

NEGOTIATING NEUTRALITY
Anglo-Spanish Relations in the Age of
Appeasement,
1931-1940

Scott Robert Ramsay

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis examines Anglo-Spanish relations between 1931 and 1940 within the context of general appeasement. It argues that the British policy of non-intervention in response to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War sought to prevent the conflict escalating into a wider European war and to ensure that it could maintain or establish cordial relations with whichever side emerged victorious. However, due to General Franco's military successes, the support he received from Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, and the geostrategic importance of the Iberian Peninsula in British government's Mediterranean strategy, Britain's non-intervention policy evolved into a policy of appeasing Franco which remained in place beyond the Civil War and throughout the Second World War. This policy aimed to drive a wedge between Franco and the Axis Powers to prevent Spain's incorporation into the Rome-Berlin Axis and ensure the neutrality of the Iberian Peninsula. In this sense, the British government's recognition of Franco and abandonment of the Spanish Republic in February 1939 formed a concession made to appease Franco comparable to British policy towards Abyssinia and Czechoslovakia. By using different concepts of appeasement as an analytical framework, the thesis shows how appeasement policies can alter power dynamics in diplomatic relationships to the advantage of the weaker state and how that state can use this to its own advantage. In this regard, the thesis contributes to our understanding of how appeasement policies function and evolve but it also provides a more dynamic analysis of Anglo-Spanish relations than previous studies. Indeed, it focuses not only on how British and Spanish foreign policies changed over time, but also the influence which they had on each other. It concludes that we should consider Franco, like Hitler and Mussolini, as a beneficiary of appeasement who intuitively understood how to use this policy to his advantage.

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INTRODUCTION

Britain, Spain and Appeasement

‘Today England recognises us’, shouted General Francisco Franco to a large audience in Burgos on 27 February 1939. ‘Tomorrow’, he went on as the enthusiastic crowd cheered, ‘the world will recognise us!’¹ Franco was referring to the decision of the British government to grant his regime de jure recognition while withdrawing diplomatic recognition of the legally elected Spanish government. During almost three years of Civil War, the Spanish government had been fighting against Franco’s rebels which had the military support of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. For its part, the British government had maintained a policy of non-intervention and done little to oppose this fascist intervention in Spain. Franco made clear in his speech his gratitude for the German and Italian support he received. For the Republican government, Britain’s recognition of Franco solidified once and for all its international isolation. One month later, Francoist troops would enter Madrid, one of the last major cities to remain under the government’s control, and from his headquarters in Burgos Franco would announce the end of the Spanish Civil War on 1 April 1939.²

This thesis will make a significant contribution to two scholarly debates. Firstly, it challenges much of what historians have written about the motivations behind Britain’s policy of non-intervention. As we will see, a significant number of historians tend to examine the British government’s attitude towards the two sides in Spain in light of concerns regarding the spread of communism, but this thesis reverses that trend by placing British fears of fascism at the forefront

¹ ‘El discurso del Caudillo’, *ABC Sevilla*, 28/2/1939.

² At the end of the Civil War, the Republican government retained control of much of southern and central Spain and still had control of considerable military resources but Franco’s military progress had convinced the majority of observers abroad that his victory was inevitable. On the Republic’s final struggle for survival, see Paul Preston, *The Last Days of the Spanish Republic* (London: William Collins, 2016); Ángel Bahamonde Magro and Javier Cervera Gil, *Así terminó la guerra de España* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2000).

of its analysis. Rather than a policy of hostility which sought to facilitate the overthrow of the Spanish Republic, the thesis situates Britain's approach to Spain, and more specifically its relations with the rebel government and subsequent Franco regime, within the broader framework of general appeasement. It was this context that led to a policy of appeasing General Franco in the lead up to the Second World War. Britain's abandonment of the Republican government became to Franco what Abyssinia had been to Mussolini in 1936 and what Czechoslovakia would become for Hitler in March 1939. This approach leads to the second significant contribution that the thesis will make. By using appeasement as the lens through which to view Anglo-Spanish relations, the thesis also demonstrates how the foreign policy of the appeasing state can affect the diplomacy of the target of the policy. In Franco's case, as the head of a militarily and economically weak state, he was able to use what he perceived as demonstrations of British weakness and uncertainty to reinforce his position as a new dictator on the international stage.

The Spanish Civil War: World War in Embryo

The social and political polarisation which Spain experienced between the proclamation of the Second Republic in April 1931 and the outbreak of the Civil War in July 1936 made it an attractive battleground for a confrontation between the ideologies of fascism and communism.³ The Republican government, with the help of popular civilian backing, suppressed the rising in key strategic areas and remained in control of major cities such as Madrid, Valencia and Barcelona.⁴ The Spanish Moroccan Army, the country's most fierce and battle-hardened military force, which Franco would lead, was paralysed by the lack of ships to transport it across the Straits of Gibraltar after Republican warships whose crews mutinied against their officers made the operation

³ On the origins of the Spanish Civil War, see Paul Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War: Reform, Reaction and Revolution in the Second Republic* (London: Routledge, 1994); Stanley Payne, *Spain's First Democracy: The Second Republic, 1931-1936* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993). For a study which examines the period 1931-1936 on its own terms, rather than simply a prelude to an inevitable civil war, see Manuel Álvarez Tardío and Roberto Villa García, *El precio de la exclusion. La política durante la Segunda República* (Madrid: Encuentro, 2010). Although dated, Gerald Brenan's account still stands as one of the most thorough overviews of the origins of the Civil War: *The Spanish Labyrinth: An Account of the Social and Political Background of the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, originally published 1943)

⁴ The Republican government also remained in control of Spain's eastern coast and parts of the southern coast for most of the conflict and the northern coast until the summer of 1937, Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War: Reaction, Revolution and Revenge* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006), pp. 102-134.

impossible.⁵ The heavy setbacks the rebellion faced forced its plotters to seek help from abroad. Within days, General Franco established contact with the German and Italian governments and on 25 July both Hitler and Mussolini decided to send aircraft to North Africa which Franco could use to transport his stranded troops.⁶ By mid-August, German and Italian aircraft had facilitated the transport of thousands of troops to mainland Spain and created an international dimension to Spain's Civil War.⁷

The British government formulated its own response to the outbreak of the Civil War with the aim of avoiding an escalation of the conflict beyond Spain or worsening the broader ideological polarisation that had taken place in Europe during the 1930s. The Spanish Republic established contact with the French government on 20 July and requested permission to purchase war matériel with which it could subdue the rebellion. The French Popular Front government, led by the socialist Léon Blum, responded positively but in the meantime Blum visited London with his Foreign Minister, Yvon Delbos, between 23 and 25 July. A mixture of British disapproval, disagreements within the French government and with French military advisors, and fear of a right-wing reaction in France, led Blum to withdraw his offer to help the Republic by 26 July.⁸ Blum sought desperately to find another solution and, as evidence of Italian intervention emerged, proposed an official Non-Intervention Agreement on 1 August. Under this agreement, the British, French and Italian

⁵ Michael Alpert, *La guerra civil española en el mar* (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1987).

⁶ The key work on Italian intervention is John Coverdale, *Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). For a study on the origins of Italian intervention grounded in Italian and Spanish archival records, see Ismael Saz Campos, *Mussolini contra la II República: hostilidad, conspiraciones, intervención (1931-1936)* (Valencia: Edicions Alfons el Magnànim, 1986). The most succinct overview of the decision-making process that led to Italian intervention is Paul Preston, 'Mussolini's Spanish Adventure: From Limited Risk to War', in Paul Preston & Ann L. Mackenzie (eds.), *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain, 1936-1939* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), pp. 21-51.

On German intervention, see Ángel Viñas, *Franco, Hitler y el estallido de la guerra civil: antecedentes y consecuencias* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2001); Christian Leitz, *Economic Relations between Nazi Germany and Franco's Spain, 1936-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Michael Alpert, *Franco and the Condor Legion: The Spanish Civil War in the Air* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019); Denis Smyth, 'Reflex Reaction: Germany and the Onset of the Spanish Civil War', in Paul Preston (ed.), *Revolution and War in Spain, 1931-1939* (London: Methuen, 1984), pp. 243-265.

⁷ For a succinct overview of the process of the conflict's internationalisation, see Enrique Moradiellos, *El reñidero de Europa. Las dimensiones internacionales de la guerra civil española* (Barcelona: Ediciones Península, 2001), pp. 77-92; Willard C. Frank, 'The Spanish Civil War and the Coming of the Second World War', *International History Review*, 9.3 (1987), 368-409; Michael Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*, 2nd edn (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). For a much older but what remains a classic account, see Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1961), pp. 209-313.

⁸ The debate surrounding the British and French responsibility in what became the Non-Intervention Agreement found in Glyn Stone, 'Britain, Non-Intervention and the Spanish Civil War', *European Studies Review*, 9(1979), 129-149 & David Carlton, 'Eden Blum and the Origins of Non-Intervention', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 6.3 (1971), 40-55.

governments would refrain from assisting either side in the Spanish conflict. Although it welcomed the French proposal, the British government advocated a broader agreement which incorporated Germany and Portugal as well. For their part, Hitler and Mussolini agreed in principle to the agreement but demanded that it include the Soviet Union. By late August, twenty-seven European states had signed the agreement and the British government agreed to host a Non-Intervention Committee in London which would ensure all signatories abided by it. Germany, Italy and, to a more limited extent, Portugal, however, continued to send supplies to the military rebels.⁹

In theory, German and Italian intervention rendered the Non-Intervention Agreement a failure almost from its inception, although in practice it was a success for the British government in the sense that it contained the conflict to the Iberian Peninsula. Throughout August, September and October, clear evidence that Hitler and Mussolini had no intention of abiding by the agreement continued to emerge and in late October large supplies of war matériel, as well as thousands of international volunteers recruited by the Comintern, began to arrive in Spain.¹⁰ The military rebels and many observers abroad expected the fall of Madrid to mark the symbolic end of the conflict. However, delays in rebel forces reaching the capital bought time for these reinforcements to bolster the Republic's defence of the capital. By November, it was clear that Franco's attempt to take Madrid had failed but the conflict had transformed into an international one. Moreover, in late November, shortly after the announcement of the Rome-Berlin Axis which set in motion the process of consolidating an alliance between Hitler and Mussolini, the German and Italian governments withdrew diplomatic recognition from the Spanish Republic and granted de jure recognition to General Franco after he had emerged as the supreme leader of the military

⁹ Literature in Spanish or English on Portuguese support for Franco is limited but valuable accounts can be found in Alberto Pena Rodríguez, *Salazar y Franco: La alianza del fascismo ibérico contra la España republicana: diplomacia, prensa y propaganda* (Gijón: Trea, 2017) & Pedro Aires Oliveira, 'Taking Sides: Salazar's Estado Novo, the Nationalist Uprising and the Spanish Civil War', in Raanan Rein & Joan Maria Thomàs (eds.), *Spain 1936: Year Zero* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2018), pp. 114-132.

¹⁰ In total, up to 40,000 volunteers from over fifty countries. For an overview of their involvement, see César Vidal, *Las brigadas internacionales* (Madrid: S.L.A Espasa, 2006); Giles Tremlett, *The International Brigades: Fascism, Freedom and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020). More than 2,000 British volunteers went to fight in Spain, see Richard Baxell, *British Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War: The British Volunteers in the International Brigades, 1936-1939* (London: Routledge, 2004). On Soviet intervention, see Daniel Kowalsky, *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Stanley Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). The most thorough overview of intervention on the side of the Republic and the transportation of war matériel is Gerald Howson, *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War* (London: John Murray, 1998).

rebellion.¹¹ Not only was there substantial intervention on both sides in Spain, but the legal status of each also became a source of division in an increasingly polarised Europe. It is in this context that we can best understand why the British government adopted and maintained a policy of non-intervention throughout the Civil War and also how it rationalised the decision to do so in the face of increasing evidence that foreign intervention benefited the rebels in their attempt to overthrow the legally elected Spanish government.

Historiography: Anglo-Spanish Relations, 1931-1940

Early scholars of Anglo-Spanish relations in the 1930s had limited access to archival records and emphasised the strategic constraints under which the British government formulated its policy. William Laird Kleine-Ahlbrandt, for instance, labelled British non-intervention a ‘policy of simmering’ which struck a balance between maintaining the broader objective of general appeasement and a policy of neutrality in the Civil War which tolerated foreign intervention on both sides so long as it did not impair Spanish territorial integrity or pull Britain to a wider European conflict before it had sufficient time for rearmament. In an attempt to maintain an objective approach, he argued that, judged purely from the British perspective, this policy was successful.¹² At around the same time, Dante Puzzo took a broader approach and examined the Spanish conflict within its global context. His study, like Kleine-Ahlbrandt’s, was based primarily on published documents and memoirs but examined the motives of several states in Europe and further afield for their non-intervention or support for either of the two sides in Spain.¹³ K. W. Watkins, meanwhile, analysed the divisions which the Civil War caused within the British Conservative Party particularly and political opinion more generally. For him, the British government not only put its goal of general appeasement above other foreign policy objectives, but divisions in British attitudes towards Spain were so deep that no policy other than non-intervention

¹¹ On the impact Spain had on Italo-German rapprochement, see Glyn Stone, ‘Italo-German Military Collaboration in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939’, in Gaynor Johnson (ed.), *The International Context of the Spanish Civil War* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), pp. 33-55; MacGregor Knox, *Common Destiny: Dictatorship, Foreign Policy, and War in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 142-145; H. James Burgwyn, *Italian Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period, 1918-1940* (London: Praeger, 1997), pp. 145-197.

¹² William Laird Kleine-Ahlbrandt, *The Policy of Simmering: A Study of British Policy during the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (London: Springer, 1962). As he noted in his conclusion, for instance, ‘British policy required the containment of the war and the preservation of Spanish integrity; both were realized. Since success implies the realization of aims British policy was successful’, p. 140.

¹³ Dante Puzzo, *Spain and the Great Powers, 1936-1941* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1962).

was possible. In this sense, non-intervention was the most feasible policy not because it was uncontroversial but because it was the one which divided British public and political opinion the least.¹⁴

Once historians gained access to archival records relevant to the period and were able to study British attitudes towards Spain in more depth, they began to identify and emphasise the role which ideological prejudices within the British government and Foreign Office towards the Spanish Republic played. In 1979, Jill Edwards pioneered the field by drawing on a wide range of British archival records. Her nuanced approach to the issue demonstrates the complexities of British non-intervention and provides a sober assessment of both the reasons for the initial decision of the government to adopt this policy and why it maintained it throughout the conflict. For instance, Edwards argued that the social and political deterioration which occurred in Spain after the election of the Popular Front government in February 1936 alarmed the Foreign Office to the communist threat and ensured Britain would remain neutral. To demonstrate this, she draws on examples of ideological prejudices expressed by individuals. Sir Samuel Hoare, the First Lord of the Admiralty, for instance, hoped for a strict policy of neutrality and said that ‘On no account must we do anything to bolster up Communism in Spain’. For Edwards, this outburst indicated ‘the degree of anti-communism which was so important a factor in the formulation of British policy towards Spain in the vital early days of the rebellion’. Lord Chatfield, First Sea Lord, also stated clearly that he believed the rebel cause to be ‘much nobler than the Reds’ and that Franco would not grant any territorial concessions in return for Mussolini’s help. This, according to Edwards, ‘was akin to the view very widely held in the Foreign Office as a whole’.¹⁵

However, Edwards also argues that while anti-communism played an important role in shaping British perceptions of the rebellion in Spain, there were several diplomatic and strategic

¹⁴ K.W. Watkins, *Britain Divided: The Effect of the Spanish Civil War on British Political Opinion* (London: T. Nelson, 1963). On opposition to general appeasement within the Conservative Party, see Neville Thompson, *The Anti-Appeasers: Conservative Opposition to Appeasement in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971). The thesis discusses public opinion at relevant points, but it worth pointing out here that despite widespread British public support or sympathy for the Republic, on the whole this had little influence on official policy. However, this level of support for the Republic did result in significant fundraising activities in Britain for humanitarian assistance, see Jim Fyrth, *The Signal Was Spain: The Spanish Aid Movement in Britain, 1936-1939* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1986); Tom Buchanan, *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain: War, Loss and Memory* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press); Emily Mason, *Democracy, Deeds and Dilemmas: Support for the Spanish Republic within British Civil Society, 1936-1939* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2017).

¹⁵ Jill Edwards, *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (London: Macmillan, 1979), pp. 23-24; Lawrence Pratt, *East of Malta, West of Suez* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 43.

constrains that came to the fore by August. She paid a lot of attention, for instance, to the issue of Italian intervention and the difficulties it created for Anglo-Italian rapprochement. Although it was clear that the Italian government was actively intervening in Spain, the British government had to downplay how this violated the Non-Intervention Agreement in the hope of gradually improving relations with Mussolini. Nevertheless, Edwards claims that only after the ‘long favoured’ recognition of Franco in February and his victory in April 1939 did the Cabinet and Foreign Office become aware of the strategic advantages which the policy of non-intervention had conceded to the dictator states.¹⁶ This, as we will see, overlooks the primacy of strategic constraints and concerns regarding German and Italian intervention throughout the civil war and beyond.

United States historian Douglas Little overlooked British strategic constraints almost completely when he condemned non-intervention as a policy of ‘malevolent neutrality’. For Little, ideological antipathy towards left-wing groups, especially anarchists, and the threat they posed to British economic interests in Spain, led the British government to adopt a policy which indirectly but purposefully benefited the military rebels who were trying to expunge these groups from the Spanish political system. This argument fits within Little’s broader understanding of British foreign policy in the interwar period, which he suggests focused on preventing the spread of communism in the west and thereby assuring British economic prosperity. Accordingly, British hostility towards the Republic existed from its inception and deteriorated gradually over the next five years. Indeed, by the summer of 1936, he argues, ‘for more than five years political and economic conflicts had, like a cancer, rotted Spanish relations with Great Britain’ and, as ‘anarchists and communists edged ever closer to power in Madrid’ the British adopted a policy of ‘malevolent neutrality’ to ‘let the patient expire before the infection had a chance to spread’.¹⁷

There are two fundamental weaknesses in Little’s argument and both stem from the importance he attaches to Britain’s ideological antipathy towards the Spanish Republic. Firstly, he suggests that British economic interests in Spain were substantial enough to opt for a ‘better Franco than Stalin’ approach, ignoring what a rebel victory would have meant for these interests.

¹⁶ Edwards, *British Government*, pp. 210-212.

¹⁷ Douglas Little, *Malevolent Neutrality: The United States, Great Britain and the Origins of the Spanish Civil War* (London: Cornell University Press, 1985); Douglas Little, ‘Red Scare, 1936: Anti-Bolshevism and the Origins of British Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23, 2 (1988), 291-311 (pp. 310-311); for a similar interpretation, see David Jorge, ‘Gran Bretaña y la segunda república española: prejuicios históricos y progresiva hostilidad’, in Ángeles Egido León (ed.), *La Segunda República y su proyección internacional* (Madrid: Catarata, 2017) pp. 160-187.

Nevertheless, as Edwards had argued some years earlier, it is unlikely that the British government prioritised its commercial interests above the impending threat of war in Europe which an alternative policy to non-intervention would have risked. British capital investment in Spain, for instance, amounted to approximately £40,000,000. At the time of the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, British investment in China amounted to approximately £300,000,000. British investment worldwide, meanwhile, stood at over £3,300,000,000. Accordingly, British investment in Spain was significant but relatively modest if we consider it in a wider context.¹⁸ Secondly, and most importantly, Little paid almost no attention to Britain's strategic constraints or the broader policy of general appeasement. By doing so, he neglected British concerns regarding the rise of fascism in Europe and the threat it posed to the European status quo. Indeed, Little's approach largely consisted of collating examples of negative attitudes towards the Republic within the Foreign Office and diplomatic service which he used to present non-intervention as little more than a manifestation of Britain's 'better dead than red' approach to the outbreak of the Civil War.¹⁹ The period which Little covers exacerbates these weaknesses. Understandably, he ends his study in the summer of 1936 because his intention was to study the origins of British non-intervention. However, he does not resist the urge to make sweeping assessments about British policy towards Spain for the rest of the Civil War. As he notes,

Despite considerable evidence that Germany and Italy were much more deeply involved than Russia during the early stages of the Spanish strife, Britain quickly adopted a 'better Franco than Stalin' approach, which probably helped shape the strategy of appeasement over the following two years'.²⁰

As will become clear in this analysis, Little's appraisal does not do justice to the complexities of British non-intervention and the role appeasement played.

Both Edwards and Little relied almost entirely on British archival records and therefore only provided one-sided insights into Anglo-Spanish relations. Spanish historian Enrique Moradiellos addressed this issue by incorporating Spanish archival records into his work on Anglo-Spanish relations during the Civil War. From the British perspective, Moradiellos argued that the policy of non-intervention was the result of three primary considerations: the threat of the Soviet

¹⁸ Edwards, *British Government*, p. 65, 215.

¹⁹ Jill Edwards also pointed this out in her review of Little's book in *American Historical Review*, 91.1(1986), 84-85.

²⁰ Little, 'Red Scare, 1936', p. 307.

Union and the spread of Bolshevism to western Europe; the rise of fascism and the threat this posed to peace in Europe; and the situation in Spain specifically, which he argues Westminster viewed as a pre-revolutionary breakdown of law and order. As a result, the British government initially adopted a policy of ‘benevolent neutrality’ because it believed the conflict would be of short duration and therefore that there was no real danger of the rebels making territorial concessions to the German and Italian governments. By November 1936, when the rebels failed to take Madrid, however, the British government had subordinated this policy to the wider policy of general appeasement.²¹ Accordingly, Moradiellos viewed the Civil War as an arena in which the British government could maintain its policy of appeasing Hitler and Mussolini and argued that only the fear of communism taking root in Spain can explain why the British government remained so blind to the strategic dangers posed by fascist intervention.²²

Although most historians who have written on the subject tend to depict British policy during the Civil War as either pro-rebel or anti-Republican, few have focused on British concerns regarding what a rebel victory would mean for the British foreign policy. One reason for this is the

²¹ Enrique Moradiellos, *Neutralidad benévola. El Gobierno británico y la insurrección militar española de 1936* (Oviedo: Pentalfa, 1990). In the same decade, Juan Avilés Farré used Spanish, British and French sources and put forward a similar argument, see *Pasión y farsa. Franceses y británicos ante la guerra civil española* (Madrid: Eudema, 1994). More recently, Hugo García’s excellent study beat a new path by incorporating a wide range of sources from both the U.K. and Spain, although he focused primarily on Spanish propaganda and the impact it had on attitudes across the political spectrum in Britain, see *The Truth About Spain! Mobilizing British Public Opinion, 1936-1939* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2009).

