.⁷² The tired remains of the Royal Expedition thereafter escaped back across the River Ebro and into their safe zone,

Cabrera and the path to defeat

Thus the Royal Expedition failed in circumstances which harked back to Early Modern warfare, of dynastic misunderstandings, lumbering and slow logistics, and religious piety. The retreating Carlists suffered a particularly dire lack of footwear, impeding their ability to counterattack or to acquire redress given that village shoemakers now feared the Cristino counterinsurgency more than the panicked insurgents. Usually the Carlists resorted to theft and pillage, or as Villiers reported: ‘every village through which the Queen’s army has passed lately the population has been found barefooted’.⁷³ The collapse of the insurgents’ political community obscured the logistical crisis besetting the Cristino counter-insurgency. General Espartero’s pursuit was hamstrung by the private contractor system – the derided *asentistas* – who faced pillage and Carlist interceptions en route to supplying field armies, and delivered insufficient food and clothing (including wooden and even cardboard heels for shoes).⁷⁴

Militarily the expedition was a strategic disaster for Carlism, and revealed the fundamental dilemma affecting the rebels, who were secure in their mountain fastnesses yet too weak to carry to carry insurgency warfare decisively into Cristino territory. Don Carlos’ retreat marked a critical third and final stage in Carlist politics which would pave the way for peace. The ignominious failure to take the capital saw international support for Carlism ebb, and no sooner had the Expedition retreated across the Ebro than politics moved in a radical direction. Uranga’s limited offensives demonstrated the structural reality that the Carlists were virtually unbeatable in the internal lines of their

⁷⁰ T.N.A., FO 72/483, No. 275: 26 September 1837 letter from Villiers to Palmerston.

⁷¹ Pirala, *Guerra civil*, IV, pp. 232-237.

⁷² Pirala, *Guerra civil*, IV, pp. 237-239.

⁷³ T.N.A., FO 72/483, No. 290: 7 October 1837 letter from Villiers to Palmerston.

⁷⁴ Pirala, *Guerra civil*, IV, pp. 237-239; for a more positive assessment of the private contractor system in the Early Modern era, see David Parrott, *The Business of War* (2012).

Basque and eastern fastmseses, but frail in longer-range operations like the Royal Expedition. On 29 October 1837, the so-called Manifiesto of Arceniega saw radical *apostólicos* dominate the king and launch public proclamations describing the Expedition's failure as the work of the hated peace faction known as *transaccionistas*. Moderates were purged from the cabinet and many exiled, whilst such diehard Carlists (*apostólicos*) as Teijeiro and Guergué took their place and thereafter maintained a stranglehold on Carlist politics which would antagonise the army under Maroto and ultimately result in a civil war within the civil war. That Maroto would win, and thus clear the way for peace, could not have been predicted by anyone in late-1837.⁷⁵ The defeat of the Expedition thus meant victory for the Carlist hardliners in the Basque country. But few Basques were fooled by the king's proclamation at Arceniega that he had "returned only momentarily" and – bizarrely – that the Royal Expedition was a promising dress rehearsal for a future offensive of "national liberation" (rather than the conclusive march on Madrid spoken about only weeks earlier).⁷⁶

The Royal Expedition set the Basque country on a path of stagnation from which it would never recover, despite two more half-hearted expeditions launched from there in 1838 (the García and Negri raids). The fact that most of the Expedition's victories had been won on Aragonese territory consolidated Cabrera's leadership in the Maestrazgo and created a functioning and centralised Carlist state in the region. An offensive which stalemated the Basque country energised the Carlist Maestrazgo.⁷⁷ The 'Supreme Royal Governing Junta of Aragón, Valencia and Murcia' (Real Junta Superior Gubernativa de Aragón, Valencia y Murcia), set up in 1837, gave Cabrera an effective power of veto on all matters: whereas he could vote on any matters he saw fit, the Junta was forbidden from interfering in any way with military matters. Moreover, the propaganda value of local Carlist victories (especially at Huesca, Barbastro and Cherta) consolidated a phenomenon underway since the Liberals' confiscation of monastic properties underway since 1836, namely, the growing enlistment of the conscript class into Carlist rather than Cristino ranks.⁷⁸ In many ways, the defeat of the Royal Expedition turned Carlism's gravity eastwards from the stalemate in the north.

During 1838 Cabrera's territorial control reached its zenith, and he 'conducted a

⁷⁵ Piralá, *Guerra civil*, IV, pp. 246-255; Julio Aróstegui Sánchez, 'La aparición del carlismo y los antecedentes de la guerra' in *Historia de España: La era isabelina y el sexenio democrático (1834-1874)*, Tomo XXXIV, fundada por Ramón Menéndez Pidal, dirigida por José María Jover Zamora (Madrid, 1981), pp. 121-122; Canal, *El carlismo*, p. 98.