²² Enrique Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albión. El Gobierno británico y la guerra civil española* (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno de España Editores, 1996), pp. 35-39, 365-371. The idea that British non-intervention was the manifestation of the existence of ideological prejudices towards the Republic has, to varying degrees, informed broader studies of the Republic during the Civil War. The most prominent is perhaps Ángel Viñas, whose trilogy of books on Republican diplomacy during the Civil War presents the Spanish government as a beleaguered state defending itself against fascist aggression and having no choice but to turn to the Soviet Union for help, see Ángel Viñas, *La soledad de la República. El abandono de las democracias y el viraje hacia la Unión Soviética* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2006); *El escudo de la República. El oro de España, la apuesta soviética y los hechos de mayo de 1937* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2007); *El honor de la República. Entre el acoso fascista, la hostilidad británica y la política de Stalin* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2009). Other studies have highlighted the limited options the Spanish government had in its diplomacy. Marina Casanova, for instance, argued that the Republic lacked a coherent foreign policy before the Civil War and during the conflict had to limit itself to trying to bring the situation in Spain to the attention of foreign states and protesting against the decisions of the Non-Intervention Committee which benefited the military rebels, see Marina Casanova, *La diplomacia española durante la guerra civil* (Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, 1996), pp. 23-26. David Jorge has taken a similar line but drawn on a wide range of archival records to show the difficulties that the Republic faced when trying to oppose the Non-Intervention Agreement in Geneva, see David Jorge, *Inseguridad colectiva. La sociedad de naciones, la guerra de España y el fin de la paz mundial* (Valencia: Tirant Humanidades, 2016). In her study of the Republic’s wartime domestic policies, Helen Graham has argued that the government of Juan Negrín, formed in May 1937, faced a war on three fronts: the military rebels and their German and Italian supporters; internecine conflicts within the Republican war itself as well as the struggle to create a unified war effort; and the hostility of the western democracies, particularly the British government, see Helen Graham, *The Spanish Republic at War, 1936-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 316-389.

tendency of historians to focus on Anglo-Spanish relations during the Civil War or Second World War in isolation. Edwards and Moradiellos, for instance, concluded their studies at the end of the Civil War. In the case of Moradiellos, he argued that revolutionary preoccupations remained a driving force behind British policy until ‘the Spanish problem disappeared’ in April 1939.²³ However, from the British perspective, the ‘Spanish problem’ had far from disappeared in April 1939.²⁴ In fact, such a view ignores not only the level of continuity in British policy towards Spain during this period, but also the logic which drove British policy before, during and after the Spanish Civil War. While both Edwards and Moradiellos recognised that the British government hoped to curry favour with either side by using a policy of non-intervention, neither examined how this policy remained intact beyond the Civil War.²⁵ An examination of this later period is important because it demonstrates that British non-intervention was a sustained strategic programme and, as we will see below, remained in place because it was consistent with the wider policy of general appeasement and conditioned more by fears of fascism than communism. In this sense, this thesis offers a more dynamic approach to Anglo-Spanish relations during this period because it focuses not only on how the policy changed over time, but also the ways in which and reasons why certain elements of British policy remained intact.

Where historians have focused on Anglo-Spanish relations after the Civil War, their attention has tended to drift towards the period after May 1940 once Winston Churchill replaced Neville Chamberlain as British Prime Minister. Accordingly, this has left a gap for the period between the end of the Civil War and Chamberlain’s resignation at the end of the so-called Phoney War. Glyn Stone is one of the few historians to have addressed this issue by focusing on the period between the end of the Civil War and the start of the Second World War. Stone contrasted the attitudes of the British and French governments towards Spain, arguing that while the former wanted to appease Franco to prevent him from falling into the Axis orbit, the latter believed the Franco regime was effectively already a part of the Axis and that any conciliatory attitude was

²³ Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albi3n*, p. 365.

²⁴ Similar argument found in Glyn Stone, ‘Britain, France and the Spanish Problem, 1936-1939’, in Dick Richardson and Glyn Stone (eds.), *Decisions and Diplomacy: Essays in Twentieth Century International History* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 129-152.

²⁵ This policy of currying favour with both sides is explored very briefly by Richard Little, ‘Intervention and Non-Intervention in International Society: Britain’s Responses to the American and Spanish Civil Wars’, *Review of International Studies*, 39.5 (2013), 1111-1129 (pp. 1123-1127).

futile. However, Stone focused primarily on the impact which the Spanish issue had on Anglo-French relations and little on Anglo-Spanish relations during this brief period.²⁶

Historians Richard Wigg and Denis Smyth meanwhile have both examined British policy towards Spain during the Second World War but attach little importance to Anglo-Spanish relations during the Civil War and in its aftermath up to May 1940. Smyth only goes as far as providing some context in a brief chapter on British policy between 1936 and 1939 and focuses primarily on Anglo-Spanish relations in 1941 and 1942.²⁷ The scope of Wigg's study is broader, covering British policy under Churchill from May 1940 until the end of the Second World War, but he seldom mentions Chamberlain nor provides much context for the policy which Churchill inherited.²⁸ However, both Wigg and Smyth reach the conclusion that the British government's policy amounted to a policy of appeasing Franco, particularly in the form of generous economic incentives in the form of the War Trade Agreement signed in March 1940, in order to ensure Spain remained neutral during the Second World War.²⁹ In this sense, there was continuity in British policy towards Spain during and after the Civil War with the specific aim of ensuring Spain's neutrality in a future European war regardless of what regime emerged from the conflict.

British policy both during the Civil War and Second World War conceded some influence within Anglo-rebel relations to Franco and allowed him to influence policymakers and advisors in London. However, few historians have examined the influence that British policy had on the formulation of Francoist foreign policy during the Civil War and Second World War. Focus has usually been on the pro-Axis sympathies of the regime, rather than its anti-British aspects or how

²⁶ Glyn Stone, 'Britain, France and Franco's Spain in the Aftermath of the Spanish Civil War', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 6.2 (1995), 373-407. Moradiellos has also written about Anglo-Spanish relations after the Civil War, but the chapter covering the period between April and September 1939 serves primarily as a descriptive overview of events until the outbreak of the Second World War. Moreover, while the chapter which covers the period between the start of the war and the resignation of Chamberlain in May 1940 provides a more analytical approach, it serves as a pretext for the book's primary focus on Anglo-Spanish relations once Churchill became Prime Minister, see Enrique Moradiellos, *Franco frente a Churchill. España y Gran Bretaña en la Segunda Guerra Mundial, 1939-1945* (Barcelona: Ediciones Península, 2005).

²⁷ Denis Smyth, *Diplomacy and Strategy of Survival: British Policy and Franco's Spain, 1940-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

²⁸ Richard Wigg, *Churchill and Spain: The Survival of the Franco Regime, 1940-1945* (London: Routledge, 2005).

²⁹ Historian Andrew Buchanan was also keen to label the U.S. government's approach to its economic relationship with Spain was one of 'appeasement' during this period because, despite the Roosevelt administration's moral opposition to the Franco regime, ensuring Spain's neutrality became paramount after the outbreak of war in 1939, see 'Washington's 'silent ally' in World War II? United States Policy towards Spain, 1939-1945', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 7.2 (2009), 93-117 & *American Grand Strategy in the Mediterranean during World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 53-67.

the passivity of the British government allowed Franco to model himself as a statesman on the examples set by Hitler and Mussolini earlier in the 1930s.³⁰ Indeed, his Axis connexion has been central to many studies of the early foreign policy of the Franco regime.³¹ Paul Preston, for instance, challenged the myths propagated by the regime that Franco skilfully outmanoeuvred Hitler to keep Spain out of the war by focusing on the only meeting between the two dictators at Hendaye in October 1940.³² Preston showed that the Franco would have been willing to enter the Second World War if the Führer had not refused to promise him African territories to form the foundation of a new Spanish empire.³³ Others have explored Franco's relationship with Italy to highlight the imperial nature of the Franco regime and the influence it sought to gain in the Mediterranean.³⁴ Historians Morten Heiberg and Manuel Ros Agudo have demonstrated the depth of intelligence cooperation between Franco's Spain, Germany and Italy during the Civil World War and Second World War.³⁵ In a separate work, Ros Agudo has shown how Franco had made plans before the outbreak of the Second World War to attack Gibraltar in the future and discussed this with the German and Italian governments.³⁶

This thesis builds on the works outlined above to demonstrate the continuity in Britain's policy towards Spain during the 1930s and into the Second World War, and to highlight the

³⁰ In *La perfidia de Albión*, Moradiellos stated his intention to examine the influence both sides were able to have on British foreign policy but, as stated above, he focuses mainly on the reasons for British non-intervention and Spanish perceptions of it. Historians of the Franco regime have focused more on its pro-fascism rather than anti-democratic influences. See, for instance: Joan Maria Thomàs, *La Falange de Franco: Fascismo y fascistización en el régimen de Franco, 1937-1945* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 2001); José Luis Rodríguez Jiménez, *Historia de Falange Española de las JONS* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2000); José Andrés-Gallego, *¿Fascismo o Estado católico? Ideología, religión y censura en la España de Franco, 1937-1941* (Madrid: Ediciones Encuentro, 1997).

³¹ On the German conception of Spain's strategic and economic importance, see Norman Goda, *Tomorrow the World: Hitler, Northwest Africa, and the Path Toward America* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998); Rafael García Pérez, *Franquismo y Tercer Reich. Las relaciones económicas hispano-alemanas durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Constitucionales, 1994). On the Franco Regime's resupply of German submarines, see Charles B. Burdick, "'Moro': The Resupply of German Submarines in Spain, 1939-1942", *Central European History*, 3.3(1970), 256-284.

³² Examples in Luis Suárez Fernández, *España, Franco y la Segunda Guerra Mundial: Desde 1939 hasta 1945* (Madrid: Actas, 1997) & Ricardo de la Cierva, *Hendaya: Punto final* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1981).

³³ Paul Preston, 'Franco and Hitler: The Myth of Hendaye 1940', *Contemporary European History*, 1.1(1992), 1-16.

³⁴ Principal examples in Javier Tusell & Genoveva García Queipo de Llano, *Franco y Mussolini. La política española durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial* (Barcelona: Ediciones Península, 1985); Morten Heiberg, *Emperadores del Mediterráneo: Franco, Mussolini y la guerra civil española* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2003).

³⁵ Morten Heiberg and Manuel Ros Agudo, *La trama oculta de la guerra civil. Los servicios secretos de Franco, 1936-1945* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2006).

³⁶ Manuel Ros Agudo, *La guerra secreta de Franco (1939-1945)* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2002), pp. 55-65. See also Manuel Ros Agudo, *La gran tentación. Franco, el Imperio colonial y los planes de intervención en la Segunda Guerra Mundial* (Barcelona: Styria, 2008); For a study focused on Spanish policy towards Gibraltar during the Second World War, see Juan José Telléz, *Gibraltar en el tiempo de los espías* (Seville: Andalucía Abierta, 2005).

evolution of this policy from one of non-intervention into tacit appeasement of Franco. While the thesis does not deny the existence of ideological prejudices towards the Republic on the part of the British government and Foreign Office, it argues that historians have attached too much importance to them and not enough to Britain's strategic constraints and the threat that the rise of fascism posed to British interests in the summer of 1936.³⁷ Indeed, Spain was a strategically important state for Britain's conception of foreign policy, particularly because of Gibraltar. Britain's continued possession of this vantage point over the western entrance to the Mediterranean relied on a benevolent Spanish attitude towards the issue.³⁸ Accordingly, the thesis incorporates the threat of fascism into its examination of British perceptions of and relations with Spain before, during and after the Civil War. As we will see, the Foreign Office considered the military rebels and fascist intervention as greater threats than a Republican victory because the broader goal of general appeasement increasingly pervaded the British government's formulation of foreign policy. Strategic considerations outweighed ideological ones, and in practice this meant the British government tacitly accepted a rebel victory while harbouring the hope that a policy of appeasement would separate Franco from the Axis Powers. The alternative — support for the Republic — at least from the British perspective would have resulted in the very European war which the policy of general appeasement sought to prevent.

Appeasement's Place in History

There were many critics of the British government's policies of appeasement and non-intervention during the 1930s but it was at the end of the 'Phoney War' that the failures of British foreign policy during this period became undeniable. At the end of May 1940, after Hitler had dealt the Allies a strategic blow and the French war effort stood on the verge of collapse, three journalists under the pseudonym 'Cato' began work on a polemic against those guilty for allowing Britain to find itself in such a desperate position. The book, titled *Guilty Men*, appeared in early July 1940 and was on

³⁷ On official British views of fascism and communism, the role these ideologies played in the formulation of foreign policy, and a convincing conclusion that anti-communism did not govern British policy, see G. Bruce Strang, 'The Spirit of Ulysses? Ideology and British Appeasement in the 1930s', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 19.3 (2008), 481-526.

³⁸ For a history of Gibraltar's strategic importance and the tensions it created in Anglo-Spanish relations, see Gareth Stockey, *Gibraltar: 'A Dagger in the Spine of Spain?'* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2009), pp. 10-19; George Hills, *Rock of Contention: A History of Gibraltar* (London: Robert Hale, 1974); Julio Ponce Alberca, *Gibraltar and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39: Local, National and International Perspectives* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

its twentieth reprint by October. The governments of Ramsay MacDonald, Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain were all targets of the book's attacks, which accused them of underestimating the German threat and outright incompetence. Appeasement, according to *Guilty Men*, was the 'deliberate surrender of small nations in the face of Hitler's blatant bullying'.³⁹ By the end of the war, people across the political spectrum agreed that there should be no repetition of the mistakes of appeasement and thereby endorsed the 'guilty men' interpretation. Churchill, who had been a vocal critic of the government's appeasement policy in the years preceding the war, cemented his own place in history as an anti-appeaser in his six-volume history of the Second World War, the first volume of which appeared in 1948 and condemned appeasement for its failure to prevent the conflict.⁴⁰

By the 1960s the 'guilty men' thesis was still the dominant one but revisionist interpretations gradually began to break through and challenge this condemnation of appeasement. Donald Cameron Watt, for instance, paved the way for a revisionist school which tried to understand appeasement rather than condemn it in hindsight. In contrast to the criticisms made in earlier accounts, appeasement gained more of a reputation as the outcome of political, strategic and economic constraints which prevented British policymakers from pursuing alternative policies.⁴¹ In 1966, Martin Gilbert, who just three years earlier, with Richard Gott, had published a book perpetuating the 'guilty men' thesis, revised his interpretation and argued that appeasement was a 'noble idea' rooted in 'common sense'. Moreover, he argued that appeasement had little to do with Chamberlain, but rather that it was an integral part of British interwar foreign policy and this 'attitude of mind' had been present since the Treaty of Versailles.⁴²

Once archival records from the 1930s became available in the late 1960s, they opened the door to a surge in publications, many of which not only highlighted the weaknesses of the 'guilty men' interpretation, but also explored new avenues. For instance, the economic constraints that made any alternative to appeasement difficult became a central focus for some historians, while

³⁹ Cato, *Guilty Men* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1940).

⁴⁰ Winston Churchill, *The Second World War: The Gathering Storm, Vol. I* (London: Cassell, 1948). For an overview of Churchill's attitude towards the British government's foreign policy during the 1930s, see R.A.C. Parker, *Churchill and Appeasement: Could Churchill have prevented the Second World War?* (London: Macmillan, 2000).

⁴¹ For instance, see Donald Cameron Watt, 'Appeasement: The Rise of a Revisionist School?', *Political Quarterly*, 36.2(1965), 191-213; David Dilks, 'Appeasement Revisited', *University of Leeds Review*, 15.1 (1972) 1-10.

⁴² Martin Gilbert and Richard Gott, *The Appeasers* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1963); for Gilbert's revisionist account, see *The Roots of Appeasement* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1966).

some shifted their attention to other domestic constraints, such as public opinion whose attitude the recent memory of the Great War shaped towards the prospect of another conflict in Europe.⁴³ Historians such as Andrew Stedman have explored the alternative policies open to successive British governments during the 1930s and argued there was little else they could have done.⁴⁴ However, there has never been anything close to a consensus on whether appeasement was a rational policy or exactly who, if anyone, was to blame for the inability of the British government to prevent the Second World War.⁴⁵ Rather, despite the progress historians have made in understanding the complexities of appeasement, the ‘guilty men’ thesis still occasionally re-emerges and enjoys considerable non-academic currency.⁴⁶

Perhaps the most unifying theme in appeasement studies, however, is that historians usually centre their attention around Anglo-German relations. It is worth pointing out that this is understandable because Nazi Germany represented the most significant threat to peace in interwar Europe. On the other hand, the centrality of Germany limits our understanding of appeasement, not least because we have come to regard it primarily as a policy of granting concessions to avoid war.

⁴³ For examples of economic restraints, see Robert Paul Shay, *British Rearmament in the Thirties: Politics and Profits* (Guildford: Princeton University Press, 1977); G. C. Peden, *British Rearmament and the Treasury, 1932-1939* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1979). For works that have focused on the restraints imposed by public opinion, see Franklin Gannon, *The British Press and Germany, 1936-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); Anthony Adamthwaite, ‘The British Government and the Media, 1937-1938’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 18.2 (1983), 281-297; Richard Cockett, *Twilight of Truth: Chamberlain, Appeasement and the Manipulation of the Press* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989); Frank McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain, Appeasement and the British Road to War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 114-132. Much more recently, Daniel Hucker has shifted focus back to the importance of public opinion, see *Public Opinion and the End of Appeasement in Britain and France* (Ashgate: Routledge, 2011).

⁴⁴ Andrew Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement: Neville Chamberlain and Hitler’s Germany* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2015). On Chamberlain’s rejection of alliance diplomacy that some in the Foreign Office favoured, see Michael L. Roi, *Alternative to Appeasement: Sir Robert Vansittart and Alliance Diplomacy, 1934-1937* (London: Greenwood, 1997). For an account that places the blame for Britain’s failure to form an alliance with the Soviet Union on Chamberlain, see Louise Grace Shaw, *The British Political Elite and the Soviet Union, 1937-1939* (London: Routledge, 2003).

⁴⁵ For a detailed overview of the evolution of appeasement studies, see Sidney Aster, ‘Appeasement: Before and After Revisionism’, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 19.3 (2008), 443-480. Several historians, however, have taken a different line. In the early 1960s, for instance, A.J.P. Taylor argued controversially Hitler was simply an opportunist with limited ambitions and that Chamberlain’s willingness to break away from general appeasement after the invasion of Czechoslovakia and Poland in 1939 caused the Second World War, see *The Origins of the Second World War* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1961). James Levy also broke rank by painting appeasement in a positive light, arguing Chamberlain skilfully bought Britain more time for rearmament, see *Appeasement and Rearmament: Britain, 1936-1939* (London: Rowan & Littlefield, 2006).

⁴⁶ For examples, see Anthony Adamthwaite, *The Making of the Second World War* (London: Routledge, 1992, originally published 1977); Donald Kagan, *On the Origins of War and the Preservation of Peace* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1996); Robert Shepherd, *A Class Divided: Appeasement and the Road to Munich, 1938* (London: Macmillan, 1988); John Ruggiero, *Neville Chamberlain and British Rearmament: Pride, Prejudice and Politics* (London: Greenwood Press, 1999).

Indeed, historians who have focused primarily on Anglo-German relations have often presented issues between Britain and other states, such as Italy and Spain, as ones of less importance within the context of ‘appeasement’. For instance, R.A.C. Parker, in one of the key works on British foreign policy in the 1930s, presents British non-intervention in Spain as a temporary crisis-management response aimed to prevent the outbreak of a wider European war.⁴⁷ More recently, Tim Bouverie’s refreshing overview of appeasement centred predominantly on Anglo-German relations and focused on Anglo-Italian relations or the Spanish Civil War only where necessary to provide context for Anglo-German relations.⁴⁸ Moving away from a German-centric approach, this thesis uses a broader definition of appeasement to understand not only the more general goals of the policy, but also its specific branches which the British government pursued towards individual states.⁴⁹

Defining Appeasement

Appeasement has had different meanings for different people, depending on the time or context in which they use the word. It is the Chamberlain brand of appeasement and its failure to diffuse fascist aggression in the 1930s, however, that has stuck in popular memory.⁵⁰ For historian Brian McKercher, for instance, the overall objective of British foreign policy between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries was the pursuit of stability which relied on maintaining power balances, particularly in Europe. However, once Chamberlain replaced Baldwin as Prime Minister, he began to reconstruct British foreign policy around the concept of appeasement and seeking rapprochement

⁴⁷ R.A.C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1993), pp. 80-92.

⁴⁸ Tim Bouverie, *Appeasing Hitler: Chamberlain, Churchill and the Road to War* (London: The Bodley Head, 2019). There are, however, some exceptions. For instance, see Reynolds M. Salerno, *Vital Crossroads: Mediterranean Origins of the Second World War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Richard Hammond, ‘An Enduring Influence on Imperial Defence and Grand Strategy: British Perceptions of the Italian Navy, 1935–1943’, *International History Review*, 39.5 (2017), 810-835.

⁴⁹ See, for instance, *Ibid.*, pp. 817-822.

⁵⁰ Indeed, since the 1930s representatives of nation states have frequently employed the term as a warning of what not to do in response to the aggressive ambitions, imagined or otherwise, of another state. Neville Chamberlain’s failed attempt to appease Germany, they argue, has proved beyond doubt that appeasement as a policy simply does not work. Accordingly, the use of the phrase has served as a rhetorical justification for several foreign interventions since the Second World War, such as Korea, Vietnam and Suez in the 1950s, Cuba in the 1960s, the Falklands in the 1980s, the Gulf War in the 1990s and, much more recently, Iraq in the 2000s. When Barrack Obama pledged in 2008 to reach a nuclear armaments deal with Iran as part of his presidential bid, George W. Bush, who had used the concept of appeasement to justify the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq five years earlier, compared this pledge to the appeasement of Nazi Germany in the 1930s.

with Germany and Italy. Accordingly, McKercher argues, appeasement emerged with Chamberlain and the Anschluss in March 1938 was its first test.⁵¹ Frank McDonough has taken a similar line, arguing that once Chamberlain became Prime Minister, Britain entered a phase of ‘active appeasement’, although he characterises British foreign policy between 1931 and 1937 as ‘passive appeasement’.⁵² Others have simply considered appeasement as a traditional cornerstone of British foreign policy and therefore more of a general attitude towards foreign policy.⁵³ N.J. Crowson, for example, examined the attitudes and understandings of appeasement of Conservative MPs from across Britain during the 1930s and argued that we ‘ought to conceive “appeasement” as an underlying attitude of mind which aimed to anticipate and avoid conflict by concession and negotiation, which is why “realism” and “appeasement” were practically synonymous for Conservatives in the 1930s’.⁵⁴

The rise of fascism altered understandings of what appeasement meant. Before the foreign policies of Hitler and Mussolini posed a direct threat to British interests, policymakers in London typically understood appeasement in the ways suggested by historians such as Crowson. Indeed, in the 1920s the concept of appeasement was often associated with the issue of the repayment of war debts. In a speech in September 1925, for instance, Winston Churchill, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, told his audience,

We think it our duty to consider not only the capacity of our debtors to pay, but the circumstances in which these debts were incurred. We believe it also to be in the interests of Britain to promote a general appeasement and revival on the continent of Europe. It is in our moral interests, it is in our material interests.⁵⁵

In this sense, appeasement was an environment in which the states of Europe maintained peace and in which mutual cooperation would create a stable and affluent continent. Of course, because Germany was Britain’s primary adversary during the First World War, hopes for sustained peace

⁵¹ B.J.C. McKercher, ‘Anschluss: The Chamberlain Government and the First Test of Appeasement, February-March 1938’, *International History Review*, 39.2 (2017), 274-294.

⁵² McDonough, *Appeasement and the British Road to War*, p. 1.

⁵³ Paul Kennedy, ‘The Tradition of Appeasement in British Foreign Policy, 1865-1939,’ *British Journal of International Studies*, 2.3 (1976), 195-215; Paul W. Schroeder, ‘Munich and the British Tradition,’ *Historical Journal*, 19.1 (1976), 223-243.

⁵⁴ N.J. Crowson, *Facing Fascism: The Conservative Party and the European Dictators, 1935-1940* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 3.

⁵⁵ TNA.CAB24/175/38, CP 438(25), 20/10/1925.

in Europe centred on the role Germany would play in Europe in future and the appointment of Adolf Hitler as German Chancellor in January 1933 therefore forced the British government to reassess its foreign policy. According to the Cabinet's understanding of appeasement in December 1933, for instance, appeasement amounted to 'political assurances calculated to improve and consolidate good relations between Germany and her neighbours'.⁵⁶ In January 1934, a Cabinet memorandum detailing the British government's policy in regard to disarmament stipulated that

a general agreement securing the limitation of armaments at the lowest practicable level would be the most effective and significant proof of international appeasement and an encouragement of the mutual confidence which springs from good and neighbourly relations. Consequently, His Majesty's Government regard agreement about armaments not as an end in itself, but rather as a concomitant of world peace and as an outcome of political amelioration.⁵⁷

In documents such as these, appeasement comes across as something that described efforts to ensure lasting peace and stability, although it was an evolving concept. However, as Hitler challenged the balance of power in Europe, the British government shifted to a policy of seeking bilateral agreements with Germany that largely took the form of granting concessions to avoid war.

In his memoirs, Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary from December 1935 to February 1938, reflected on common understandings of appeasement in the 1930s and the differences in the ways he and Neville Chamberlain understood it. He said he had

occasionally used the word 'appeasement' in a speech or minute for the Foreign Office in the sense of the first meaning given in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'to bring peace, settle (strife, etc.)'. It was not until some years later, when the results of the foreign policy pursued by Mr. Chamberlain became apparent, that the word was more strongly associated with the last meaning given in the dictionary, 'to pacify, by satisfying demands'.⁵⁸

These differences would later lead to Eden's resignation in February 1938. We will see later, in chapter four, how Spain played an important role in dividing Eden and Chamberlain beyond the issue of Italian intervention, but it is worth pointing out here that the Franco regime, like Fascist Italy, increasingly viewed Eden as an obstacle to friendlier relations with the British government. Unlike with Hitler's Germany, Eden recognised the comparative weakness of Mussolini and

⁵⁶ TNA.CAB24/245/19, CP 299(33), 12/12/1933.

⁵⁷ TNA.CAB24/247/10, CP 10(34), 30/1/1934.

⁵⁸ Anthony Eden, *The Eden Memoirs: Facing the Dictators* (London: Cassell, 1962), p. 324.

believed the best way to pacify him was to take a firmer stand early on. However, as we will see, the geostrategic importance of the Iberian Peninsula, fascist intervention in Spain and the diplomacy of the rebel government forced even Eden into tacit acceptance of a policy of appeasing Franco.

The changing nature of appeasement created an environment which empowered the leaders of relatively weaker states, such as Franco or Mussolini, and enabled them to influence British foreign policy. Italy alone, for instance, was militarily too weak to pose any real danger to the British government but a failure to appease Mussolini could have had two disastrous consequences. Firstly, a war with Italy would have caused at least some damage to the Royal Navy fleet and thereby weakened British naval strength ahead of a possible conflict with Germany in the future. With the increasing threat of Japanese aggression in the Far East, this could have rendered the Royal Navy even less effective if Britain had to fight a war against Germany and Japan simultaneously. Secondly, Italo-German rapprochement, even if Mussolini maintained neutrality in a future war in Europe, could have made strategic planning far more difficult for the British government because it would have to overstretch its resources across Europe and the Far East.⁵⁹

By the 1930s, the British government sought to circumvent these threats through the policy of general appeasement. However, rather than viewing the strategy of appeasement as a policy of granting concessions, this thesis defines the appeasement as a framework in which the British government formulated its foreign policy in the interwar period. Within this framework that had appeasement as its ultimate goal, the British government considered how its diplomatic relations with states that were not targets of the policy might affect this goal. To appease Hitler and Mussolini, for instance, the British government based many important foreign-policy decisions on assumptions of how they would react. Broadly speaking, this formed part of an attempt to prevent the division of Europe into hostile ideological blocs, something which British policymakers believed had been a major cause of the First World War.⁶⁰

This anticipatory nature of appeasement was perhaps most significant in shaping Britain's relations with the Soviet Union. Anti-communism throughout the 1920s and 1930s was an

⁵⁹ See B.J.C. McKercher, 'National Security and Imperial Defence: British Grand Strategy and Appeasement, 1930-1939', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 19.3 (2008), 391-442.

⁶⁰ Paul Doerr, *British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 79, 190.

important element of British foreign policy and certainly pushed some to see fascism as a bulwark against the spread of communism. However, while there were some Conservatives who saw agreements with Germany and Italy as the better alternative because of fascist sympathies, these alone cannot explain why British policy towards the Soviet Union had by the summer of 1939 created a situation in which Stalin could reach an agreement with Hitler.⁶¹ Of course, uncertainty surrounding the Red Army's effectiveness and reliability was an important strategic factor which allowed British strategists and policymakers not to attach too much importance to forming an alliance with the Soviet Union. Moreover, the attitudes of the smaller eastern European states towards an Anglo-Soviet alliance, particularly the Polish government's opposition to the passage of Soviet troops through its territory, led the British never to make an active effort to form such a partnership until the summer of 1939.⁶² Nevertheless, in the years before the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the British government had distanced itself from the Soviet Union diplomatically because it was concerned about how Hitler and Mussolini might perceive Anglo-Soviet rapprochement as a policy of encirclement. Indeed, Hitler made this clear when he used the Franco-Soviet Treaty of Mutual Assistance as a pretext for sending troops into the Rhineland in March 1936.⁶³

⁶¹ For instance, for a list of Conservatives who were members of the Anglo-German Fellowship, see Crowson, *Facing Fascism*, p. 207. Some Conservatives such as Lord Londonderry were openly pro- Nazi Germany, see Ian Kershaw, *Making Friends with Hitler: Lord Londonderry and Britain's Road to War* (London: Allen Lane, 2004). On the complex relationship between conservatism and fascism, see the collection in Martin Blinkhorn's edited volume, *Fascists and Conservatives: The Radical Right and the Establishment in Twentieth-Century Europe* (London: Routledge, 2003, originally published 1990). On different views within the Foreign Office, see Peter Neville, 'Rival Foreign Office Perceptions of Germany, 1936-39', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 13.3 (2002), 137-152. For a study on the Foreign Office's attitudes towards communism and fascism, see Donald Lammers, 'Fascism, Communism and the Foreign Office, 1937-1939', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 6.3 (1971), 66-86.

⁶² Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, pp. 216-245; P.E. Caquet, 'The Balance of Forces on the Eve of Munich', *International History Review*, 40.1 (2018), 20-40 (p. 25).

⁶³ Martin Thomas, *Britain, France & Appeasement: Anglo-French Relations in the Popular Front Era* (Oxford: Berg, 1996), pp. 25-53. We can also see the element of appeasement at play in British policy towards Austria. For example, in 1934 Mussolini made it clear to the British government that he too was concerned about German strength and aggression in the future. He also became a close friend of Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss with whom he shared these concerns. Although Dollfuss and Mussolini were determined to restrain Hitler and his determination to unify Austria and Germany, they lacked British support. Indeed, when in January 1934 Dollfuss announced that he would protest to the League of Nations about German interference in Austria he found little enthusiasm in London. The French government, meanwhile, supported Dollfuss and proposed to bring its own complaints to Geneva regarding German rearmament. The British rejection of this was due to concerns that if 'legal remedies' did not work, firmer action which might provoke German hostility would become necessary. Moreover, when Dollfuss asked the British government directly for support, then Foreign Secretary Sir John Simon turned him down because he did not want to antagonise Hitler and lose the opportunity of reaching an agreement with Germany at the Disarmament Conference, see Richard Lamb, *Mussolini and the British* (London: John Murray, 1997), pp. 101-102.

Wedge Strategies: Using Appeasement to Prevent Alliances

As well as anticipating the hostile reaction of the fascist states to its own diplomatic manoeuvres, one of the principal aims of the British government's strategy of appeasement was to prevent the formation of hostile alliances. In this sense, the strategy of appeasement sought to avoid war or at least create better conditions in which to wage one and this made the policy susceptible to change. Indeed, when an individual state – such as Italy – was able to threaten British interests directly, either by inflicting damage on British resources or through its relationship with Britain's potential adversaries, this state could become the target of an appeasement policy.⁶⁴ In anticipation of the formation of hostile alliances, the British government used wedge strategies to break up or weaken them. As we will see, because of the circumstances of the Spanish Civil War, this objective pushed Britain's policy of non-intervention to evolve into a policy of appeasing Franco. Indeed, Franco became an object of the British government's policy of general appeasement because non-intervention, including British support for the Non-Intervention Agreement, was a product of that broad strategy. Aside from confining the conflict to Spain, with non-intervention the British government sought to ensure that whatever regime emerged from the Civil War did not adopt a foreign policy hostile towards British interests. Accordingly, because of Franco's relations with the Axis Powers and Franco's continuous military successes against the Republic, British policy shifted to ensuring that the Franco regime would not join the Axis Powers in a hostile alliance against Britain.

To move away from seeing appeasement as a policy simply of granting concessions to Nazi Germany in the hope of avoiding war, political scientists Norrin Ripsman and Jack Levy have developed a broader definition and identified three types of appeasement. Firstly, they acknowledged what we most often associate with the term 'appeasement' – resolving the grievances of a potential adversary. Secondly, they proposed another type of appeasement which they labelled 'diffusing secondary threats'. Lastly, they suggested appeasement can be a policy of avoiding war in the short term in order to prepare for conflict in the long-term.⁶⁵ In this thesis we will focus on 'diffusing secondary threats' to identify the process through which Anglo-Spanish

⁶⁴ The Cabinet first considered war with Italy a real possibility in 1935, see Hammond, 'An Enduring Influence', pp. 817-818.

⁶⁵ Norrin Ripsman and Jack Levy, 'Wishful Thinking or Buying Time?: The Logic of British Appeasement in the 1930s', *International Security*, 33.2 (2008), 148-181.

relations went to make Franco's Spain a branch of this policy. Within this, Ripsman and Levy proposed three sub-types:

1. 'Conserving resources' (granting concessions to a secondary adversary to free up resources for use against a primary adversary)
2. 'Denying allies' (appeasing a secondary adversary to prevent it from forming an alliance with a primary adversary or giving it military support)
3. 'Redirecting the threat' (a stronger version of 'denying allies' which involves appeasing a secondary adversary in order to redirect its hostility towards the primary threat)

Although, as we will see, each of these played a role in Anglo-Spanish relations, it is primarily the second subtype that concerns us in this thesis. This is because Franco never posed a direct military threat to the British government to necessitate the preservation of resources, and redirecting Franco's hostility was never a realistic option because of his commitment to the Axis Powers.

Political scientist Timothy Crawford has further developed this idea of a 'wedge strategy' and defines it as 'a state's attempt to prevent, break up or weaken a threatening or blocking alliance at an acceptable cost'. He proposes that a wedge strategy's success depends largely on three main factors which centre on 'selectively accommodating' an adversary. Firstly, wedge strategies that 'selectively accommodate' an adversary while standing firm against another are most likely to divide an opposing coalition than strategies that depend on confrontation and coercion. Secondly, selective accommodation is most effective in producing neutral alignments rather than redirecting their hostility. Finally, Crawford proposes that selective accommodation works best when it manipulates secondary interests, such as economic relationships, that benefit the target but remain under the control of the state that seeks to divide adversaries.⁶⁶

Crawford proposes four possible outcomes of successful selective accommodation:

- 1) Re-alignment (shifting a target from an opposing alliance to a friendly one)
- 2) De-alignment (neutralising a target before its commitment to an ally increases)

⁶⁶ Timothy Crawford, 'Preventing Enemy Coalitions: How Wedge Strategies Shape Power Politics', *International Security*, 35.4 (2011), 155-189 (pp. 156-158).

- 3) Pre-alignment (preserving the neutrality of a target that is not yet allied but is prone to join the enemy camp)
- 4) Dis-alignment (weakening a target's co-operation with an opposing bloc, especially through economic agreements, without trying to convert the target into a neutral or an ally).

It is in this context of appeasement that British policy towards Spain comes into focus. In fact, as we will see, each element identified here by Crawford applies to Britain's policy towards Spain at certain stages during this period. Indeed, during the Civil War, the British government sought to curry favour with Franco and weaken his attachments to the Axis Powers. After the de jure recognition of Franco in February 1939 failed to achieve this, the British government sought to neutralise Franco before his commitment to the Axis strengthened. Once the Second World War began, the British policy had failed to ensure benevolent neutrality and so shifted to preserving Franco's neutrality in practice because German successes made him prone to enter the war at an advantageous moment, such as the fall of France. This overlapped with a policy of 'dis-alignment' as the British government began to use the possibility of a generous War Trade Agreement to weaken Franco's cooperation with the Axis Powers. In this sense, the thesis goes further than previous studies by examining more closely the changes in British policy towards Spain over time and how the evolution of British non-intervention into a policy of appeasement affected Anglo-Spanish relations.

Appeasement's Contradiction: Demonstrations of Weakness as Sources of Encouragement

By moving beyond viewing appeasement as a policy of granting concessions to Nazi Germany and examining the policy in relation to Spain, we can better understand how appeasement policies can affect power dynamics in diplomatic relationships. By default, all types of appeasement policies concede some influence in a bilateral relationship to the target state because such a policy relies on the appeasing state's willingness either to make concessions or to overlook actions of the target state. These actions might include the target state's capacity to alter power balances in a wider context or to threaten the appeasing state's interests directly. Accordingly, appeasement can be a self-perpetuating policy because it grants advantages to its target state, such as the freedom to intervene in foreign conflicts that might upset international power balances or embark upon

ambitious imperialist policies without fear of consequences, and relies on that state to define the point at which it no longer wishes to receive these benefits. Put simply, an appeasement policy gives its target state more freedom in its foreign policy because the appeasing state is unlikely to oppose the target state's actions with a threat of aggression.

In this thesis, we will use this concept of encouragement as a marker of appeasement in the context of Anglo-Spanish relations because of its presence in Anglo-German and Anglo-Italian relations. In the 1920s, before Mussolini committed to attaching his foreign policy ambitions to those of the Third Reich, for instance, he took a largely cautious approach to foreign policy and, rhetoric aside, acknowledged that his actions had to be compatible with the existing balance of power in Europe.⁶⁷ However, when the British government signed the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, Mussolini interpreted this as a sign of British weakness and sought to take advantage of the shifting power balances in Europe.⁶⁸ In fact, Dino Grandi, the Italian Ambassador at London between 1932 and 1939, actively encouraged Mussolini to pursue a more aggressive foreign policy. According to his reading of British politics, Grandi recommended that Mussolini adopt the same tactics which the German and Japanese governments had used in relation to the League of Nations. If Britain feared Italy would also withdraw from the League, Grandi advised, it would become much more accommodating to Italian demands. This perception of British weakness led Grandi at the end of August 1935 to advise Mussolini that sanctions were an unlikely response to an Italian invasion of Abyssinia because the Royal Navy would be too overstretched and vulnerable to

⁶⁷ According to MacGregor Knox, alignment with Nazi Germany formed part of Mussolini's geopolitical agenda even before coming to power in 1922, see *Common Destiny*, pp. 113-147; see also Robert Mallett, *Mussolini and the Origins of the Second World War, 1933-1940* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 106-150.

⁶⁸ Indeed, until 1935 he even tried to work with the British and French to prevent the rise of a militarised Germany. At the Stresa Conference of April 1935, for instance, Britain and Italy reaffirmed their commitments under the 1925 Locarno Treaties and agreed to protect Austria's independence against German expansion. Almost immediately after the Stresa Conference, however, the British government signed the Anglo-German Naval Agreement. Hitler's challenge to power structures in Europe had already created an environment in which a more aggressive Italian foreign policy could emerge and, perceiving the Naval Agreement as a sign of British weakness, Mussolini shifted his policy to take advantage of the situation. The encouragement Mussolini found is discussed briefly in Denis Mack Smith, *Mussolini: A Biography* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1982), pp. 188-196. See also Aaron L. Goldman, 'Sir Robert Vansittart's Search for Italian Cooperation against Hitler, 1933-1936', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 9.3 (1974), 93-130. Patrick Buchanan considers the Stresa Front as the last opportunity to stop German expansion and prevent the Second World War, see *Churchill, Hitler and the Unnecessary War: How Britain Lost Its Empire and the West Lost the World* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2008), pp. 131-161. On Mussolini's reaction to Anglo-German Naval Agreement, see Richard Lamb, *Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce's Italy on the World Stage* (London: Fromm, 1999), p. 114.

enforce them.⁶⁹ Just over a month later, Italian forces invaded Abyssinia. After the assumption that there would be no serious consequences for the invasion proved correct, Mussolini realised he had little reason to fear the British government's response to his actions in the future, and this influenced his decision to intervene in Spain.⁷⁰

This is not to say that Britain was militarily weak in the 1930s and could not have pursued an alternative foreign policy, but it is important to highlight international perceptions of British foreign policy during this decade. Indeed, throughout this period British policymakers were open about the fact that they wanted to avoid another war in Europe and spoke frequently of their desire for general disarmament.⁷¹ Even before the rise of Hitler, in November 1932 Stanley Baldwin, at the time Lord President of the Council, infamously summarised in the House of Commons the prevalent fear in Britain of another war: 'I think it is well also for the man in the street to realise that there is no power on earth that can protect him from being bombed. Whatever people may tell him, the bomber will always get through'.⁷² In this regard, the thesis uses the concept of weakness when referring to the British government's reluctance to take a stand against aggression because of the source of encouragement this provided to certain states.

Of course, viewing appeasement as a policy of weakness was not a view limited to fascist powers. In August 1938, for instance, Ivan Maisky, the Soviet Ambassador at London, told Lord Halifax, British Foreign Secretary from February 1938, that the Soviet Union was disappointed in Britain's policy towards the fascist states because 'these policies demonstrate the weakness of the

⁶⁹ John Gooch, *Mussolini and His Generals: The Armed Forces and Fascist Foreign Policy, 1922-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 110, 189-202, 265-269.

⁷⁰ Lamb, *Mussolini and the British*, p. 114. On the origins of the Italian war with Abyssinia, see Robert Mallet, *Mussolini in Ethiopia: The Origins of Fascist Italy's African War, 1919-1935* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). On its significance in relation to the Second World War, see Barry Sullivan, 'More than Meets the Eye: The Ethiopian War and the Origins of the Second World War', in Gordon Martel (ed.), *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered: A.J.P. Taylor and the Historians* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 178-203. This quandary of appeasement influenced the course of German foreign policy in the 1930s. Indeed, the goal of general appeasement branched into a policy of granting concessions to Germany because Hitler's rise to power and the construction of the Third Reich posed a direct threat to British interests and the balance of power in Europe. For instance, although Hitler had withdrawn Germany from the Disarmament Conference and League of Nations and announced the existence of the Luftwaffe by 1936, the remilitarisation of the Rhineland in that year marked the beginning of a process of territorial adjustments in Europe. The passive response from the British and French governments was a source of encouragement for Hitler because it suggested that neither was willing to resist with force further territorial revisions in Europe, Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1936-1945: Nemesis* (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. xxxv-xxxvi, 3-4.

⁷¹ Andrew Webster, 'From Versailles to Geneva: The Many Forms of Interwar Disarmament', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 29.2 (2006), 225-246.

⁷² HC Debate, vol. 270, 10/11/1932, c632.

“Western Democracies” and thereby encourage the aggressors’.⁷³ Pablo de Azcárate, the Spanish Republican Ambassador at London from September 1936, also saw British interwar foreign policy in this way. As he noted in his memoirs,

the two dictators, especially the German one, interpreted Chamberlain’s concessions and his conciliatory attitude not as a sincere desire to reach agreements that could establish peace, but purely and simply as signs of weakness. And so it turned out that ‘appeasement’, far from serving as a device to circumvent the tensions created by Hitler’s demands and resulting aggressiveness, was its most effective stimulant.⁷⁴

It was into this international environment that Franco emerged as a new dictator who could benefit from and exploit British demonstrations of weakness.

It is no surprise that Franco, a general with high ambitions and a loathing of liberal democracy, viewed Britain’s appeasement policy as one of weakness, but to understand how Franco assessed the international situation during these years and conceived of his own place within it, it is worth quoting at length one of his principal biographers, Paul Preston:

The military rising had opened entirely new vistas of ambition and no sooner did he [Franco] begin to cherish an ambition than it was fulfilled. The military rebel who thought he would soon be back in the Canary Islands became Commander-in-Chief. As Generalísimo, he was attracted by the Headship of State. No sooner was that acquired than he began to toy with the idea of a single party like those of his Axis allies. Having tamed the various political forces of the Nationalist coalition and become Jefe Nacional of the FET y de las JONS, he began to envy the clout on the international scene enjoyed by Hitler and Mussolini. In this respect, the humiliation of the western democracies at Munich was particularly striking to him, all the more so in the light of his own impotence as he nervously awaited the outcome of the Czech crisis.

Accordingly, the ceremonial and choreography of his regime would henceforth proclaim that the Caudillo was both a worthy contemporary of the Duce and the Führer and a fitting heir to the great warrior-kings of Spain’s glorious imperial past. He would watch the developing crisis in Europe with a sense that here was an opportunity that he, who had regularly adjusted his ambitions upwards in the last three years, could seize. As Head of State, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Head of Government and National Chief of the Single Party, he had a combination of

⁷³ Ivan Maisky, *The Maisky Diaries: Red Ambassador to the Court of St James’s, 1932-1943*, ed. by Gabriel Gorodetsky (London: Yale University Press, 2015), entry for 17/8/1938, p. 117.

⁷⁴ Pablo de Azcárate, *Mi embajada en Londres durante la guerra civil* (Barcelona: Ariel, 2012), pp. 49-50.

powers unknown in Spain even in the time of Phillip II. Having reached the pinnacle of power and prestige within Spain, to fulfil further ambitions and to redress what he saw as the historical injustices perpetrated against Spain by Britain and France meant wielding power on the international stage.⁷⁵

By viewing Franco from the British perspective as a dictator whose rise to power and ambitions mirrored those of the two principal targets of British appeasement, this thesis will shed new light on relations between the British government and Franco by examining them through the lens of appeasement. Moreover, it will show the ways in which appeasement policies can alter power dynamics in bilateral relationships. Indeed, for the entirety of the period in question, Franco was engaged in a Civil War or recovering from it which restricted his opportunities for an ambitious foreign policy on the scale anywhere close to that of Germany or Italy. Nevertheless, Britain's policy towards Franco gave him leverage in his diplomacy which allowed him to maintain an obstinate and assertive attitude and imitate his German and Italian counterparts.

It is worth pointing out here that the extent to which the Franco regime was 'fascist' is this the subject of ongoing and contentious historiographical debates.⁷⁶ However, how closely the ideology underpinning the Franco regime matched that of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany was not a major cause of anxiety for the British government or Foreign Office. In this sense, there are similarities between British perceptions of 'fascism' in Spain and that in Italy and Germany. For example, the ideology of Mussolini's and later Hitler's regimes evoked varied opinions in Britain, both positive and negative, although the unfavourable attitudes towards both Italy and Germany became much more dominant over the course of the 1930s as the threat posed by the foreign

⁷⁵ Preston, *Franco*, p. 326.