⁷⁶ Oyarzun, *Historia del carlismo*, pp. 105-106.

⁷⁷ Rújula (ed.), *Historia de la guerra*, LXXV-LXXVI.

⁷⁸ Remírez de Esparza, *Carlismo aragonés*, pp. 46-59; Jaime del Burgo, *Historia de la primera guerra carlista*, pp. 185-186.

villainous war to the death’, escalating reprisals against prisoners and refusing mediation to bind the Eliot Treaty’s humanitarian provisions to his zone.⁷⁹ One count taken in 1837 saw Cabrera’s army totalling 11,418 infantry 1,282 cavalry, 337 artillerymen and 22 guns. He had shown foresight in turning the prize of Cantavieja into an arsenal. This force was enough for Cabrera to take Morella on 25 January 1838, which now became his *de facto* capital.⁸⁰ But the demands for blood and treasure turned Cabrera into a military dictator overruling the civilian junta and even subjecting the Church to arbitrary rule. Churches and monasteries fell victim to scorched earth tactics just like all other buildings, bells were smelted into weapons, and for all the religiosity of Carlism, Ramón Cabrera had little patience or compassion for militarily ‘useless’ clerics. When Don Carlos protested at Cabrera’s execution of a priest found guilty of theft, the Commander-in-Chief replied ‘Your Majesty is being misled. The man I shot was no priest but a thief. Cabrera demoted the pro-Carlist Bishop of Mondoñedo when he complained to Don Carlos of Cabrera’s expulsion of ‘useless’ friars from Morella once they refused to bear arms in defence of the besieged capital.⁸¹ The term *ojalatero* (‘if only’) became popular in Carlist discourse, deriding the shirkers within the Carlist political community and the growing peace faction at the top.⁸²

But Cabrera’s secure position inside his political community in rural Aragón could not withstand the overwhelming weight of Cristino pressure bolstered by its overwhelming media and demographic resources. In June 1838 Carlists sent out feelers to Livorno, Italy, seeking foreign support for a new Carlist effort in Catalonia. But these feelers were intercepted by Cristino authorities and British vessels.⁸³ In December 1838 worse was to come. A private Carlist arms dealer seeking 15,000 firearms in Britain was frustrated when British authorities informed the Cristinos and put the blockading Royal Navy on watch for suspicious cargoes approaching the east coast of Spain.⁸⁴

Defeat became inevitable once the Basque provinces agreed to conditional surrender in the August 1839 ‘Embrace of Vergara’. Generalísimo Espartero’s overwhelming army descended on Cabrera’s eastern zone over the winter of 1839-40. Cabrera’s government descended into a virtual reign of terror, and Cabrera himself fell gravely ill in February 1840. Upon his recovery by May most of the east had fallen to government troops. By

⁷⁹ A.H.N., Emigrados, 8119, 29 December 1838 letter from Spanish government to British minister in Madrid.

⁸⁰ Pirala, *Guerra civil*, IV, pp. 408-41; Oyarzun, *Historia del Carlismo*, p. 157.

⁸¹ Núria Sauch Cruz, ‘Un retrat del general carlista Ramon Cabrera’, in Daniel Montaña i Josep Rafart (eds.), *El Carlisme ahir i avui* (I Simposi d’Història del Carlisme, 11 de maig de 2013), pp. 103-104.

⁸² Pirala, *Guerra Civil*, II, pp. 260-265.

⁸³ T.N.A., FO 72/516: 6 June 1838 letter from Villiers to Palmerston.

⁸⁴ T.N.A., FO 72/500: 6 December 1838 letter from Villiers to Palmerston.

June 1840 Cabrera had interned himself in France and the First Carlist War was over. Thus the Carlist effort never squared the circle of defensive superiority versus offensive vulnerability. Raiding as a form of warfare is ultimately limited in its strategic and tactical effectiveness, as its employment is in itself usually a symptom of the military inferiority of the raiders.⁸⁵ By the same token, the irregular warfare that dominated the Carlist effort in the northern zone during 1833-35, and in the east from 1833-37, followed a pattern of tactical success which in turn guaranteed strategic failure. Both Zumalacárregui and, to a lesser extent, Cabrera, welcome the transition from irregular to regular organisation of Carlist forces. The Carlists, after all, were supposed to be a 'regime-in-waiting' worthy of the support of Absolutist Europe, not the bandits and brigands of Cristino propaganda. But for all their advantages of interior lines, defensive topography, morale and greater military effectiveness, the Carlists could never outweigh the demographic, economic and military superiority of a Cristino regime in receipt of decisive foreign support.

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