⁷⁶ On ideological influence of the fascist states on Franco, see Ángel Viñas, 'Natural Alliances: The Impact of Nazism and Fascism on Franco's Domestic Policies', in Helen Graham (ed.), *Interrogating Francoism: History and Dictatorship in Twentieth-Century Spain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 139-158. Anti-liberalism and the tendency to view democracy as a decadent and in the process of being replaced by a superior, authoritarian style of government were common in the emerging extreme right discourse that underpinned the military rebellion in Spain, see Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain* (London: Harper Press, 2013), pp. 34-51. On ideological links between the Spanish right and the fascist states before the Civil War, see Raul Morodo, *Los orígenes ideológicos del franquismo: Acción Española* (Madrid: Alianza, 1985); Ismael Saz Campos, *Fascismo y franquismo* (Valencia: Universidad de Valencia, 2004); Joan Maria Thomàs, *Lo que fue el falange* (Madrid: Plaza & Janés, 1999); Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, 'Falangismo, nacionalsocialismo y el mito de Hitler en España (1931-1945)', *Revista de Estudios Políticos*, 169 (2015), 13-43; Ferran Gallego, *Ramiro Ledesma Ramos y el fascismo español* (Madrid: Síntesis, 2005). The military rebel leadership's rejection of parliamentary democracy and liberalism followed similar lines to the rise of fascism in Germany and Italy, see Stanley Payne, *Fascism: Comparison and Definition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980).

policies of the two increased.⁷⁷ In the case of Spain, what concerned British policymakers and advisors more than ideology was how closely Franco would align his foreign policy with the fascist states and attach his ambitions to those of his German and Italian counterparts. As we will see on several occasions in this thesis, those in London and British representatives in Spain often remarked on the extent to which the military rebels and subsequently the Franco regime were adopting the characteristics of the German and Italian governments, but this was not *because* they appeared to be drifting towards a Spanish model of fascism. Rather, it was how this would translate into foreign policy, which increasingly appeared as if a Franco victory would result in a Spanish foreign policy detrimental to British interests. Accordingly, we will see that as the Civil War progressed, there was a deterioration in any sympathy or admiration that existed for Franco the more his victory, largely the result of fascist intervention, seemed to suggest that the Iberian Peninsula might soon become aligned with Britain's likely adversaries in Europe.

Structure and Sources

By focusing on Anglo-Spanish relations within the context of appeasement and utilising archival records from across both Spain and the U.K., the thesis aims primarily to do two things. Firstly, it challenges the tendency in the existing historiography to label British non-intervention in the Civil War as a policy of 'malevolent neutrality' intended to facilitate the overthrow of the Republic. While historians have acknowledged that Spain served as an arena in which the British government could maintain its policy of appeasing Hitler and Mussolini, they have overlooked how appeasement shaped British perceptions of the two sides in the Civil War. By using concepts of appeasement to examine British non-intervention and its evolution into a branch of the wider policy of general appeasement, the policy comes into focus as a result of strategic constraints typical of British interwar foreign policy. Importantly, this approach highlights British fears of a rebel, rather than Republican, victory in the Civil War.

Secondly, the thesis seeks to contribute to our understanding of how appeasement policies evolve and can alter power dynamics within diplomatic relations between two states. By focusing on relations between the British government and Franco during the Spanish Civil War and early

⁷⁷ For example, see Crowson's analysis of Conservative attitudes towards German and Italian fascism in the 1920s and 1930s, *Facing Fascism*, pp. 19-48. See also Strang, 'The Spirit of Ulysses?', pp. 484-493.

part of the Second World War, it shows how appeasement policies are self-perpetuating because they grant advantages to their target state and rely on that state to define the point at which it no longer wishes to receive these benefits. In this respect, the thesis also sheds light on the formulation of Francoist foreign policy by showing not only that he understood the leverage which appeasement gave him in his relations with the British government but also how he used it to dictate the terms of that relationship and assert himself as a statesman.

This assessment of Anglo-Spanish relations adopts a chronological structure. The first section focuses on the period between the proclamation of the Republic in 1931 until the early months of the Civil War when the British government formulated its policy of non-intervention. Chapter one considers British Foreign Office perceptions of Spain's social and political polarisation alongside that simultaneously taking place in Europe. It shows that concerns regarding the rise of fascism and Spain's strategic importance laid the foundation of the non-intervention policy. Chapter two focuses on the formulation of non-intervention and argues that the policy of general appeasement determined how Britain responded to the outbreak of the Civil War more so because of the threat of fascism than communism. Indeed, both the Foreign Office and Chiefs of Staff were in agreement that the British government ought to remain neutral in order to avoid arousing the hostility of either side in Spain. By doing so, they hoped to ensure Spain's neutrality in a future European war, regardless of what regime emerged. From the Spanish perspective, it shows how both sides viewed the policy as one of hostility. For the Spanish government, the Non-Intervention Agreement deprived it of its legal right to purchase arms on the international market to defend itself against an illegal rebellion. For their part, the military rebels believed they were acting in the interests of all European states by preventing the spread of Bolshevism and interpreted non-intervention as a policy that sought to prevent them from doing so.

The second section focuses on the period between September 1936 and February 1939 and examines the evolution of non-intervention into a policy of appeasing Franco. Accordingly, the emphasis of the thesis shifts more towards Anglo-rebel relations, although it does not overlook Britain's relations with Spanish government during this period. Indeed, chapter three shows that the British government genuinely wanted the policy of non-intervention to work but this ultimately gave way to Anglo-rebel rapprochement because of the policy of appeasement. Chapter four traces the evolution of Anglo-rebel relations between January 1938, when Franco established his first real

government with a fully-operational Foreign Ministry, and February 1939, when the British government granted de jure recognition to the Franco regime. It argues that, at this point, the British government withdrew recognition from the Republic because it feared Franco's hostility and alliance with the Axis powers and therefore allowed him to dictate the terms of recognition, even though the Foreign Office and government believed a victory for Franco posed a threat to British interests. This was a direct continuation from the original conception of the policy of non-intervention which had anticipated this. In terms of Crawford's four possible outcomes of selective accommodation discussed above, the end of the Civil War marked the transition from attempts at 're-alignment' to 'de-alignment'.

The final section of the thesis focuses on relations between the British government and the Franco regime from the final stages of the Civil War until Chamberlain's resignation in May 1940. It argues that British policy remained intact and continued to attempt to drive a wedge between Franco and the Axis powers. In this regard, the British government and Foreign Office had anticipated the situation which arose after the end of the Civil War because the policy grew out of the initial aims of non-intervention, which was to ensure Spain's neutrality in a future European war. For his part, Franco continued to exploit the advantages which his relations with the Axis powers and Britain's appeasement policy gave him. However, a new element in Anglo-Spanish relations emerged which coincided with the consolidation of the Franco regime. As he had done during the Civil War, Franco maintained that Britain's non-intervention policy had been hostile towards the rebels. Accordingly, he took advantage of a willingness on the part of the British government to make amends for its policy and this helped to sustain the policy of appeasement. Franco's foreign policy during this period allowed him openly to sympathise and associate with the Axis powers and thereby exacerbate British concerns that he would follow in the footsteps of Hitler and Mussolini. Indeed, within six months of the outbreak of war, Franco would become the beneficiary of a generous War Trade Agreement which the British sought to use to buy Franco's neutrality. In this sense, the limited success of preserving Franco's neutrality gave way to 'dis-alignment' whereby the British government kept its policy of appeasement in place in order to weaken Spain's cooperation with the Axis Powers.

The thesis draws on both previously used and largely overlooked archival records from seventeen archives across the U.K. and Spain, including diplomatic records, private papers and

intelligence sources. Underused archival records include private paper collections of British and Spanish policymakers such as those of the Duke of Alba, the use of which is confined to Spanish studies of this topic, and the papers of British policymakers such as Lord Hailsham, Lord President of the Council until November 1938. This study also draws on intelligence sources which few historians have incorporated into studies of Anglo-Spanish relations. The HW 12 series held at the National Archives in London, for instance, are revealing about what the British government knew of Italian intentions early in the Civil War but only became available in 2003. Moreover, this thesis is the only detailed study of Anglo-Spanish relations written in English to draw extensively on Spanish archival records. Overall, however, the thesis makes its biggest contribution through its use of British and Spanish diplomatic correspondence and the new framework in which it analyses them. Indeed, as we have noted already, historians who have written on this topic have downplayed British concerns about fascism in Spain and a rebel victory, but this thesis puts these concerns at the centre of its analysis.

Overall, this thesis shows that Anglo-Spanish relations in the age of appeasement were more complex than other historians have suggested. Indeed, instead of focusing specifically on the foreign policies of the British government, the Republic or the military rebels, it tries to understand the impact which each of these foreign policies had on each other. This is clearest in Anglo-rebel relations. By using theoretical concepts of appeasement, it traces the evolution of Britain's policy of non-intervention into one of appeasement and shows the ways that Franco was not only able to benefit from this policy, but also to influence it using the agency it conceded to him. Rather than focusing on any ideological prejudices in London against the Republic, the thesis considers Britain's approach to its relations with Spain within the context of appeasement and the fascist threat which this policy sought to pacify. By taking this approach, the thesis makes a contribution to the historiography not only on Anglo-Spanish relations during this period, but also that relating to British appeasement, Spain's Civil War diplomacy and the construction of the Franco regime. In this regard, it provides a more dynamic view than previous studies both because it analyses how British and Francoist foreign policies changed over time as well as the influence which they had upon one another. It concludes that we ought to consider Franco, like Hitler and Mussolini, as a beneficiary of appeasement who intuitively understood how to use appeasement to his advantage.

PART ONE
THE ORIGINS OF NON-INTERVENTION

I

IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF NON-INTERVENTION

The British Foreign Office and Spain's Political Polarisation, 1931-1936

Introduction

On 14 April 1931, large crowds were gathering in streets and squares across Spain. In Madrid, thousands filled the streets around the Royal Palace, waving Republican flags. Two days earlier, Spaniards had gone to the ballot box and demonstrated overwhelmingly that the monarchy no longer represented the interests of the nation. After pondering the result for a couple of days, King Alfonso XIII, enthroned in 1902 at the age of sixteen, accepted that his position was no longer tenable and fled to France that evening. Soon after, provisional president Niceto Alcalá Zamora proclaimed the Second Spanish Republic.⁷⁸ In London, the Marquis de Merry del Val, the Spanish Ambassador, prophesied to his friend Winston Churchill that these political developments would lead to Civil War and resigned from his post as soon as he heard of Alfonso's departure.⁷⁹ In little more than five years, Merry del Val's prophecy would come true.

This chapter focuses on the Foreign Office's perceptions of the social and political polarisation which occurred in Spain after 1931 and led to the Civil War that the country would

⁷⁸ Henry Buckley, *The Life and Death of the Spanish Republic: A Witness to the Spanish Civil War* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2013 [1940]), pp. 40-50.

⁷⁹ Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, University of Cambridge [CAC], Churchill Papers [CHAR], 2/314, Churchill to Merry del Val, 10/12/1937; Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid [AHN], Merry del Val papers, PP.1236/19.665, Merry del Val to Foreign Ministry, 14/4/1931.

endure for almost three years. Several historians who have examined Anglo-Spanish relations during this period have argued that an attitude of hostility developed gradually in London towards the Spanish Republic so that by the summer of 1936, the British Foreign Office and government adopted a policy of non-intervention to facilitate the success of the military rebellion. The strongest advocate of this interpretation is Douglas Little, who characterised the British government's policy of non-intervention as one of 'malevolent neutrality'. Gradually between 1931 and 1936, but especially after the victory of the Popular Front government in the elections of February 1936, Little argues, hostility hardened towards the Republic because of concerns that Spain was drifting towards communist revolution. Accordingly, when the Civil War broke out in July 1936, this communist 'cancer' ensured that ideological concerns took precedence over strategic factors and the British government therefore quickly opted for a 'better dead than Red' response.⁸⁰ The principal problem with this exegesis is that it pays almost no attention to British strategic concerns or the wider context of general appeasement. Similarly, Enrique Moradiellos, despite considering British strategic constraints and appeasement, suggests a fear of communism in Spain and a general aversion to the Republic, especially after February 1936, led to the British government adopting this policy and pursuing a 'benevolent neutrality' towards the rebels.⁸¹

In general, historians have supported their arguments with examples of antipathy of British officials for left-wing elements in Spain, but they have often overlooked British perceptions of the extreme right in light of the growing fascist threat in Europe in the 1930s.⁸² Little's analysis, for instance, draws on examples of negative comments made by Foreign Office Western Department clerks about left-wing groups in Spain and conflates their opinions with official 'Whitehall' policy. Yet high-ranking Foreign Office officials seldom wrote in the minutes on despatches sent from British diplomats in Spain, and it is unlikely that they paid much attention to this correspondence until spring and summer 1936. This presents problems when considering official British perceptions of Spain during this period. Whilst high-ranking Foreign Office officials said very little about Spain, compared to discussions prompted by despatches from Berlin or Rome, British

⁸⁰ Little, 'Red Scare, 1936', p. 311.

⁸¹ Moradiellos, *Neutralidad benévola*, pp. 77-117; Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albión*, 24-39.

⁸² As Spanish society became increasingly polarised during the republican period, a fascist movement developed in Spain and would later play a major role in Franco's new state. See Ángela Cenarro Lagunas, *El fin de la esperanza: fascismo y guerra civil en la provincia de Teruel (1936-1939)* (Teruel: Instituto de Estudios Turolenses, 1996), 67-91; Stanley Payne, *Falange: A History of Spanish Fascism* (London, 1962); Javier Jiménez Campo, *El fascismo en la crisis de la Segunda República española* (Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 1979).

politicians said even less. Of course, the views of Western Department officials who digested reports from British diplomats in Spain between 1931 and 1936 were important as they were a source of information for policy-makers once the latter began to take more of an interest in Spanish affairs after the spring of 1936.

Through an analysis of the perceptions of Spain in the Foreign Office's Western Department and British diplomatic staff in Spain, this chapter argues that historians have overstated British hostility towards a left-wing government in Madrid before the outbreak of Civil War. As the Civil War almost immediately transformed into an international conflict, there are many difficulties in linking British perceptions only of left-wing government in Spain with Britain's immediate adoption of a policy of non-intervention. Accordingly, a focus on British perceptions of political polarisation in Spain until the outbreak of the Civil War demonstrates that both the Foreign Office and British ambassadors at Madrid – George Grahame (1928-1935), whom Spanish President Niceto Alcalá Zamora referred to as a 'true friend of Spain', and Henry Chilton (1935-1939) – considered the Second Republic a viable political project that they wanted to succeed, even after the election of the Popular Front in February 1936.⁸³

In order for the Republic to succeed in ensuring political stability, the Foreign Office believed a Spanish government inclusive of right and left-wing elements was essential. As we will see, British policymakers and advisors projected onto Spain their own experiences in dealing with labour unrest. Indeed, the political culture cultivated in Britain since the First World War in response to labour militancy informed British assessments of political developments in Spain between 1931 and 1936. Stanley Baldwin, Prime Minister of the Conservative-dominated National Government at the outbreak of the Civil War in Spain, for instance, had played a pivotal role in resolving the General Strike of 1926 during his second term as Prime Minister and played a crucial part in cultivating this more inclusive political culture.⁸⁴ The experience of the tumultuous 1920s instilled British politicians and civil servants with an appreciation of the fact that improved living

⁸³ Niceto Alcalá Zamora, *Memorias: segundo texto de mis memorias* (Barcelona: Espejo de España, 1977), p. 326.

⁸⁴ Philip Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative Leadership and National Values* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 204, 211, 235-38, 325-26, 353. Laura Beers, "'Is this man an anarchist?': Industrial Action and the Battle for Public Opinion in Interwar Britain", *Journal of Modern History*, 82.1 (2010), 30-60; Keith Jeffrey and Peter Hennessy, *States of Emergency: British Governments and Strikebreaking since 1919* (London: Routledge, 1983), pp. 102-42. See also Scott Ramsay, 'Ideological Foundations of British Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War: Foreign Office Perceptions of Political Polarisation in Spain, 1931-1936', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 30.1 (2020), 44-64.

standards for the working class provided a more stable political environment in which general economic progress and prosperity were possible. In Spain's case, British observers believed that a stable and inclusive government would not only tame the extreme elements of the left, but also avoid a situation in which fascism could take hold on the Iberian Peninsula.

The Years of Reform, 1931-1933

After the fall of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship (1923-1930), the right in Spain stood in disarray whilst left-wing opinion overwhelmingly favoured a Republic.⁸⁵ Although some right-wing and conservative groups were prepared to accept the new regime in principle, the Republic failed to consolidate a cohesive social base that would have paved the way for the introduction of moderate reforms. Instead, attempts to consolidate itself through structural reforms of education, land, and the military solidified significant right-wing opposition almost immediately.⁸⁶ Francisco Largo Caballero, leader of the Socialist Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT) and Minister of Labour, introduced a series of agrarian reforms aimed at improving living and working conditions that would be a source of contention and a major cause of the coup in 1936.⁸⁷ Whilst Largo Caballero's reforms provoked the hostility of many landowners, reforms relating to the Spanish military and Catholic Church solidified opposition to the regime amongst other powerful sectors of Spanish society. Manuel Azaña, the Minister of War, attempted to modernise the military by reducing the inflated officer corps and making cuts to save money.⁸⁸ Catholic opposition to the Republic hardened early on after left-wing groups burned a number of churches in Madrid in May 1931 without any serious opposition from the government. The announcement of the proposed Article 26 of the Constitution, which sought to prohibit the Church from engaging in education, further exacerbated the religious question.⁸⁹ In summary, the Republic's reforms consolidated the hostility

⁸⁵ Javier Tusell, *La Segunda República en Madrid: elecciones y partidos políticos* (Madrid: Tecnos, 1970), 23-27.

⁸⁶ Helen Graham, 'Reform as Promise and Threat: Political Progressives and Blueprints for Change in Spain, 1931-6', in Helen Graham (ed.), *Interrogating Francoism: History and Dictatorship in Twentieth Century Spain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 69-95 (pp.74-78).

⁸⁷ Paul Preston, 'The Agrarian War in the South', in Paul Preston (ed.), *Revolution and Civil War in Spain, 1931-1939* (London: Methuen, 1984), 159-81; Paloma Biglino Campos, *El socialismo español y la cuestión agraria, 1890-1936* (Madrid: Centro de Publicaciones, Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social, 1989), pp. 313-22.

⁸⁸ Nigel Townson, *The Crisis of Democracy in Spain: Centrist Politics Under the Second Republic, 1931-1936* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2000), pp. 24-47.

⁸⁹ Anticlericalism had a tradition among the left in Spain and the Republic provided a political environment in which it could alter the powerful position the Church held in Spanish society, see William Callahan, *The Catholic Church in Spain, 1878-1998* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2000); Frances Lannon, *Privilege, Persecution and Prophecy: The Catholic Church in Spain, 1875-1975* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

of landowners, large swathes of the military and Catholics from the outset.⁹⁰ As a result, by 1936 many from these groups were united in their calling for the overthrow of the Republic and likened it to the weak Alexander Kerensky government in Russia after the fall of the tsar in 1917.

According to the ‘malevolent neutrality’ school, the British government and Foreign Office shared these concerns and their hostility therefore dates back to the Republic’s proclamation. However, it was the uncertainty of the Spanish situation, rather than the character of the new regime, that influenced any early negative perceptions of the Republic within the Foreign Office. Ambassador George Grahame, for instance, told the Foreign Office on the day of the Republic’s proclamation that the ‘situation within the last hour or two has developed in the most alarming manner and the regime has collapsed’.⁹¹ Due to kinship ties between the British and Spanish royal families, there was some concern about the plight of King Alfonso XIII and his family but Grahame soon informed his colleagues in London that the regime change had occurred with no bloodshed and that the royals had safely arrived in France after fleeing Madrid.⁹² When Grahame assured the Foreign Office that ‘the new republican government are evidently desirous of doing all in their power to maintain the movement on peaceful lines’, Arthur Wiggin, First Secretary in the Western Department, asked his colleagues, ‘will there be such unanimity when the government get to business? There is almost no chance of it, one may predict with reasonable certainty’. ‘The future’, he concluded, ‘is as obscure as ever’.⁹³

This uncertainty delayed the British government’s recognition of the Republic until a week after its proclamation, on 22 April.⁹⁴ The new Spanish government prompted the question of recognition and led to the Foreign Office’s first detailed discussion on the matter. Charles Howard Smith, a private secretary and later Assistant Under-Secretary, favoured moving forward with recognition but was concerned that ‘it is not absolutely certain that the [municipal election results] showed a republican majority. There was a strong republican majority in the towns but we know

⁹⁰ On the opposition to religious reforms and the political consequences, see Mary Vincent, *Catholicism in the Second Spanish Republic: Religion and Politics in Salamanca, 1931-1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 171-190; Sid Lowe, *Catholicism, War and the Foundation of Francoism: The Juventud de Acción Popular in Spain, 1931-1939* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010).

⁹¹ TNA.FO371/15771, W4146/46/41, Grahame to Isaacs, 14/4/1931.

⁹² TNA.CAB23/66, 21(31)6, 15/4/1931, 23/66; Grahame to Foreign Office, 14/4/1931; TNA.FO371/15771, W4147/46/41; TNA.FO371/15771, W4204/46/41 Grahame to Isaacs, 15/4/1931.

⁹³ TNA.FO371/15771, W4202/46/41, Grahame to Isaacs, 15/4/1931, Wiggin minute, 16/4/1931.

⁹⁴ TNA.CAB23/66, CC24(31)1, 22/4/1931.

nothing of the country districts . . . Moreover, it seems quite likely that the new government may have stormy times ahead'.⁹⁵ Assistant Under-Secretary, Sir George Mounsey, agreed: 'we must know a great deal more about the internal reactions ensuing from this first landslide victory before we can accord official recognition'. Grahame, in a better position to judge the situation, was more enthusiastic than his counterparts in Whitehall and urged the Foreign Office to move quickly with recognition:

It is by no means outside the bounds of reasonable possibility that a republican regime may consolidate itself in Spain . . . The Republican government is at present being carried on a flood tide of enthusiastic popular support . . . News of the attitude of Great Britain towards it will be eagerly awaited and future relations between the two countries will doubtless be influenced thereby . . . Great Britain has long held a leading position in the estimation of Spanish public opinion and our national interests both political and commercial may suffer if impression be given that Great Britain is imbued with a prejudice against new regime which is not manifested by other governments⁹⁶

As we will see in later chapters, this fear of appearing to have prejudices was central to the British government's policy of non-intervention during the Civil War.

In the months following recognition of the Republic, there was further uncertainty surrounding which parties would find representation in the Constituent Cortes after general elections in June. The Foreign Office envisioned a Cortes composed primarily of Socialists and Republicans with Alejandro Lerroux, the leader of the Radical Republican Party and Foreign Minister of the provisional government, as Prime Minister. The Foreign Office regarded Lerroux as an ideal moderating influence between the multitude of competing political parties and ideologies in Spain. As Lerroux himself stated, 'I am a conservative when confronted with anarchy, and a revolutionary when confronted with the forces of stagnation'.⁹⁷ Lerroux had already reached out to the British government in May to assure it that fostering good relations with other nations and being an advocate of League of Nations principles would be central to Spanish foreign policy.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ TNA.FO371/15771, W4251/46/41, Howard Smith and Mounsey minutes, 18/4/1931.

⁹⁶ TNA.FO371/15771, W4251/46/41 Grahame to Foreign Office, 16/4/1931.

⁹⁷ TNA.FO371/15774, W7543/46/41, Grahame to Henderson, 26/6/1931, Wiggin minute, 2/7/1931.

⁹⁸ On republican foreign policy, see Ángeles Egido León, *La concepción de la política exterior durante la Segunda República, 1931-1936* (Madrid, 1987); for a brief overview of Republican foreign policy, see Javier Tusell, *Historia de España en el Siglo XX. II: La crisis de los años treinta: República y Guerra Civil* (Madrid, 1998), pp. 240-49.

It soon became clear that the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) was the largest party and with support of republican groups in the Cortes and that the Republican Manuel Azaña would become Spanish Prime Minister. Nevertheless, Grahame informed the Foreign Office, 'the future Cortes will be of an advanced democratic but not revolutionary character'.⁹⁹ Wiggin concurred, remarking that 'what has happened so far must be regarded as distinctly satisfactory. The elements of moderation seem at present in ascendant, and despite all the forecasts, broken heads seem to have been relatively few'.¹⁰⁰

Some in the Foreign Office also recognised political cleavages amongst the various left-wing groups in Spain, such as socialists, communists, and anarchists. When Norman King, the British consul-general in Barcelona, wrongly reported that communists had caused disturbances in the Catalan capital, Alexander Leeper, who in August 1933 would become head of the Western Department, merely noted, 'it was the anarchists, not the communists, who caused the trouble'.¹⁰¹ Indeed, the biggest threat to stability came from the anarchists who did not participate in parliamentary politics and were responsible for persistent strikes and disturbances in Spain throughout the year.¹⁰² Wiggin noted his concern, 'the fact that the extremist labour organisation [Confederación Nacional del Trabajo] stands aloof from the parliamentary struggle is a factor in Spanish politics which must always be borne in mind'.¹⁰³

Due to these anarchist threats, strong leadership became a concern and the Foreign Office could only hope that 'whatever prime minister takes office will show an iron hand in dealing with such situations'.¹⁰⁴ Firm leadership took on special importance in Spain not only because of the widespread strikes that occurred during 1931, but also due to the need to steer the Cortes in the debates surrounding the new Spanish Constitution.¹⁰⁵ As we saw above, the articles relating to the religious question proved extremely controversial and these proposals alone served to alienate large swathes of Catholics. By challenging the influence of the Church, Leeper noted how the Republic

⁹⁹ TNA.FO371/15774, W8234/46/41, Grahame to Henderson, 15/7/1931.

¹⁰⁰ TNA.FO371/15774, W7660/46/41, Wiggin minute, 30/6/1931.

¹⁰¹ TNA.FO371/15775, W10541/46/41, Leeper minute, 15/9/1931.

¹⁰² Julián Casanova, *De la calle al frente: El anarcosindicalismo en España, 1931-1936* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1997).

¹⁰³ TNA.FO371/15774, W7884/46/41 Grahame to Henderson, 7/7/1931. On the CNT during the years of the Republic, see Chris Ealham, *Anarchism and the City: Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Barcelona, 1898-1937* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2010), pp. 85-101.

¹⁰⁴ TNA.FO371/15774, W8648/46/41, Wiggin minute, 28/7/1931.

¹⁰⁵ Stanley Payne, *Alcalá Zamora and the Failure of the Spanish Republic, 1931-1936* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2017), pp. 30-45.

was ‘getting into deep water. It is embarking on an attempt to deal with the status of the Church . . . I think we should hear of a monarchist reaction in 1932’.¹⁰⁶ It was amidst the debates on the Constitution that Manuel Azaña, leader of the republican party *Acción Republicana* and still Minister of War, emerged as the dominant figure in Spanish politics. The debates surrounding the religious question led to the resignation of the Cabinet, paving the way for him to preside over a new one. At the time, the Foreign Office knew little about Azaña but soon came to respect him as a robust and highly skilled politician despite right-wing claims he would be a Spanish Kerensky. In February 1932, for instance, after a botched insurrectionary attempt by anarchists, Grahame told the Foreign Office how Azaña’s government had ‘taken the drastic step of using powers under the Law for the Defence of the Republic to deport ringleaders of the movement without trial to Spanish Guinea’.¹⁰⁷ Passed in October 1931, this law allowed the government to take extreme measures when dealing with threats to political stability.¹⁰⁸ Over the following year, it proved a useful tool for the Azaña government as threats to political stability came from both the extreme left and right.

The most significant attempt to destabilise the Republic came in August 1932 when José Sanjurjo y Sacanell, a prestigious general who had fought in Morocco and would later play a leading role in the July 1936 military rebellion, attempted to bring down the Republic through a *pronunciamiento*.¹⁰⁹ The government quickly suppressed the rising in Madrid and soon after in Seville, where Sanjurjo led a force of 6,000 troops. At the same time, anarchists around Seville took the opportunity to initiate a revolt of their own, and government troops sent to suppress Sanjurjo’s revolt then had to subdue an anarchist rising. Grahame noted how ‘it is unfortunate that one more “pronunciamiento”, however futile, has to be added to the list former ones’.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ TNA.FO371/15775, W11648/46/41, Leeper minute, 8/10/1931.

¹⁰⁷ TNA.FO371/16506, W1956/12/41, Grahame to Simon, 15/2/1932.

¹⁰⁸ Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, p. 77, 130-131; Stanley Payne, *Spain's First Democracy: The Second Republic 1931-1936* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), p. 73.

¹⁰⁹ *Pronunciamiento* is a term used to refer to a sort of rebellion or a *coup d'état* particularly in the Iberian Peninsula and Latin America. It differs from these slightly in that it was driven usually by one section of the army and aimed at weakening the government’s nerve with either limited or sometimes no violence, rather than overthrowing it. The Sanjurjo revolt received funding from Fascist Italy, as did many right-wing groups opposed to the Republic during this period, see Ismael Saz, ‘La política exterior de la Segunda República en el primer bienio (1931-1933): Una valoración’, *Revista de Estudios Internacionales*, 6.4 (1985), 843-858 (pp. 853-54).

¹¹⁰ TNA.FO371/16506, W9230/12/41, Grahame to Simon, 15/8/1932.

The Sanjurjo revolt bolstered Azaña's reputation in London as a bulwark against attempts from both the left and right to destabilise the Republic.¹¹¹ Grahame offered the Foreign Office his thoughts on what would have happened if the Sanjurjo coup had been successful. Not only would it have 'damaged irretrievably Republican institutions', it would have 'obliterated ordinary constitutional and parliamentary government in Spain' and led to 'another edition of the Primo de Rivera coup d'état with a general in charge without any political acumen'.¹¹² This, Grahame emphasised, would have 'probably involved a return to the unfortunate conditions which occurred so often in the nineteenth century in Spain, with disastrous consequences for the stability and orderly progress of the country'.¹¹³ Azaña's uncompromising attitude towards attacks from both the left and right led Wiggin to consider him 'an absolute politician' and 'the best man one could wish for Spain at this critical juncture'.¹¹⁴ In this sense, it is unhelpful to view British perceptions of the Republic as a gradual accumulation of hostility. Rather, the Foreign Office viewed the Republic within the vortex of Spain's political polarisation, recognised that threats came from both the left and the right, and therefore held a preference for a centrist government. In fact, Azaña's success rectified some of the negative views of the Republic held by some in the Foreign Office in April 1931. After suppression of the Sanjurjo revolt, for instance, Grahame complained to the Foreign Office about Eugene de Caux, a *Times* correspondent in Madrid, who had been writing unduly critical reports of the Republic. For Grahame, the correspondent ignored 'the fact that the Republican Government, ever since the revolution, has been engaged in a continuous struggle to preserve the safety of the new regime from both the extreme left and the extreme right'. The extreme right, he went on, had 'been working hard to damage and if possible overturn the Republic'. Grahame also complained that de Caux's articles ignored the severity with which the government treated the extreme left but was quick to fire criticism at any negative treatment of 'priests and aristocrats'.¹¹⁵ Leeper agreed and noted that the tone of de Caux's articles was 'unfairly

¹¹¹ Preston, *Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, pp.100-101; Sanjurjo was sentenced to death and later reprieved. He went into exile in Portugal from where he would collaborate with the military rebels that planned the revolt of July 1936. The supposed leader of the revolt, Sanjurjo died in a plane crash on 20 July whilst travelling back to Spain. Hundreds of his collaborators in the 1932 revolt were sent into exile in West Africa without trial, see Buckley, *Life and Death*, pp. 88-92.

¹¹² TNA.FO371/16506, W9493/12/41, Grahame to Simon, 23/8/1932.

¹¹³ TNA.FO371/16506, W9944/12/41, Grahame to Simon, 7/9/1932; TNA.FO371/16506, W10388/12/41, Grahame to Simon, 20/9/1932.

¹¹⁴ TNA.FO371/16506, W13695/12/41, Wiggin minute, 14/12/1932.

¹¹⁵ On the British press and reports on Spanish politics between 1931 and 1936, see Darrin M. McMahon, 'La política española desde la perspectiva del London *Times*, 1930-1936', *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, 9 (1996), 159-188; Miguel

critical of the Republican regime which has done less badly than I, for one, in my ignorance expected'.¹¹⁶

Over the next year, the danger from the right became clearer to the Foreign Office as right-wing opposition to the government increased and unified. José María Gil Robles, a deputy in the Cortes for Salamanca, became the leader of this movement officially united under the Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas (CEDA). The CEDA was a right-wing mass Catholic party founded in March 1933 and made up of a broad coalition of right-wing groups.¹¹⁷ As leader of this party, Gil Robles sought to take over the Republic through legal means using the parliamentary system.¹¹⁸ However, the CEDA increasingly took on an authoritarian character that resembled the fascist movements of Germany and Italy.¹¹⁹ By August 1933, six months after Adolf Hitler's rise to power, Grahame spoke of an 'incipient Fascist movement in Spain' that took inspiration from the successes of the German and Italian regimes. He predicted that eventually the Azaña government would fall, and a likely result would be another dictatorship along fascist lines supported by 'the adherents of Primo de Rivera, whose regime was already a species of fascism inspired by the Italian regime'.¹²⁰ After increasing instability and right-wing unwillingness to do anything other than oppose the government, President Niceto Alcalá Zamora dissolved the Cortes and called a general election for November 1933.¹²¹ The situation did not inspire optimism in the Foreign Office. As Leeper noted, 'the whole incident may prove calamitous to the Spanish Republic. The elections may lead to a monarchist reaction & if so conceivably to serious disorders'.¹²²

Fernández-Longoria, 'La percepción de los acontecimientos políticos españoles de enero a julio de 1936 en la prensa inglesa', *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, 17 (2005), 191-205.

¹¹⁶ TNA.FO371/16506, W9269/12/41, Grahame to Smith, 17/8/1932.

¹¹⁷ José Ramón Montero, *La CEDA. El catolicismo social y político en la II República* (Madrid: Revista de Trabajos, 1977).

¹¹⁸ José María Gil Robles, *No fue posible la paz* (Buenos Aires, 1968), pp. 77-80.

¹¹⁹ Julio Gil Pecharromán, *Historia de la Segunda República Española, 1931-1936* (Madrid, 2002), p. 182.

¹²⁰ TNA.FO371/17427, W9240/116/41, Grahame to Simon, 9/8/1933. The British and French governments became increasingly concerned over the strategic implications of closer Italo-Spanish relations in the 1920s, see Gustavo Palomares Lerma, *Mussolini y Primo de Rivera: Política exterior de dos dictadores* (Madrid: Eudema, 1989), pp. 221-239; Javier Tusell & Genoveva García Queipo de Llano, *El dictador y el mediador. España-Gran Bretaña, 1923-1930* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Intestigaciones Científicas, 1986).

¹²¹ TNA.FO371/17427, W10357/116/41, Grahame to Foreign Office, 12/9/1933.; W11428/116/41, Grahame to Simon, 10/10/1933; TNA.FO371/17427, W11858/116/41, Grahame to Simon, 19/10/1933.

¹²² TNA.FO371/17427, W11165/116/41, Grahame to Foreign Office, 4/10/1933.

The Years of Reaction, 1933-1936

Divisions between left-wing parties on one hand and the ability of Gil Robles to rally the right behind the defence of ‘religion, homeland, order, family, work and property’ on the other led to the CEDA becoming the largest party in the Cortes.¹²³ Fearing that a government headed by Gil Robles would only further arouse left-wing fervour, Alcalá Zamora opted for a centrist government led by Lerroux, which received the support of Gil Robles’s CEDA. However, the CEDA’s strength in the Cortes allowed the party frequently to effect cabinet reshuffles and wield significant influence over the direction of government policies.¹²⁴ This prompted Grahame to warn the Foreign Office that if the right-wing parties used ‘their majority unduly and without prudence a dangerous situation might arise’ with the Socialists, who were ‘extremely hostile to Lerroux and likely to oppose him in every way if he were in power and allied to any party of the right’. He believed this course was particularly dangerous because ‘in their opposition they would have behind them all the industrial proletariat’.¹²⁵ Accordingly, Grahame hoped that in towns and cities that required a second ballot, the left would realise the importance of putting aside differences and uniting to ‘redress the swing to the right’.¹²⁶ The Foreign Office acknowledged this risk of further polarisation. Foreign Office clerk Charles Stirling, for instance, wrote that the ‘fate of Spain is now largely in the hands of Señor Robles and the Catholics’. However, he believed that ‘if they insist on taking office themselves and reforming the constitution there will be a head-on clash between them and the socialists and both sides are already hinting at a resort to revolutionary measures if they cannot get their way by constitutional methods’.¹²⁷ As we can see, the opinions of the Foreign Office and Grahame converged on the desire to see a stable government in Spain that could incorporate moderate elements of both the left and right as a means of defence against the extremes of either side.

The fears of Grahame and his colleagues in London regarding the deterioration of the political situation in Spain eventually came to pass and they tended to place the blame on right-

¹²³ Ferran Gallego, ‘The Importance of Being Fascist: The Falange and the Spanish Counter-Revolution (1931-1936)’, in Ferran Gallego and Francisco Morente (eds.), *The Last Survivor: Cultural and Social Projects Underlying Spanish Fascism, 1931-1975* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2017), pp. 38-41 (p. 38); TNA.FO371/17427, W13297/116/41, Grahame to Foreign Office, 22/11/1933.

¹²⁴ Preston, *Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, pp. 120-126.

¹²⁵ TNA.FO371/17427, W13657/116/41, Grahame to Simon, 29/11/1933.

¹²⁶ TNA.FO371/17427, W13297/116/41, Graham to Foreign Office, 22/11/1933.

¹²⁷ TNA.FO371/14727, W14852/116/41, Grahame to Vansittart, 30/12/1933.

wing groups rather than the left. Indeed, over the next year, the new Spanish government failed to maintain order and the Foreign Office and Grahame held it responsible for the deterioration of the political situation. Grahame noted how ‘the Lerrox cabinet shows little life and seems to have no drive or purpose’, which provoked agitation in left-wing groups. Stirling meanwhile observed how Spain seemed ‘to be drifting slowly towards an inevitable struggle between the extremes of the Left and Right’.¹²⁸ When circumstances forced Lerrox to assemble a new Cabinet and include more right-wing elements, some within the Foreign Office’s Western Department were concerned this would only lead to the right-wing elements growing ‘more exacting in their demands’. Moreover, it might provoke more serious demonstrations and outbreaks of violence ‘by the communists and the socialists leading possibly to a demand by the Right for a ‘strong’ government of a dictatorial character’.¹²⁹ Grahame weighed in with his assessment that the goal of the right was ‘to advance by degrees towards a fuller control of the government’, but that the ‘whole proletariat’ would be ready to resort to violence ‘if the reactionary parties take undue advantage of their parliamentary predominance’.¹³⁰

British concerns regarding the violent left-wing reactions to right-wing incremental attempts to take full control of the Spanish political system proved true in the autumn of 1934 but even when faced with a left-wing insurrection, the Foreign Office did not believe that the appropriate response was violent repression. As we have noted, the Foreign Office and Grahame hoped to see in Spain a political system that incorporated moderate elements from both sides of the political spectrum. However, Gil Robles was unwilling to reach any compromise with the left and threatened to withdraw the CEDA’s support for the government unless members of his party could take up ministerial positions. When this tactic secured three Cabinet positions for CEDA ministers, left-wing groups launched a general strike. The lack of planning ensured the government was quickly able to suppress the strike in cities such as Madrid and Barcelona. In the northern region of Asturias, however, it developed into something resembling a revolutionary insurrection and lasted for a number of weeks.¹³¹ Although the swift suppression of the rising revolt relieved Foreign

¹²⁸ TNA.FO371/18595, W1781/27/41, Grahame to Simon, 20/2/1934.

¹²⁹ TNA.FO371/18595, W2101/27/41, Grahame to Simon, 1/3/1934; TNA.FO371/18595, W/2168/27/41, Stirling minute, 5/3/1934.

¹³⁰ TNA.FO371/18595, W2255/27/41, Grahame to Simon, 2/3/1934.

¹³¹ See David Ruiz, *Insurrección defensiva y revolución obrera: el octubre español de 1934* (Barcelona: Editorial Labor, 1988); Javier Rodríguez Muñoz, *La revolución de octubre de 1934 en Asturias: orígenes, desarrollo y*

Office concerns about a communist revolution in Spain, focus soon shifted to the harsh repression meted out by the military authorities, especially in Asturias.¹³² One concern in the Western Department was that repression could not be ‘a good foundation for a moderate government which is what is really required to consolidate the Republic’.¹³³ Stirling noted that the ‘consequences [of the revolt] are depressing in spite of the government’s victory’, as ‘liberals of all shades have been crushed and discredited’.¹³⁴ He went on, ‘the triumph of the right may give Spain at least some months of orderly government. But Spain is in need of progress in many ways and the fact that the progressive forces are now heralded as potential enemies of law and order cannot make for peaceful development in the long run’. Indeed, the press launched an atrocity campaign, the object of which was, according to Grahame, ‘to create a sensation of horror in Spanish public opinion as to cause socialists and communists, etc. to be regarded as outside the pale of humanity’ and sweep away with a ‘flood of reprobation’ anyone ‘previously associated with them’. One example Grahame drew on, for instance, was a fabricated story of ‘20 little girls’, all daughters of Civil Guards, who reportedly had their eyes gouged out by extremists in Asturias.¹³⁵

Two considerations shaped British attitudes towards Spain’s social and political polarisation. Firstly, the attitudes of the Foreign Office and Grahame reflected the British Conservative Party’s efforts during the 1920s and early 1930s to avoid political polarisation in Britain by attempting to incorporate the Labour Party and the wider socialist movement into its own definitions of parliamentary democracy. Conservative Party leader Stanley Baldwin believed the appeal of socialism to be too powerful and constant and that only a positive and inclusive response could counter it. For him, successful resistance to revolution from the left also required opposition to reactionaries of the Conservative right.¹³⁶ While the Liberal Party retained some central ground in Britain until the start of the 1930s, the moderate centre in Spain eroded rapidly as extremists of both the left and right grew more exacting in their demands on the government. In

consecuencias (Oviedo: Editorial Prensa Asturiana, 2010); Matthew Kerry, *Unite, Proletarian Brothers!: Radicalism and Revolution in the Spanish Second Republic* (London: University of London Press, 2020), pp. 129-152.

¹³² TNA.FO371/18596, W8854/27/41, Grahame to Simon, 6/10/1934; TNA.FO371/18596, W8913/27/41, Grahame to Simon, 8/10/1934. The government called in the Spanish Foreign Legion to suppress the rising, see José E. Álvarez, ‘The Spanish Foreign Legion during the Asturian Uprising of October 1934’, *War in History*, 18.2 (2011), 200-224.

¹³³ TNA.FO371/18596, W8934/27/41, Leigh-Smith minute, 8/10/1934.

¹³⁴ TNA.FO371/18696, W9132/27/41, Stirling minute, 15/10/1934.

¹³⁵ TNA.FO 371/18597, W9526/27/41, Grahame to Simon, 30/10/1934. On the impact of this propaganda on Spain’s social and political polarisation, see Brian Bunk, *Ghosts of Passion: Martyrdom, Gender and the Origins of the Spanish Civil War* (London: Duke University Press, 2007).

¹³⁶ Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin*, p. 204.

the first two years of the Republic, this situation presented fewer problems for Azaña than it did for his opponents. Indeed, whilst facing problems from both the left and right, Azaña was able to incorporate more left-wing elements than the string of governments in power after November 1933. According to Grahame's appraisal, 'the fundamental trouble [since the November 1933 elections] is the antagonism between the whole Spanish proletariat and Sr. Lerroux'. Under Azaña, conversely, the 'moderate socialists were in the cabinet and supported the [government] in suppressing extremist labour agitation: but now the situation is very different and much more disturbing'.¹³⁷ The Foreign Office concurred with Grahame and believed the solution would be a government representative of both left and right-wing interests. In an assessment of the development of Spanish politics between 1931 and 1934, for example, Stirling concluded that as long as reactionaries refrained from pushing the government to a 'pronounced measure of reaction', there was 'hope that a balance between the interests of the Right and the Left may eventually be found by parliamentary means'.¹³⁸

The second consideration, which later became one of the pillars of the British government's non-intervention policy during the Civil War, was a reluctance to provoke hostility towards Britain in whatever regime was in power in Spain. To avoid this, the Foreign Office thought it best to keep out of Spain's internal affairs. Official British attitudes towards the Asturias rising and the violent suppression of it provide a salient example of this. In November, for instance, Lord Listowel, a Labour peer, and Ellen Wilkinson, a Labour MP, travelled to Spain unofficially to investigate the repression in Asturias.¹³⁹ When they visited the British Embassy in Madrid to ask Grahame's advice on whom to speak to within the Spanish government, the ambassador warned them that 'the intervention of any foreigners in so delicate a matter would not have any other effect than to annoy the Spanish government' and offered them no assistance. His colleagues in the Foreign Office

¹³⁷ TNA.FO371/18595, W2476/27/41, Grahame to Simon, 13/3/1934.

¹³⁸ TNA.FO371/18595, W2654/27/4, Stirling memorandum, 19/3/1934.

¹³⁹ The British Labour Movement was vocal in its criticism of the suppression of the Asturias rising and the National Council of Labour sent a telegram directly to Prime Minister Alejandro Lerroux to urge him not to issue death sentences. Arthur Henderson, former leader of the Labour Party and Foreign Secretary and in 1934 recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, wrote to Ramón Pérez de Ayala, the Spanish Ambassador at London, to express the Labour movement's concerns, see Labour History Archive, People's History Museum, Manchester [LHA], William Gillies papers [WG] SPA/52, Henderson to Ayala, 2/11/1934, telegram from National Council of Labour to Lerroux enclosed. The visit of Listowel and Wilkinson, however, was not sponsored by the Labour Party or any group affiliated to it and causes concern that they might have even made the situation worse for those arrested, see LHA.WG/SPA/56 & 57, Robinson to Middleton, 15/11/1934.

agreed that Grahame ought to limit any assistance he offered them to ensuring they were ‘not treated too harshly by the Spanish authorities’.¹⁴⁰ Both the Foreign Office and Grahame were correct to expect a hostile response from the Spanish government. Indeed, when Listowel and Wilkinson managed to speak to President Alcalá Zamora, he refused to allow them to carry out any sort of investigation and retorted that they would not have been accommodating to foreign interference in Britain’s internal affairs. For his part, Gil Robles said in the Cortes that what happened in Spain was no business of theirs and that if he were in power he would have ‘put them over the frontier’, for which he received loud applause. The monarchist daily newspaper, *ABC*, also urged the Spanish authorities to expel them from the country.¹⁴¹ When they left Spain, they departed in a car from Oviedo where local police had to protect them from a large crowd that had gathered and began throwing objects at their vehicle.¹⁴²

The interference of Listowel and Wilkinson was of particular concern to Grahame because he worried that it might cause the Spanish government to adopt foreign policy hostile towards Britain. The Foreign Office shared these concerns. When Listowel and Wilkinson returned to London, for instance, the *Manchester Guardian* published an interview with the latter in which she compared the repression in Asturias to terrorism. The Foreign Office noted how it hopes such reports would not reach Spain because they would make ‘a very bad impression, especially as the present Spanish government are showing goodwill towards us’.¹⁴³ As right-wing influence was on the rise, this fed into concerns regarding the advent of fascism in Europe and its increasingly hostile foreign policies in Germany and Italy. Grahame told the Foreign Office that ‘the internal situation has reached a degree of complication such as in the past has often induced a government to seek in some foreign adventure a means of distracting attention from difficulties at home’.¹⁴⁴

Although the Spanish government had no firm foreign policy programme, its increasing reliance upon nationalist support prompted concerns. In February 1935, for example, the Italian

¹⁴⁰ TNA.FO371/18597, W10052/27/41, Grahame to Leigh-Smith, 19/11/1934; W9977/27/41, Grahame to Simon, 15/11/1934.

¹⁴¹ TNA.FO371/18597, W9987/27/41, Grahame to Simon, 15/11/1934.

¹⁴² TNA.FO371/18597, W10035/27/41, Grahame to Simon, 17/11/1934.

¹⁴³ ‘Terrorism in Spain’, *Manchester Guardian*, 24/11/1934. For Foreign Office reaction, see TNA.FO371/18597, W10626/27/41, 7/12/1934.

¹⁴⁴ TNA.FO371/19735, W1079/18/41, Grahame to Simon, 5/2/1935.

Chargé d’Affaires in Madrid told Grahame that, in a meeting on foreign policy, someone in the Spanish government had suggested installing guns on a line of hills north of Gibraltar to command the fortress. In this meeting, when someone apparently said that such a measure would indispose the British government, the advocate of the policy reportedly replied that ‘it was not England’s business what Spain does within her own territory’. Accordingly, Grahame went on to suggest what British policy in regards to Spain ought to be:

[...] if we were not on good terms with Spain and there was a feeling against us in this country, I expect that the Spaniards would do something of the sort if only to assert themselves. I always think that it is greatly to our interest that Spain, with her extremely important geographical position both in Southern Europe and in North Africa, should remain as has been the case for many years, pacific and practically unarmed; and also that she should not be linked up with any continental power. In the past, something disagreeable for England has always developed when Spain has entered into a continental ‘entente’ or alliance.¹⁴⁵

As a result of such incidents, the Foreign Office was forced to pay more attention to Spanish foreign policy in 1935 than it had since the proclamation of the Republic. In June 1935, for example, Grahame told his colleagues that Lerroix was thinking about visiting London. This came amidst improving relations between the French and Spanish Governments, and Grahame warned that ‘it would be inadvisable to rebuff the Spaniards in any desire on their part to show equal friendship to Great Britain as to France’. Foreign Office officials were all in agreement that the British government should take advantage of Lerroix’s visit to London to ‘sound his views’ as Spanish foreign policy was ‘becoming more active’ and the Spanish government was ‘seeking to assert the right of Spain in international affairs’.¹⁴⁶

The Italian invasion of Abyssinia in October 1935 and the reaction to it in Spain exacerbated these concerns. The League of Nations responded to the invasion by imposing economic sanctions on Italy and up until this point the Republican governments in Spain, particularly that in power between 1931 and 1933, had sought to work within the framework of the League of Nations. Accordingly, the Foreign Office was not impressed to see that the government

¹⁴⁵ TNA.FO371/19735, W1542/18/41, Grahame to Peterson, 20/2/1935.

¹⁴⁶ TNA.FO371/19747, W4891/4891/41, Grahame to Vansittart, 4/6/1935.

in power in 1935 negotiated a commercial treaty with Italy while League discussions regarding the imposition of sanctions were still ongoing. Indeed, the Foreign Office noted that ‘the fact that [Spain] has just concluded this agreement is not a good display of her cooperation in this embargo’.¹⁴⁷ The Spanish government was in fact divided on the issue of sanctions but the frequent reshuffling of the Cabinet since November 1933 allowed the CEDA gradually to gain more influence over the direction of policy and this commercial treaty was part of a wider trend in Spain’s drift to the right.¹⁴⁸ Although the Spanish government hoped to remain neutral in the event of an international conflict, it also desired closer relations with Fascist Italy.¹⁴⁹ The Spanish Ambassador at London, Pérez de Ayala, did not hide his sympathy for Italian ventures when British policymakers sought to ensure Spain was fully on board with League actions. As Ayala told Foreign Minister José Martínez de Velasco in December, ‘My friends in the British government know my personal opinion [on Abyssinia] ... that Italy’s cause is legitimate’.¹⁵⁰

The pro-Italian trend in Spanish foreign policy was even more alarming to the British government because of a surge in nationalist sentiments among the right in Spain. This led to frequent and explicit references to the re-conquest of Gibraltar. In November 1935, for instance, Sir Henry Chilton, who had recently replaced Grahame as British Ambassador, informed the Foreign Office that Spanish public opinion was becoming more sensitive about Gibraltar. Chilton had recently come across a leaflet which he believed Spanish fascists had produced depicting the Rock of Gibraltar with the words ‘Is the map of Europe going to be revised? This is the moment for Spain to raise the question of Gibraltar’.¹⁵¹ The following month he warned the Foreign Office about a more alarming article that appeared in *El Sol*, a Madrid daily newspaper, which a former naval officer had written. The article’s title was ‘Defence of the Territory and the Re-Conquest of Gibraltar’ and asserted that in the event of a conflict between Italy and Britain, Spain’s malevolence or benevolence would depend on whether the latter returned Gibraltar to its rightful owner. In the event of such a conflict, Chilton cautioned that public opinion might even force the Spanish government into pursuing such a policy.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ TNA.FO371/19747, W9120/4266/41, Drummond to Hoare, 21/10/1935.

¹⁴⁸ Pecharromán, *Historia de la Segunda República*, pp. 119-122.

¹⁴⁹ Egido León, *La política exterior española*, pp. 339-373

¹⁵⁰ Archivo General de la Administración [AGA], 54/7197, Ayala to Velasco, 7/12/1935.

¹⁵¹ TNA.FO371/19747, W9674/4764/41, Chilton to Hoare, 8/11/1935.

¹⁵² TNA.FO371/19747, W11052/4764/41, Chilton to Eden, 30/12/1935.

Towards the end of 1935, right-wing parties recognised British concerns about political developments in Spain and attempted to alleviate them. In November, for instance, Gil Robles met Chilton and assured him that he would ‘not countenance any action towards a dictatorship’ and that he was determined ‘to attain complete power only by strictly legal and democratic methods’.¹⁵³ The Foreign Office, however, doubted Gil Robles’s sincerity and believed in rumours it had heard regarding his role in plots for a military rebellion.¹⁵⁴ Gil Robles lent support to these rumours when he met Chilton again in December to share his thoughts on the political situation and the likely outcome of another general election. He tried to warn Chilton that the extreme left would sweep the elections in Barcelona, Madrid and everywhere south of the capital, resulting in a ‘revolution more bloody than the French and Russian revolutions’. When Chilton reported this conversation to the Foreign Office, he doubted Gil Robles’s predictions and instead warned that a successful coup would allow him to ‘set up a regime similar to that existing in Italy today’.¹⁵⁵

By the end of 1935, cracks began to emerge in the relationship between Gil Robles and the monarchists upon whom much of the CEDA’s support rested. According to Chilton, the monarchists were having misgivings that Gil Robles was more ‘interested in forging a base for a fascist republic’ than in forwarding the interests of the Church and the monarchy.¹⁵⁶ Meanwhile, the parties of the left – not only the moderate parties, but also the anarchists and communists – were resolving their differences and, in mid-January 1936, issued a manifesto proclaiming they had achieved identity of aims and interests and were going to co-operate in the February general election as a Popular Front coalition.¹⁵⁷ Despite right-wing propaganda, Stirling noted how the Popular Front’s manifesto was ‘not quite so blood curdling’ as the right had made out but doubted such a coalition would be able to co-operate harmoniously even with a majority in the Cortes.¹⁵⁸ However, of greater concern in the Foreign Office than the winner in the election was how the losing side would respond. Indeed, whatever the result, the Foreign Office believed the election

¹⁵³ TNA.FO371/19736, W9890/18/41, Chilton to Hoare, 15/11/1935.

¹⁵⁴ TNA.FO371/19736, W10877/18/41, Chilton to Hoare & Stirling minutes, 21/12/1935.

¹⁵⁵ TNA.FO371/19736, W11051/18/41, Chilton to Eden, 30/12/1935.

¹⁵⁶ TNA.FO371/20519, W65/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 3/1/1936.

¹⁵⁷ On the concept of the Popular Front, see Helen Graham and Paul Preston, ‘The Popular Front and the Struggle Against Fascism’, in Helen Graham and Paul Preston (eds.), *The Popular Front in Europe* (London: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 1-19; Santos Julia, *Orígenes del Frente Popular en España* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1979). For a critical account of the left’s political tactics leading up to the 1936 election, see Manuel Álvarez Tardío and Roberto Villa García, *1936. Fraude y violencia en las elecciones del Frente Popular* (Madrid: Espasa Libros, 2017).

¹⁵⁸ TNA.FO371/20519, W585/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 21/1/1931.

would only answer two questions: who would win? And whether the losing side would ‘resort to violence’?¹⁵⁹

The Popular Front and the Road to Civil War, February-July 1936

As we noted above, historians have argued that the Popular Front victory in February 1936 and its aftermath solidified British hostility towards the Republic. Some have identified Chilton as an unfair judge of the situation in Spain and placed on him some responsibility for this hostility in Westminster. Paul Preston, for instance, has recently argued that ‘there was a prevailing belief, fanned by the fiercely right-wing Ambassador Sir Henry Chilton . . . that in Spain the victory of the Popular Front in February 1936 had signified the beginning of a pre-revolutionary crisis’. In ‘despatch after despatch’, Chilton ‘managed to convey the impression that the Popular Front cabinet was the puppet of extreme left Socialists and Communists’.¹⁶⁰ However, such views of Chilton’s despatches are perhaps exaggerated. Although he often overplayed communist influence in Spain, Chilton’s assessments of the political situation between February and July 1936 were more nuanced. In his first despatch after the election, for instance, he reassured the Foreign Office that the new government would ‘consist of men of fairly moderate views’.¹⁶¹ He also predicted that Azaña as Prime Minister would have a ‘fairly easy time for the next six to twelve months’. In late March, he was still hesitant to entertain the possibility of a communist regime in Spain, arguing that ‘As the Spanish people do not desire a communist regime, I do not think that such a form of government, if it is ever established, would be of long duration’.¹⁶²

The Foreign Office naturally grew more concerned in the spring of 1936 with developments beyond Spain. However, German and Italian action in the Rhineland and Abyssinia ensured the

¹⁵⁹ TNA.FO371/20520, W1355/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 14/2/1936.

¹⁶⁰ Paul Preston, ‘Britain and the Basque Campaign of 1937: The Government, the Royal Navy, the Labour Party and the Press’, *European History Quarterly*, 48.3 (2018), 490-515 (pp. 491-92).

¹⁶¹ TNA.FO371/20520, W1444/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 17/2/1936; TNA.FO371/20520, W1643/62/41, Chilton to Foreign Office, 24/2/1936.

¹⁶² TNA.FO371/20520, W2678/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 26/3/1936. Preston does not use any quotations from Chilton in support of this claim and instead provides a list of telegrams he sent to the Foreign Office in the spring of 1936 (see note two, p. 511). However, none of those provided suggests the Foreign Office would have got this impression from him. For instance, in a telegram from 24 March (FO 371/20520, W2868), Chilton speaks only of hypothetical situations in which communists could gain too much power but also talks of a right-wing coup and the establishment of a dictatorship.

Spanish Popular Front's renewed commitment to collaboration with the League was welcome.¹⁶³ The sanctions imposed on Italy had been fruitless but remained in place and on 7 March German forces marched into the Rhineland. The Popular Front government not only opposed suggestions of imposing League sanctions on Germany due to the failure of this action with Mussolini, but soon came to advocate lifting sanctions and pursuing a policy of rapprochement with Italy in order to reduce Mussolini's hostility towards the Republican regime.¹⁶⁴ This was important for the British government, which at this stage was also beginning to veer towards lifting sanctions, because Spain played a crucial role in maintaining equilibrium in the Mediterranean and ensuring Britain's control of the Straits of Gibraltar. The threat in the Mediterranean, as we have noted, came from Mussolini and it was not in Britain's interests for the Italian government to form an anti-British alliance with a Spanish government or to pursue a hostile policy towards Spain.¹⁶⁵ The Popular Front's desire simply to maintain friendly relations with Italy was, therefore, a foreign policy that the British government could endorse.

The Popular Front government's main focus, however, was on internal social and political issues and reassuring observers abroad that Spain was not drifting towards chaos. In the last week of February, for instance, Spanish Foreign Minister Augusto Barcia instructed Ayala to make efforts to modify alarmist stories about Spain in newspapers such as the *Daily Mail* in order to reassure the British government that the situation was under control.¹⁶⁶ Although the rising levels of violence in the spring of 1936 made the Popular Front government vulnerable to right-wing propaganda labelling it as having lost control of law and order, the Foreign Office did not place all the blame on left-wing groups. Rather, officials in the Western Department were not only able to draw distinctions between the political leanings and affiliations of those who caused disturbances, but in fact held right-wing groups and fascists responsible as well.¹⁶⁷ For his part, Chilton could

¹⁶³ Francisco Quintana, *España en Europa, 1931-1936. Del compromiso por la paz a la huida de la guerra* (Madrid: Nerea, 1993), p. 316.

¹⁶⁴ Ismael Saz, *Mussolini contra la II República: hostilidad, conspiraciones, intervención (1931-1936)* (Valencia: Edicions Alfons el Magnànim, 1986), pp. 154-157.

¹⁶⁵ José Luis Neila, *La IIª República española y el Mediterráneo. España ante el desarme y la seguridad colectiva* (Madrid: Editorial Dilema, 2006), pp. 269-271.

¹⁶⁶ AGA.54/7199, Barcia to Ayala, 27/2/1936. Examples in 'Bolshevik Spain?', *Daily Mail*, 18/2/1936; 'Moscow's Hand in Spain', *Daily Mail*, 20/2/1936.

¹⁶⁷ TNA.FO371/20520, W1938/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 4/3/1936; TNA.FO371/20520, W2179/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 11/3/1936; TNA.FO371/20520, W2384/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 14/3/1936. Little, 'Red Scare', p. 298, claims that the growth of the PCE from February 1936 and the ongoing disturbances 'lent credence' to rumours circulating among British politicians and civil servants, including Stanley Baldwin's personal confidant, Thomas Jones, that 'Moscow foretells a communist government in Spain in three months'. This is somewhat misleading because Jones was hardly

not say whether Azaña had the situation under control but was willing to speculate that he might have been ‘allowing the lower classes to blow off some steam’ and waiting for the opportunity for ‘suddenly calling a halt and restoring order once more’.¹⁶⁸ Certainly, this was not Azaña’s tactic, and continued disturbances led to the proliferation of rumours of an impending communist revolution. However, to make matters worse, these rumours prompted ones of a right-wing military coup set to take place before 12 April.¹⁶⁹ The Western Department’s Evelyn Shuckburgh, at this stage chiefly responsible for Spanish affairs, summed up the Foreign Office attitude towards the situation in Spain, noting that while the situation was disturbing, ‘there is nothing we can do, except wait for the coup d’état, or the revolution, or whatever is to come’.¹⁷⁰

Even as attention shifted from the possibility of a rebellion to a political crisis in April and May, the Foreign Office and Chilton were still far from hostile towards the continuation of left-wing government in Spain. The political crisis was the result of Alcalá Zamora’s decision to dissolve the government and call for the February general election. Under the Republican constitution, if the president dissolved the government on more than one occasion within a six-year period, the Cortes could decide whether the second dissolution had been necessary. If the Cortes decided it was unnecessary, it could remove the president from office and use the opportunity to remove Alcalá Zamora in April.¹⁷¹ Chilton believed that Azaña was the most likely replacement and that Diego Martínez Barrio of the Radical Republican Party would become Prime Minister. Barrio’s centrist politics led the Foreign Office to think that having ‘Azaña as president and Barrio

representative of all ‘British Conservatives’, not least because he usually voted for the Labour Party. The diary entry where Little references Jones merely states that Joachim von Ribbentrop, the German ambassador at London, claimed that Moscow predicted a communist government in Spain, see Thomas Jones, *A Diary with Letters, 1931-1950* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), pp. 210-211. British deciphering of communication between Moscow and the Spanish Communist Party in Madrid at this time suggested that the intention of the Comintern was not to ferment revolution in Spain but to collaborate with the Republican government and support it against left-wing extremism. One deciphered telegram sent from Moscow to Madrid in May 1936, for instance, read: ‘in all the party activity you must realise that in the situation as it stands the creation of soviet power is not in the order of the day, but, at the moment, it is solely a question of establishing such a democratic rule that it will be possible to bar the progress of fascism and anti-revolution’, see HW [Signals Intelligence Records, The National Archives, Kew] 17/26/5300, Moscow to Spain, 6/5/1936, intercepted 9/4/1936.

¹⁶⁸ TNA.FO371/20520, W2387/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 18/3/1936.

¹⁶⁹ Spanish Ambassador Pedro de Ayala informed his government on 2 April that *The Times* had published an ‘alarmist’ story about the situation in Spain and in response Ayala wrote a letter to the editor, see AGA.54/7197, Ayala to Barcía, 2/4/1936; for the report, see ‘Agitated Spain, *The Times*, 2/4/1936; for Ayala’s letter, see ‘Agitations in Spain: Spanish Government’s View’, *The Times*, 4/4/1936.

¹⁷⁰ TNA.FO371/20520, W2678/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 26/3/1936; Little, *Malevolent Neutrality*, p. 197 refers to Shuckburgh as Whitehall’s ‘expert on Spain’.

¹⁷¹ Payne, *Alcalá Zamora*, 129-49.

as prime minister would be a strong combination'.¹⁷² While the prediction that Azaña would become president came true, the position of Prime Minister ultimately went to Left Republican Party politician Santiago Casares Quiroga. Nevertheless, the Foreign Office and Chilton both considered this a satisfactory outcome. The latter, for instance, told his colleagues that 'there might now be some chance of a better maintenance of public order and the curbing of the many demands of the proletariat'.¹⁷³ Of Azaña, he said 'one hears nowadays, from mouths which but two months ago would have condemned him unreservedly, suggestions that Señor Azaña is, at the moment, the only man who can save Spain from anarchy or communism'.¹⁷⁴ William Montagu-Pollock, a Foreign Office official with experience in the Diplomatic Service, concurred and minuted on 20 May that 'there is a good chance that the Azaña-Quiroga combination, which should be a strong one, will succeed in restoring order; even if it has to walk worriedly at first'.¹⁷⁵ Despite the breakdown of law and order in Spain, the Foreign Office held on to hopes that moderate right-wing elements would passively support what it considered a moderate government in its efforts to restore order.¹⁷⁶ However, Gil Robles and most right-wing groups opposed the Popular Front from its inception and sought to blame only the left for civil disorder.¹⁷⁷

Anti-Republican propaganda in Spain failed to convince Chilton or the Foreign Office in London that only the left was to blame for civil disorder. Indeed, the Popular Front government had been striving to maintain order through the suppression of both left- and right-wing groups and British observers heeded Azaña's warnings that the fascist movement in Spain was not as negligible as people might have thought.¹⁷⁸ In April, for instance, Chilton told London of a conversation he had with a friend with connections to fascist groups in Spain. According to this friend, these groups were not in a hurry to launch a coup because 'recruits to fascism were flowing in thick and fast' and 'the actions of the government were driving hundreds daily into the arms of fascism'. Shuckburgh summarised the Foreign Office's attitude when he minuted, 'we have heard much of

¹⁷² TNA.FO371/20521, W3723/62/41, Shuckburgh minute, 29/4/1936.

¹⁷³ TNA.FO371/20521, W4243/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 13/5/1936.

¹⁷⁴ TNA.FO371/20521, W3224/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 14/4/1936.

¹⁷⁵ TNA.FO371/20521, W4433/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 18/5/1936 & Pollock minute, 20/5/1936.

¹⁷⁶ TNA.FO371/20521, W4249/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 13/5/1936.

¹⁷⁷ TNA.FO371/20521, W3449/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 21/4/1936; TNA.FO371/20521, W4433/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 18/5/1936; TNA.FO371/20521, W5670/62/41, Ogilvie-Forbes to Eden, 25/6/1936; Payne, *Spain's First Democracy*, pp. 314-20.

¹⁷⁸ TNA.FO371/20521, W3567/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 24/4/1936; TNA.FO371/20521, W4749/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 27/5/1936; TNA.FO371/20521, W4915/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 3/6/1936.

the communists' activities; this is the other side of the picture'.¹⁷⁹ Chilton could substantiate this information based on some of his own experiences in Spain. In May, for instance, he told the Foreign Office that 'not without reason', the government was seriously afraid of fascism. After a recent drive between Zaragoza and Madrid, he wrote of 'villagers unanimously [giving] the fascist salute as we passed. I did not see one clenched fist'.¹⁸⁰ Perhaps more alarming was the apparent widespread support in Spain for fascist Italy's conquest of Abyssinia. Antonio Goicoechea, leader of the monarchist party *Renovación Española*, for example, sent a telegram to Mussolini congratulating him on the entry of Italian troops into Addis Ababa, the Abyssinian capital. The Italian ambassador at Madrid, Orazio Pedrazzi, also published a statement in the Spanish press announcing that it would be impossible to respond personally to the thousands of letters he had received demonstrating support for the Italian conquest of Abyssinia.¹⁸¹

Spaniards of the right were well aware of foreign perceptions of these links between Spanish and Italian fascists and sought to alleviate British concerns. In June, for instance, a Spaniard named Hippolite Finat Rojas met and informed an official from the British Ministry of Labour that there would be a coup in Spain within the next week. This informant claimed that the 'head of the Spanish army' had sent him because plotters of the rebellion were 'anxious His Majesty's Government should know that it is not a fascist movement and anxious not to be thought connected with Italian propaganda or interests'. The intention of the coup was apparently strictly to restore order and place in power a 'civilian right-wing government'. The plotters also wanted to express their concern that Italy 'may take advantage of the temporary uncertainty caused by the coup to take naval action against the Balearic Islands'. At this stage, the Foreign Office doubted the likelihood of a rebellion within the timeframe given and therefore did not believe it had any reason to anticipate Italian action in Spain.¹⁸²

Although the rebellion did not materialise, the social and political situation in Spain continued to deteriorate and the British government began to take a direct interest in what was

¹⁷⁹ TNA.FO371/20521, W3720/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 29/4/1936, Shuckburgh minute, 30/4/1936.

¹⁸⁰ TNA.FO371/20521, W4074/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 8/5/1936.

¹⁸¹ TNA.FO371/20521, W4190/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 12/5/1936.

¹⁸² TNA.FO371/20521, W4919/62/41, Shuckburgh minute, 3/6/1936, Vansittart's reply enclosed. Only a few weeks later, Luis Bolín, Franco's chief press officer during the Civil War, would begin making arrangements in London for a plane to fly Franco from the Canary Islands to Morocco and initiate the rebellion, see Peter Day, *Franco's Friends: How British Intelligence helped Bring Franco to Power in Spain* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2011).

happening. George Ogilvie-Forbes, Counsellor at the British Embassy in Spain and later Chargé d’Affaires, suggested that Eden raise the issue with Spanish Foreign Minister Augusto Barcia at the upcoming League of Nations meetings in Geneva. In preparation for this, Montagu-Pollock drew up a memorandum on political developments in Spain since 1931 for Eden to read before departing for Switzerland. Eden underlined parts of the text, including the Spanish government’s apparent inability to maintain order at present, and that ‘chances of parliamentary government are slight’. Significantly, he underlined the suggestion that a ‘fascist coup’ was unlikely due to the Spanish Army being ‘a very uncertain element’ as ‘left-wing feeling is very strong among the lower ranks’. It is of course impossible to make much of what Eden was thinking as he underlined certain parts of this memorandum. However, if the parts he underlined in the text were what he considered most significant, there was no reason for him to assume that the rebellion that sparked the Civil War in July would be a quick success.¹⁸³

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that from the proclamation of the Second Republic in April 1931 until the military rebellion against it in July 1936, the British Foreign Office hoped to see a stable government in Spain that incorporated moderate elements from both the left and the right. Rather than viewing the social and political polarisation during these years as a process of bolshevisation and drift towards a communist state, the Foreign Office viewed the Republic as a viable political project that faced threats from the extremes of both the left and right. By incorporating British concerns regarding the rise and threat of fascism in Europe, the chapter has given a more nuanced assessment of British perceptions of Spain in the years preceding the Civil War.

The British political elite’s emphasis on respect for Parliament and the institution of democracy, as well as attempts made by Baldwin and the Conservative Party to incorporate the Labour movement within Conservative definitions of democracy, played out in assessments of political polarisation in Spain.¹⁸⁴ It became increasingly clear that oppression of the working class in Spain and a reluctance to introduce reforms to improve living and working conditions would

¹⁸³ TNA.FO371/20521, W5693/62/41, Pollock minute, 23/6/1936.

¹⁸⁴ Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin*, p. 204, 211, 235-38, 325-26, 353.

only lead to unrest and violence. From the Foreign Office's assessments of the political situation between 1931 and 1936, we can see that British policymakers and advisors hoped that centrist political actors, less prone to the extremes of both the political left and right, would take charge of governing Spain and steer the country away from the broader trend of ideological polarisation taking place in Europe during the 1930s. Although by summer 1936 it was clear that a stable, democratic government was no longer a realistic possibility, there was no consensus in the Foreign Office on what political regime was most desirable. Nevertheless, the perceptions of British diplomats in Spain and their colleagues at the Foreign Office before July 1936 provide insight into the ideological foundations of the policy of non-intervention adopted in response to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

Considering British perceptions of Spain within the wider context of the ideological polarisation in Europe during the 1930s is important because it allows us better to understand British attitudes on the eve of the Civil War. If the extreme elements of either side in Spain were going to triumph and establish a regime in place of the Republic, neither a regime of the left nor of the right was in British interests. Indeed, while historians have argued that the Foreign Office feared the consequences of a communist regime for British economic interests in Spain, they have attached less importance to British strategic concerns in light of the growing fascist threat in Europe. Of course, while historians have highlighted the potential for communism to spread from Spain to Portugal and France and therefore become a strategic threat to Britain, British policymakers with a focus on the Mediterranean were concerned more by the strategic threat of fascism. If the signs we have seen in this chapter of rapprochement between the Spanish right and Fascist Italy became a firmer diplomatic relationship, this presented significant dangers to Britain's position in the Mediterranean. The Spanish Civil War provided the context in which such a relationship could develop.

II

THE OUTBREAK OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

Formulating a Foreign Policy, July-September 1936

Introduction

As Spain was about to spiral into a protracted civil war, the British Chiefs of Staff were in the final stages of producing a report on Britain's strategic concerns in the Mediterranean. The Cabinet discussed the report on 21 July, just three days after the military rebellion in Spain, but it focused primarily on Greece and Turkey, rather than the importance of Spain and Gibraltar. The underlining conclusion of this report was that

From a strategical point of view, the first desideratum is a secure Mediterranean. This involves, as the primary consideration, the restoration of our former friendly relations with Italy. No action should be taken which is liable to prejudice this primary consideration.

The report stressed the necessity of establishing another base in the eastern Mediterranean and of securing the co-operation of Greece or Turkey in the event of a war with Italy. The Chiefs of Staff argued that with a third base in the east the Royal Navy would be able to close both the eastern and western entrances to the Mediterranean to Italian shipping and sever Italy's land and sea communications with its African territories.¹⁸⁵ This report by the Chiefs of Staff symbolised British policy towards Italy at the time. On the one hand, the British government sought to avoid action that would provoke Mussolini's hostility and prevent Anglo-Italian rapprochement, not least

¹⁸⁵ TNA.CAB24/263/41, 'Eastern Mediterranean: Understanding with Turkey and Greece', 21/7/1936.

because just days earlier it had lifted the economic sanctions that had been in place since the previous year. On the other, it aimed to create better conditions in which to wage war should these efforts fail. On 17 July, Sir Eric Drummond, the British Ambassador at Rome, wrote to Eden about Mussolini's attitude towards European collaboration and the prospects of improving Anglo-Italian relations. If relations did not improve, Drummond warned, Mussolini was 'likely to chuck in his hand and throw himself entirely into the German camp, even at the risk of a Europe divided into two distinct camps with all the ultimate dangers which this involves'. Italy, Drummond concluded, was therefore the 'pivot on which all hope of future general European collaboration rests'.¹⁸⁶

Despite the importance of the Mediterranean and Anglo-Italian rapprochement in British strategic planning, some historians have underestimated the importance of these when assessing Britain's response to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. Douglas Little, for instance, argued that fears of a communist revolution in Spain determined the British government's decision to adopt a policy of non-intervention rather than strategic considerations.¹⁸⁷ For his part, Enrique Moradiellos situates Britain's response to the rebellion within the wider context of British foreign policy but suggests only from November 1936, once the rebels failed to capture Madrid, did the British government subordinate its policy of non-intervention to the wider policy of general appeasement. Accordingly, he argues that between July and November concerns regarding a communist revolution guided Britain's response and its support for a non-intervention policy.¹⁸⁸ Edwards, despite putting less emphasis on ideological prejudices against the Republic during the Civil War, argued that concerns regarding the spread of communism guided the British government's initial response to the military rebellion.¹⁸⁹

This chapter argues that the British government immediately subordinated its response to the rebellion in Spain to the wider policy of general appeasement. As we have noted,

¹⁸⁶ Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham (CRL), Avon Papers (AP) 13/1/48, Drummond to Eden, 17/7/1936.

¹⁸⁷ Little, 'Red Scare', pp. 306-307. More recently, historian Maria Thomas had echoed Little's arguments by focusing on the views and reports of Norman King, the British Consul-General at Barcelona, and arguing that they were representative of attitudes in London towards Spain. During the summer of 1936, King sent graphic reports of violence that occurred in the Republican zone and Thomas argues that these reports undoubtedly shaped the British policy of non-intervention. However, King was on holiday at the time of the rebellion and did not return to his post until the end of July, by which point the British government had already decided on a policy of non-intervention, see Maria Thomas, 'The Front Line of Albion's Perfidy. Inputs into the Making of British Policy towards Spain: The Racism and Snobbery of Norman King', *International Journal of Iberian Studies*, 20.2 (2007), 105-127.

¹⁸⁸ Moradiellos, *Neutralidad benévola*, pp. 211-233.

¹⁸⁹ Edwards, *British Government*, pp. 15-39.

rapprochement with Italy was essential for neutralising the Mediterranean and the British government was therefore unwilling to adopt any policy which might alienate or provoke the hostility of Mussolini. This chapter shows that the Foreign Office and government knew not only that the Italian government was aware of the rebellion before it had begun, but also that within days Mussolini was contemplating intervention on the side of the rebels. Accordingly, from the very beginning, the British government had reason to believe that any support it gave to the Republic would place it in a position from which it risked a conflict with Italy.

Many Historians have taken a counterfactual approach by suggesting that if the British and French governments had taken a firmer stand in support of the Republic at the very beginning of the Civil War, Mussolini would probably have backed down. Paul Preston, for instance, suggests that one of the factors that influenced Mussolini to intervene in Spain was his assumption that the British establishment sympathised with the military rebels which led him to believe he would have the British government's 'covert approval'.¹⁹⁰ In a similar vein, Anthony Adamthwaite has directed heavy criticism towards the French government for not taking the opportunity to curb German and Italian aggression by sticking to its initial intention of sending arms to the Spanish government.¹⁹¹ However, we can never be absolutely certain about this, and at any rate we ought to consider the factors that influenced the process of decision making in London within the context of general appeasement and the restrictions, even self-imposed ones, that this policy placed on British policymakers when it came to Anglo-Italian or Anglo-German relations. This included simply selling armaments, which under international law the Republic had a right to purchase on the international market. Indeed, historians have often condemned the policy of non-intervention for this embargo it imposed on the Spanish government but we must be careful not to overlook the motivations for this from the British perspective, particularly when we consider it in light of the broader strategy of general appeasement. Gerald Howson, for example, points out that 'British arms exports to everywhere except Spain not only continued but actually increased from 1936' and therefore argues that this offers no justification for the British embargo.¹⁹² However, this overlooks the logic behind the embargo, which was to avoid an arms race against other powers in Spain by

¹⁹⁰ Paul Preston, 'Italy and Spain in Civil War and World War, 1936-1943', in Sebastian Balfour & Paul Preston (eds.), *Spain and the Great Powers in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 151-184 (p. 153).

¹⁹¹ Anthony Adamthwaite, 'The Spanish Civil War Revisited: The French Connection', in *The International Context of the Spanish Civil War*, ed. by Gaynor Johnson (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), pp. 1-18 (pp. 8-11).

¹⁹² Howson, *Arms for Spain*, p. 248.

simultaneously arming the two sides and thereby increasing the risk of the war escalating into a wider European war. Moreover, this condemnation is further misplaced if we remember that the British government also placed an arms embargo on the Abyssinian regime when it was fighting off Italian invasion.¹⁹³

This chapter also argues that the policy of non-intervention was a natural extension of the policy Britain had pursued towards Spain during the last five years. Britain's Mediterranean strategy depended on its continued control of Gibraltar, and control of Gibraltar relied on a benevolent government in Spain.¹⁹⁴ As we will see, the British Chiefs of Staff, Foreign Office and government were unanimous in their view that British policy ought to ensure Spain's benevolent neutrality in a future European war. We will discuss this in later chapters, but it is worth noting here that the issue of Spain's status in, and attitude towards, a future European war was, for the British government, *the* 'Spanish problem', rather than the Civil War alone. A policy of non-intervention offered the best means to ensure Spain's neutrality because it meant that neither side in Spain would have reason to adopt a foreign policy hostile towards Britain in the future. Not only was this policy consistent with the wider policy of general appeasement in the sense that it followed the logic of avoiding war or creating better conditions in which to wage one, but it also laid the foundation of Britain's policy towards the Civil War until its end in April 1939. None of this is to say that ideological antipathy towards the Republic did not exist. Rather, the chapter shows that regardless of any hostility towards the Spanish government or concerns of communism in Spain, realist policies predominated over any idealist ones. In this sense, ideology played a role in shaping

¹⁹³ Before the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, the British government had imposed an arms embargo on Haile Selassie's government because it feared supplying arms would provoke Mussolini and cause a war with Italy. In his memoirs, Eden, who at the time opposed the embargo, wrote 'All Abyssinia asked of the world was the right to self-defence. Even that was being denied her by withholding arms ... I was thoroughly sympathetic to this appeal, but had to content myself with referring it to London'. He reflected on this erroneous decision of the British government but noted 'Threats in the Italian press about the violent action that would follow if the embargo were raised had their effect', see Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, pp. 252-253, 289-290. The Abyssinia crisis, however, served only to demonstrate British weakness and boost Italian confidence. The timing of the civil war in Spain, just weeks after the lifting of the ineffective sanctions on Italy, ensured the British government would try a different method to improve Anglo-Italian relations.

¹⁹⁴ A hostile government in Spain or Italian occupation of the Balearics would have prevented France from transporting troops from North Africa through the Western Mediterranean and instead force it to use the Atlantic route. Taking into account the length of this route, as well as the time needed to transport troops across France from the Atlantic coast to its eastern and south eastern fronts, it would have taken France three times as long to transport troops from North Africa to mainland France. Of course, a hostile government in Spain would also have added another unfriendly state to France's borders. See Juan Aviles Farré, 'Francia y la guerra civil española: los límites de una política', *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, 5 (1992), 165-184 (pp. 165-166).

the unofficial attitudes of some British policymakers and advisors, but strategic constraints and the wider policy of general appeasement ensured the British government would adopt and maintain a policy of non-intervention throughout the Spanish Civil War.

By understanding British policy in this way, the chapter also allows us to understand better the foreign policies of the Spanish government and the rebels during the early months of the conflict and, in turn, the impact that they had on British policymakers and advisors. Indeed, as the British sought to curry favour with whichever side eventually emerged from the conflict, this policy conceded some influence to the two sides in Spain. As the broad strategy of appeasement and the threat of a war with Italy pushed the British government to adopt the policy of non-intervention, this was more important for the rebels than for the Republic who, as we will see, struggled to formulate an effective or robust opposition to Britain's non-intervention policy. The rebels, on the other hand, possessed an advantage in any relations with the British government because they had the support of the German and Italian governments. Accordingly, almost immediately after the rebellion, the British government had to contend with the possibility that a rebel victory might lead to the formation of a Rome-Berlin-Madrid Axis. This fear, based on its concerns regarding the rise of fascism in the preceding years, was the genesis of the appeasement policy Britain would later direct towards General Franco.

Defining a Policy

The British government defined its own response to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War amid an unclear and chaotic situation. Telephone lines and telegram communications were severely disrupted and many of the British diplomatic staff in Spain were on holiday, including Britain's Ambassador Henry Chilton, who was in San Sebastián.¹⁹⁵ On 18 July, Chilton told the Foreign Office that the Spanish Foreign Legion had revolted in Morocco but he could speak only of rumours of a rising in other parts of Spain.¹⁹⁶ Two days later, on 20 July, he informed his colleagues of more rumours that military rebels in Pamplona, Burgos, Vitoria, Palencia and Valladolid had revolted and enjoyed popular support.¹⁹⁷ A few hours later on that day, he told the Foreign Office that the

¹⁹⁵ 'Madrid 'Phone Still Cut', *Daily Mail*, 21/7/1936.

¹⁹⁶ TNA.FO371/20522, W6529/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 18/7/1936.

¹⁹⁷ TNA.FO371/20523, W6605/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 20/7/1936.

‘general situation remains confused and reliable information is not obtainable’ and that although there were ‘still grounds for anxiety’ the progress of the rebels ‘was slackening’.¹⁹⁸ The Spanish Embassy in London was also unable to provide any detailed information on what was happening in Spain. On 20 July, the Spanish Ambassador, Julio López Oliván, asked the Foreign Ministry in Madrid for information about the development of events because his inability to provide detailed information was having a negative effect on opinions in London. However, even at this early stage he was able to inform his government that Eden had told him that central to British foreign policy would be preventing the division of Europe further into ideological blocs.¹⁹⁹ These obstacles to communication meant that the British Cabinet would not discuss what was happening in Spain until 22 July.²⁰⁰ From the archival records it is not clear in how much detail the Cabinet discussed the Spanish issue, but they concluded that while the ‘situation remains unclear’ due to ‘fragmentary information’ it ‘should be carefully watched’ with no action was necessary for the moment.²⁰¹

In addition to the uncertainty of the situation in Spain, evidence that the Italian government not only knew about the rebellion before it happened but also that it was contemplating intervening on the side of the rebels pushed Britain towards favouring a policy of non-intervention. British deciphering of Italian communications between Tangier and Rome revealed that the Italian government had knowledge of the military rebellion the day before it began.²⁰² On 16 July, Pier Filippo de Rossi, the Italian Minister Plenipotentiary at Tangier, for instance, told the Italian Foreign Ministry ‘[It is] reported to me that after murder of Calvo Sotelo there will be a new rising in Spain, which is to be directed by General Franco now Governor of Canaries. The movement is to be started in Tetuán by the Foreign Legion’.²⁰³ One week later, on 23 July, de Rossi sent another telegram to Rome in which he spoke of Franco’s request for Italian assistance:

General Franco, with whom I am in cordial relations, asks me to inform Your Excellency that he assumes the direction of the movement not for party reasons but to combat communism ... He

¹⁹⁸ TNA.FO371/20523, W6606/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 20/7/1936.

¹⁹⁹ AGA.12/3218/6/1, Oliván to Barcia, 20/7/1936.

²⁰⁰ On the same day, the King approached Oliván and a royal garden party, although what they discussed is unclear, see ‘Grave Position in Spain, *Manchester Guardian*, 22/7/1936.

²⁰¹ TNA.CAB23/85/7, 22/7/1936.

²⁰² On secret contact between the Spanish rebels and Italian government before the rebellion on 18 July, see Heiberg and Ros Agudo, *La trama oculta*, pp. 1-14.

²⁰³ TNA.HW12/205, 065629, De Rossi to Rome, 16/7/1936.

asks that the Fascist Government of Italy should interest itself in his Fascist [movement] and should be willing to [assist] and help him quickly to strike a decisive blow against his enemies.²⁰⁴

Further decryptations revealed that the Foreign Ministry in Rome, under the direction of Mussolini's son-in-law, Galeazzo Ciano, was taking a serious interest in the rebellion. Ciano asked de Rossi to let him know 'with precision' the strength of the 'revolutionaries' and the 'chances of successes' the rebellion had.²⁰⁵ Already by this stage, it was clear that if Britain wanted to improve its relations with Mussolini, staying out of the Spanish conflict offered the best chances of doing so.

This evidence of Italian intentions helps us to understand how the British government formulated its response to the Civil War in Spain over the course of the next week. By this point, the Republican government had made no attempt to purchase armaments in Britain but had asked for support from the French government.²⁰⁶ On 18 July, José Giral, the Spanish Prime Minister, had personally sent a telegram to French Prime Minister Léon Blum requesting the urgent supply of war matériel with which the Spanish government could suppress the rebellion. While Blum agreed to this initially, his discussions over the next few days with the British government would play a role in changing his mind.²⁰⁷ Blum visited London between 23 and 25 July with his Foreign Minister Yvon Delbos. Although it did not share the information it had on Italian intentions, the British government made its attitude towards the conflict clear. While the Anglo-French discussions were taking place, Rome asked its embassy in London to obtain information to verify reports emanating from Paris that France was making preparations to send aid to the Republic.²⁰⁸ On 25 July, Ciano tasked de Rossi with getting 'in touch with Franco' and informing him in an 'absolutely secret way' that 'any action in his favour would be made easier if he were to assume a mantle of [legality]' such as forming 'in the name of the Spanish nation a Government in Morocco' and giving 'formal notice to the Powers'.²⁰⁹ Meanwhile Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin told Blum that if French intervention in Spain provoked a conflict with Italy or Germany the British

²⁰⁴ TNA.HW12/205, 065680, De Rossi to Rome, 23/7/1936

²⁰⁵ TNA.HW12/205, 065680, Rome to Italian Legation in Tangier, 24/7/1936.

²⁰⁶ Casanova, *La diplomacia española*, pp. 50-53.

²⁰⁷ Ricardo Miralles, 'El duro forcejeo de la diplomacia republicana en París. Francia y la guerra civil española', in *Al servicio de la República. Diplomáticos y guerra civil*, ed. by Ángel Viñas (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2010), pp. 121-154 (pp. 123-125).

²⁰⁸ TNA.HW12/205, 065700, Rome to Italian Embassy in London, 24 July 1936.

²⁰⁹ TNA.HW12/205, 065680, Rome to Italian Legation in Tangier, 25/7/1936.

government would remain neutral.²¹⁰ Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, asked Blum just before he returned to Paris whether he really intended to send arms to the Spanish government. When Blum confirmed this was his intention, Eden replied, ‘I ask of you only one thing, I beg of you, be cautious’.²¹¹

Historians often try to establish a link between Baldwin’s personal hatred of communism and British concerns regarding a communist revolution in Spain to explain British non-intervention but this does not offer a sufficient explanation of British policy. They usually cite, for instance, a comment Baldwin made to Eden shortly after the Anglo-French meetings in which he said ‘on no account, French or other, must you bring us into a fight on the side of the Russians’.²¹² However, rather than view this as evidence of revolutionary preoccupations guiding Britain’s response to the Civil War, we ought to examine it in its wider context and how it links to British foreign policy objectives more broadly. Indeed, it is worth bearing in mind the Franco-Soviet Treaty of Mutual Assistance, concluded in May 1935 and ratified in February 1936, and what the British government thought of it. Hitler had used the treaty to justify Germany’s reoccupation of the Rhineland in March and the British government viewed it as contributing to the division of Europe into ideological blocs.²¹³ Under the Treaty, in the event of an unprovoked attack on either the Soviet Union or France, they would immediately lend each other reciprocal aid and assistance. If French aid to the legal Spanish government provoked a war with Hitler or Mussolini, this would represent

²¹⁰ Edwards, *British Government*, p. 28.

²¹¹ Joel Colton, *Léon Blum: Humanist in Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1966), p. 241. In his memoirs, Eden did not include any recollection of this conversation, instead implying that the French government came up with the idea of non-intervention for its own reasons, see *Facing the Dictators*, p. 401. Whether Baldwin and Eden based their warnings on intercepted Italian communications is difficult to know with certainty, but given that this material was under the control of the Foreign Office and frequently circulated to people within it, it seems unlikely that at least Eden would not have received the information contained within these, see, for example, H. Matthew Hefler, “‘In the way’”: Intelligence, Eden, and British Foreign Policy towards Italy, 1937–38’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 33.6 (2018), 875-893 (pp. 879-880); On the handling of signals intelligence, see John Ferris, ‘The Road to Bletchley Park: The British Experience with Signals Intelligence, 1892-1945’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 17.1 (2002), 53-84.

²¹² Original quote in Jones, *A Diary with Letters*, p. 231. Moradiellos, *La perfidia*, pp. 53-54; Edwards, *British Government*, pp. 18-19. Viñas, *La soledad de la República*, pp. 76-77, acknowledges that the British government simply wanted a friendly government in Spain but suggests Baldwin was convinced that a victory for the Republic would result in a communist regime. Little, *Malevolent Neutrality*, p. 226, argues Baldwin’s comment was a confession that he ‘was deeply troubled by signs of Bolshevik subversion in Spain’.

²¹³ Bouverie, *Appeasing Hitler*, p. 62, 83-85.

an act of aggression against France, and the British government would have then had to choose between joining France and the Soviet Union in this war or remaining neutral.²¹⁴

For Baldwin, communism was only marginally worse than fascism. He had prophesied before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War that ‘from the Rhine to the Pacific there will be a people running into millions who have been trained to be either Bolshevik robots or Nazi robots’ and said he would have preferred to leave ‘the Bolshies and the Nazis’ to fight each other.²¹⁵ At a Cabinet meeting in March 1936, Baldwin had said that a Franco-Soviet war against Nazi Germany ‘would probably only result in Germany going Bolshevik’.²¹⁶ Thomas Jones, a Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet and close friend of Baldwin’s, told the Prime Minister in May of concerns which German Ambassador Joachim von Ribbentrop had that Moscow was attempting to create a communist state in Spain.²¹⁷ It is with all of this in mind that Baldwin and Eden gave their warnings to Blum, and probably why Baldwin referred to ‘the Russians’ in his comment to Eden.

Of course, none of this is to say that the violence in the Republican zone, the arming of workers or the collapse of government authority did not influence British perceptions of the Spanish government.²¹⁸ Even Julio López Oliván, the Spanish Ambassador at London who had reaffirmed his loyalty to his government on 26 July, fuelled concerns of a communist revolution in Spain.²¹⁹ Just one day earlier, he had begun to make preparations for his resignation and called upon Anthony Eden to ask if he would be able to remain in Britain as a private citizen if he resigned from his post. According to Eden’s record of the conversation, López Oliván said there were three possible outcomes from the present conflict: a rebel victory, which would force his resignation; the victory of a communist government, which would also force him to resign; or the continuation in power of the Republic if it suppressed the rebellion.²²⁰ Eden noted ‘It was clear from the way he

²¹⁴ Pavel A. Zhilin, ‘The USSR and Collective Security 1935-1939’, *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 2.1-4 (1977), 147-159; Thomas, *Britain, France & Appeasement*, pp. 180-181, 194-197.

²¹⁵ Williamson, *Baldwin*, pp. 315-317.

²¹⁶ TNA.CAB23/83/18, 11/3/1936.

²¹⁷ Jones, *Diary with Letters*, p. 231.

²¹⁸ On the violence, see Preston, *Spanish Holocaust*, pp. 221-299; on anticlerical violence in the Republican zone, see Maria Thomas, *The Faith and the Fury: Popular Anticlerical Violence and Iconoclasm in Spain, 1931-1939* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2012). On the Republican government’s loss of control and the arming of militias, see Graham, *The Spanish Republic at War*, pp. 79-130.

²¹⁹ AGA.12/3218/3, López Oliván to Barcia, 26/7/1936.

²²⁰ López Oliván’s true feelings towards the two sides in Spain have been disputed. Moradiellos, *Neutralidad benévola*, pp. 188-200, argues he supported the rebels from 18 July and sabotaged the Republic’s efforts to purchase war matériel in Britain. Edwards, *British Government*, pp. 182-183, on the other hand, has argued he favoured a victory for neither side but she consulted only British archival records. Pablo de Azcárate, who would replace him as ambassador at

spoke that Sr. Oliván was inclined to regard the second alternative as the more likely', although he did not express any of his personal feelings towards what the Spanish Ambassador had told him.²²¹ It is possible that this influenced Eden and, if Eden discussed this meeting with Baldwin, that it played a role in influencing the Prime Minister's attitude as well. It seems unlikely, however, that Eden and Baldwin compartmentalised Spain as an issue separate from broader British foreign policy interests or the ideological polarisation in Europe, as the discussions with Blum and Delbos demonstrate.

Upon returning to France, Blum reversed his decision to send war matériel to the Republic as a result not only of British comments but also because of pressure he faced in Paris. On 25 July, for instance, Sir George Clerk, the British Ambassador at Paris, informed the Foreign Office that the Quai d'Orsay had exerted its own pressure on the French Cabinet because it 'already had reason to think that the Italian and German governments were assisting the "White" forces in Spain'.²²² This, of course, was before either Hitler or Mussolini had actually begun to intervene in support of the rebels but the British government, as we have seen, was already aware of contacts between the Spanish rebels and the Italian government. Moreover, on 28 July, Maurice Ingram, the British Chargé d'Affaires at Rome, warned the Foreign Office that the Italians were 'anxious lest they are faced with governments in France and Spain in which communist and anti-fascist elements predominate'.²²³ It was becoming increasingly clear that the Italian government viewed events in Spain within the broader ideological framework of fascism and communism.

By the end of July, clear evidence of Italian intervention reinforced British determination to stay out of the Spanish conflict and bolstered those in Paris opposed to Blum's desire to send war matériel to the Republic. Importantly, this signalled Anglo-French weakness to Mussolini. At dawn on 30 July, twelve Italian Savoia-Marchetti S.81 bombers left Sardinia for Spanish Morocco,

London in September 1936, wrote in his memoirs that Oliván remained loyal to the Republic until his resignation in August, see *Mi embajada en Londres durante la guerra civil* (Barcelona: Ariel, 2012), p. 31. Oliván later returned to Spain in the rebel zone but held no official post, see Marina Casanova, *La diplomacia española*, p. 59. While Oliván claimed to be independent, he made it clear to the Foreign Office in August that he desired a 'victory for the rebels', FO371/20569, W9209/3694/41, 14/8/1936. If he became a secret supporter of the rebels, this did not happen before August, as in late July he asked Eden if Britain or another nation could intervene in Spain to negotiate a settlement, which the military rebels would inevitably have rejected, see CAB23/85/8, 29/7/1936.

²²¹ TNA.FO371/20569, W6893/3694/41, Eden minute, 24/7/1936. Oliván also said something similar to Thomas Jones, a Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet, a few days later on 28 July, see Jones, *Diary with Letters*, p. 232.

²²² TNA.FO371/20524, W6960/62/41, Clerk to Eden, 25/7/1936.

²²³ TNA.FO371/20524, W7100/62/41, Ingram to Eden, 28/7/1936.

from where they would assist in transporting troops over the Straits of Gibraltar to mainland Spain. Not all of these aircraft, however, reached their destination. Fierce headwinds and heavy clouds prolonged the journey and led to a shortage of fuel. On 31 July, one plane went down in the sea, while one crashed and another landed inside French Morocco.²²⁴ Clerk relayed the news to the Foreign Office immediately and warned that the incident was certain to put serious strain on the French government's efforts to prevent the supply of war matériel to the Republic and that it would have 'wider repercussions in Franco-Italian relations'.²²⁵ The Foreign Office also soon learned of German intervention. Before the end of July British intelligence services intercepted communications between the Spanish consul at Tangier and the government in Madrid which suggested German aircraft had already arrived in Spanish Morocco and that more would soon arrive.²²⁶ The French government also kept the Foreign Office informed of German intervention. The French consuls at Hamburg and Larache, for instance, reported on the despatch and receipt of German aircraft and bombs.²²⁷

All of this helps us to explain why the British government made a conscious decision to deny the Spanish government its legal right to purchase arms on the international market. It was only in the final days of July, once efforts to purchase war matériel from France had failed, that the Spanish government turned its attention to London. On 27 July, López Oliván invited Eden and his wife to the Spanish Embassy to discuss 'urgent matters' regarding events in Spain in a strictly private environment.²²⁸ Exactly what Oliván said to Eden and why this needed to be a strictly private discussion is unclear, but after their meeting Eden told the Cabinet that the Spanish government was likely soon to request to purchase armaments from British companies.²²⁹ Eden gave the official line of the British government, which was that there would be no obstacles in the

²²⁴ The aircraft had been repainted grey in an attempt to hide their origin but the Italian insignia was still visible. The airmen were wearing civilian clothes and possessed ID with false names, although one had mistakenly brought with him his real papers identifying him as a pilot of the Italian Royal Air Force. Not knowing that the French authorities were already on the scene, two rebel aircraft dropped parcels containing Spanish Legion uniforms with a written note that gave the game away completely, see Alpert, *Franco and the Condor Legion*, pp. 50-51.

²²⁵ TNA.FO371/20525, W7445/62/41, Clerk to Eden, 31/7/1936. On 1 August, *The Times* reported that this incident had complicated the French government's difficulties in avoiding sending arms to Spain, but that it was unlikely France would do so 'provided that this is the end and not the beginning of Italian interference in the Spanish struggle'. See 'Italy and Spain', *The Times*, 1/8/1936.

²²⁶ TNA.HW12/205, Prieto to Madrid, 31/7/1936.

²²⁷ TNA.FO371/20529, W8321/62/41, Clerk to Halifax, 11/8/1936.

²²⁸ CRL.AP13/1/42D, Oliván to Eden, 27/7/1936.

²²⁹ TNA.CAB23/85/8, 29/7/1936.

Spanish government's way but that war matériel would be subject to the normal process of issuing export licences.²³⁰ On 30 July, Spanish Foreign Minister Augusto Barcia instructed López Oliván 'urgently' to find out for certain whether the British government would permit the exportation of war matériel to Spain and communicate their response as soon as possible so that Spanish officials could go to London to begin negotiations.²³¹ In reality, any efforts would have been in vain because Eden, before leaving for a holiday in Yorkshire, told the Foreign Office that he hoped to 'avoid supplying [armaments], by some means or other'.²³²

The British government decided effectively to abandon the Spanish government to a rebellion backed by the German and Italian governments not because of fears regarding the spread of communism but rather as a result of strategic and military constraints. Indeed, there were two options open to the British government: send war matériel to the Republic or adopt a policy of non-intervention and refuse to sell armaments to either side. Under the first option the British government faced two potential outcomes. Firstly, it could have committed itself to the Republican cause in the hope that British resolve would force Mussolini to back down. Alternatively, if Mussolini did not back down, the British government could have later reneged on its decision, much like the French government had done. As the failure of sanctions in response to the Abyssinian crisis had shown, however, this would serve only to demonstrate British weakness in the face of Italian aggression and boost Mussolini's confidence. Moreover, there was the question of what the British government at this point was willing to prioritise at this critical juncture: the defence of Spain's democracy or the pacification of Europe. According to British thinking at the time, the two were incompatible. Indeed, Britain could not hope to prevent Mussolini's drift into the Third Reich's orbit by waging a proxy war against him in Spain and risking a general European war.

The outbreak of the Civil War also brought Spain firmly into the policy of general appeasement because supporting the Spanish government under these circumstances brought its own risks in terms of Britain's traditional relationship with, and strategic conception of, the Iberian Peninsula. On 31 July, the military rebels made their first contact with the Foreign Office to inform it that they had established a military junta at Burgos and to express their hope of maintaining

²³⁰ AGA.12/3218/26/1, Oliván to Barcia, 28/7/1936.

²³¹ AGA.12/3218/26/1, Barcia to Oliván, 30/7/1936.

²³² TNA.FO371/20525, W7492/62/41, Seymour minute, 31/7/1936.

‘friendly relations’ with the British government.²³³ This added a new dimension to Britain’s foreign policy considerations because not only did it fear provoking an escalation of the conflict, but it also had to consider its future relationship with Spain now that the Spanish government had been unable to suppress the rebellion. If the British government supported the Republic, this support needed to be sufficient to guarantee its victory lest it create another potential adversary that was in the process of establishing friendly relations with the Italian government. Accordingly, support for the Republic would have put at risk the policy of appeasement and the chances of maintaining friendly relations with Spain if the rebellion succeeded.

The Emergence of the Non-Intervention Agreement

To bridge divided opinions in France and those between Paris and London, at the beginning of August Léon Blum proposed an official Non-Intervention Agreement.²³⁴ Although there were some disagreements about exactly which states the Agreement should include, the views of those in the Foreign Office who wanted to exclude the Soviet Union prevailed and the initial invitations went only to states disposed to aid the military rebels.²³⁵ The reply sent to the French government two days after receiving the proposal stated:

²³³ AGA.12/3218/26/1, Oliván to Barcia, 31/7/1936.

²³⁴ Historians have disagreed on exactly what role the British government played in France’s decision to withdraw its initial offer of support for the Republic. Before the 1970s, there was a general consensus that British pressure had played a significant role. Claude Bowers, the U.S. Ambassador at Madrid during the Civil War, contributed to this interpretation when he wrote in his memoirs that Blum ‘was practically blackmailed’ into accepting non-intervention, see *My Mission to Spain: Watching the Rehearsal for World War II* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1954), p. 281. In the 1960s, Hugh Thomas also claimed the French were given an ‘ultimatum’, see *Spanish Civil War*, p. 258. David Carlton challenged such interpretations and argued political infighting in Paris was the primary reason for this reversal while foreign policy considerations, including British pressure, were secondary, see Carlton, ‘Eden, Blum and the Origins of Non-Intervention’. Glyn Stone then challenged this view and stressed the importance of foreign policy considerations while acknowledging that domestic tensions played an important role, see Stone, ‘Britain, Non-Intervention and the Spanish Civil War’. Interestingly, Augusto Barcía, the Spanish Foreign Minister between July and September 1936, wrote an account of the non-intervention policy after the Civil War and placed the lion’s share of the blame on the French government, see *La política de no intervención* (Buenos Aires: Publicaciones del Patronato Hispano-Argentino de Cultura, 1942). It is clear from these studies and ones which historians have written since that the British government exerted some pressure over the French government but this merely provided Blum with the means to justify his policy against criticism from partisans of the Republic.

²³⁵ TNA.FO371/20526, W7504/62/41, Cambon to Eden, 2/8/1936; Leigh Smith minute; Mounsey note to Halifax & attached draft of response to French government’s proposal.

His Majesty's Government would in present circumstances welcome an early agreement between all powers who may be in a position to supply arms and munitions to refrain from doing so ... They are of the opinion, however, that such an agreement would not have the requisite value unless simultaneously accepted at the initial stage by such Governments as those of France, Germany, Italy, Portugal and His Majesty's Government ... It would be hoped that the agreement would eventually be subscribed to by all other powers concerned'.²³⁶

Although the British government hoped the Soviet Union would eventually subscribe to the proposed agreement, it is important to emphasise that in its initial stage the British government focused only on itself and France – to avoid a potential conflict with the fascist powers – and the states which were likely to support the military rebels. It is also worth noting that the Labour Party and wider labour movement, which later in the war became vocal opponents of the Non-Intervention Agreement once it proved to benefit the military rebels, supported the initiative as they perceived it as the best means of ensuring the Spanish government would be able to suppress the rebellion.²³⁷

Although there appeared to be widespread support in the Soviet Union for the Spanish Republic and evidence of German and Italian intervention had pushed the Soviet government to abandon its previously neutral stance towards the conflict, the Foreign Office considered the French attitude towards Spain as the biggest threat to peace in Europe.²³⁸ Indeed, there were a number of logistical obstacles to any aid from the Soviet Union reaching Spain but in France there were widespread protests demanding that the government simply send war matériel to its southern neighbour. On 9 August, for instance, more than 20,000 people gathered at the Velodrome d'Hiver in Paris to protest against their government's refusal to send arms to Spain, chanting '*Des avions pour l'Espagne, des canons pour l'Espagne!*' ('Planes for Spain, guns for Spain!'). Horace Seymour, Principal Private Secretary to Eden, minuted 'Poor M. Blum! We cannot help doubting

²³⁶ TNA.FO371/20526, W7504/62/41, Eden to Cambon, 4/8/1936.

²³⁷ Tom Buchanan, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 37-72. The violence in the Republican zone had alienated some within the Labour movement. For instance, Harold Nicolson, a National Labour MP and previously a supporter of Oswald Mosley's New Party, wrote in his diary on 8 August that the Republic was 'a mere Kerensky government at the mercy of an armed proletariat', although he conceded that 'Franco and his Moors are no better', see Harold Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters, 1930-1939* (London: Collins, 1966), p. 270.

²³⁸ Denis Smyth, "'We Are with You': Solidarity and Self-Interest in Soviet Policy towards Republican Spain, 1936-1939', in *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain, 1936-1939*, ed. by Paul Preston and Ann Mackenzie (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), pp. 87-105 (p. 91).

whether an effective non-interference agreement is possible in the face of this kind of thing'.²³⁹ Evelyn Shuckburgh, chiefly responsible in the Western Department for Spanish affairs before the Civil War, raised his concern that 'the pressure on the French government from the Left is becoming daily more heavy'.²⁴⁰ The reason that the Non-Intervention Agreement found support not only in the government but across parties in Britain was because initially it promised to prevent fascist support going to the rebels and failure to secure this could have led to similar pressure on the British government.

There seems little reason to doubt that the British government genuinely wanted the Non-Intervention Agreement to work in order to avoid foreign intervention on both sides in Spain. Indeed, the French government had already insisted when it proposed the agreement that it reserved the right to send arms to Spain if the European powers could not reach an agreement.²⁴¹ On 12 August, Yvon Delbos reiterated this view to George Clerk when he said that, unless there was an agreement soon, the French government would not be able to defy public demands to send arms to Spain as a result of the support Germany and Italy were supplying to the rebels.²⁴² This situation, Mounsey noted on 19 August, would bring 'the dangerous spectacle of French support of the government in Spain against the rebels assisted by Italy, Germany and Portugal'.²⁴³ On 24 August, the day on which the German government finally accepted the invitation to join the agreement, Charles Corbin, the French Ambassador at London, visited Eden to tell him that before this news arrived Blum and Delbos 'had been near the end of their tether'.²⁴⁴ As we have already noted, these concerns linked back to the Anglo-French talks shortly after the military rebellion and prevalent fears in London that foreign intervention in Spain would lead to the outbreak of a European war.

Due to fears that the French government would not be able to maintain its own policy of non-intervention, the Foreign Office hastened to secure an agreement between the principal

²³⁹ TNA.FO371/20528, W8108/62/41, Seymour minute, 9/8/1936.

²⁴⁰ TNA.FO371/20533, W9185/62/41, Shuckburgh minute, 19/8/1936. Warnings also came from the Air Ministry. On 19 August, for instance, Wing Commander Goddard told the Foreign Office that German and Italian intervention was looking increasingly likely and 'while this probability exists it is all the more likely that the Left and the Extreme Left supporters of the French Government will cause intervention on the side of the Spanish Government', see TNA.AIR40/222, 'Notes on Air Aspect of the Spanish Civil War', 17/8/1936.

²⁴¹ TNA.FO371/20526, W7567/62/41, Clerk to Eden, 2/8/1936.

²⁴² TNA.FO371/20529, W8370/62/41, Clerk to Eden, 12/8/1936.

²⁴³ TNA.FO371/20573, W9717/9549/41, Mounsey minute, 19/8/1936.

²⁴⁴ TNA.FO371/20572, W9550/9549/41, Eden to Clerk, 24/8/1936.

European powers. At the insistence of the German and Italian regimes, the British and French governments quickly expanded the agreement to include the Soviet Union as well.²⁴⁵ For their part, the Italians created difficulties by objecting to specific terms of the agreement, insisting that ‘unless the foreign press ceases to talk of events in Spain as a conflict between Fascism and Bolshevism’ Italy would not be able to join. ‘Mental disarmament’, Ciano insisted with clear hints to the Soviet Union, ‘was required before physical disarmament’.²⁴⁶ When the Portuguese government, which supported the rebels and allowed them to use Portuguese territory, created problems by delaying its agreement to the terms of the French proposal, the French government argued that Portugal was delaying its acceptance of the agreement until the rebels had secured victory while continuing to help them in the meantime. Accordingly, to ensure Portuguese adherence, Charles Dodd, the British *Chargé d’Affaires* at Lisbon, asked the Foreign Office to authorise him to inform the Portuguese government that Britain was beginning to ‘share the impatience’ of the French government, which the Foreign Office authorised him to do.²⁴⁷

The Genesis of Appeasement in Britain’s Policy in Spain

Evidence of fascist intervention and the potential Spain had to divide Europe further along ideological lines forced the British government to formulate its response to the military rebellion within the confines of the broader policy of general appeasement. Throughout the first six weeks of the Spanish Civil War, the fear of fascism, rather than communism, ensured the British government committed to a policy of non-intervention because an alliance between the regime that the rebels might create and the fascist powers was a greater threat to British strategic interests in the Mediterranean. Indeed, while the Foreign Office acknowledged the rebellion’s strong emphasis on nationalism, it was concerned that if the rebellion came to depend on German and Italian assistance for its survival then rebel leaders would have little say in the terms of their future relations with the fascist powers. As a minimum, this could simply mean a friendly foreign policy towards the fascist states, but it could also extend to the cessation or lending of Spanish territory for use by the fascist powers in a future European war. For instance, in response to rumours that

²⁴⁵ TNA.FO371/20527, W7808/62/41, minute by Mounsey, 5/8/1936; W7919/62/41, Ingram to Eden, 6/8/1936; FO371/20528, W8047/62/41, Phipps to Eden, 8/8/1936.

²⁴⁶ TNA.FO371/20528, W8054/62/41, Ingram to Eden, 8/8/1936.

²⁴⁷ TNA.FO371/20533, W9060/62/41, Dodd to Eden, 18/8/1936.

Franco would give up Spanish territory to the Germans and Italians in return for their assistance in his war against the Republic and eventual reconquest of Gibraltar, Mounsey said on 8 August that ‘we must keep this very much in mind and watch for any evidence’.²⁴⁸ Moreover, a Foreign Office memorandum entitled ‘Italian Foreign Policy and the Spanish Civil War’ produced in mid-August stated that ‘even if General Franco is successful his position may temporarily be very weak and he might be tempted to enter into specifically intimate political relations with Italy in return for, say, military supplies or technical assistance’. This memorandum revealed how the Foreign Office believed that Mussolini would interpret events in Spain as an ideological struggle and use the conflict as an opportunity to alter the status quo in the Mediterranean. ‘We can hardly avoid the supposition’, the memorandum read, ‘that Italy will regard the disturbances in Spain not only as a struggle between Fascism and Communism, but also and primarily as a field in which ... she might find herself at once able to strengthen her own influence and to weaken British sea power in the Western Mediterranean’.²⁴⁹

For their part, the military rebels tried to reassure the British government that the rebellion’s success would not lead to the cessation of any Spanish territory and sought to downplay any connections it had with the fascist states. In mid-August, José de Yanguas Messía, at this stage chiefly responsible for the rebellion’s international relations and later Franco’s ambassador to the Holy See, and the Marquis de Merry del Val, Spain’s ambassador at London from 1913 until 1931, travelled to meet Henry Chilton at Hendaye, where he had temporarily set up an embassy while he was unable to return to Madrid.²⁵⁰ Yanguas and Merry del Val hoped to gauge the opinion of the British government towards the rebellion and dissipate fears in London that the rebels would cede territory to Germany and Italy. Yanguas began by contrasting the conditions in the rebel zone with

²⁴⁸ TNA.FO371/20527, W7760/62/41, Clerk to Seymour, 31/7/1936, Mounsey minute 8 August.

²⁴⁹ TNA.FO371/20573, W9885/9549/41, O’Malley memorandum: ‘Italian Foreign Policy and the Spanish Civil War’, 14/8/1936. The author of the memorandum, Owen O’Malley, later became the British Chargé d’Affaires after Chilton’s retirement and was sympathetic towards the military rebels throughout the Civil War.

²⁵⁰ The location of a British ‘embassy’ in Spain was an issue throughout the Civil War. Due to the uncertainty of the situation, the Foreign Office decided that Chilton would not return to Madrid for the time being and sent George Ogilvie-Forbes there as Chargé d’Affaires instead. The convenience of being able to meet representatives of the rebels, such as Yanguas and Merry del Val, was also a factor which influenced this decision because it was in line with the policy of currying favour with both sides. Moreover, the Spanish government moved from Madrid to Valencia in November 1936, and a year later from Valencia to Barcelona. In theory this meant the capital cities of Republican Spain changed during the Civil War. Accordingly, the British government and Foreign Office also felt it was more practical to keep embassy operations going at the Hendaye consulate. This thesis therefore uses ‘British Embassy’ when referring to Hendaye in the chapters focusing on the Civil War period.

the anarchy he claimed was raging in the Spanish government's territory before explaining to Chilton the 'true national and anti-communist character' of the rebellion. He also insisted that 'the Junta had not made, nor would make, any territorial or political agreement with a foreign power' as it wanted 'to conserve friendship with all states' and especially 'to maintain the excellent traditional relations of our nation with Britain'. According to their record of the conversation, Chilton agreed with the contrasts between the two zones in Spain but was interested above all in the assurances relating to the Junta's foreign policy. Yanguas and Merry del Val believed Anthony Eden was unfavourable towards the rebels due to his aversion to Fascist Italy and his belief that the National Movement was 'purely fascist and a friend of Italy'. This, Yanguas claimed, was the reason why he had 'insisted especially on the national character of the movement' to Chilton.²⁵¹

Although the British government and Foreign Office hoped for an effective Non-Intervention Agreement, the alternative options in the event that the negotiations failed show how the policy of non-intervention was susceptible to evolve into a policy of appeasement. On 19 August, for instance, George Mounsey, Under-Secretary in the Western Department, put together a list of alternative policies to suggest to the government on 19 August. He ruled out supplying arms only to the rebels 'as contrary to all our principles and correctness of justice', which left the government with three options:

1. To continue to maintain a policy of impartiality and find ways of discouraging the supply of arms to either side without 'refusing on principle to consider applications from the Spanish Government'
2. To allow licences to be issued only when arms were guaranteed to be for the use of the Spanish government for defence purposes

²⁵¹ AGA.82/2621/5, 'Situación internacional y diplomática', 16/8/1936. A few days earlier, the Marquis del Moral, whom we will meet properly in the next chapter, met Horace Seymour at the Foreign Office and insisted Franco would not give away any of Spain's territory. While the Foreign Office did not believe Franco would do this willingly, the Foreign Office did not take Moral seriously, not least because he admitted he had not been able to get in contact with Franco personally. However, this mattered little because Franco had communicated this to the Foreign Office himself through Juan de la Cierva. See FO371/20529, W8341/62/41, Seymour minute, 11/8/1936.

In Chilton's own report of his conversation with Yanguas and Merry del Val, he said that their claims that the rebellion was 'a national movement, headed by the army and supported by substantial elements of the whole country, to rescue Spain and to free her from the horrors of the Soviet' was 'mainly propaganda', see TNA.FO371/20532, W8952/62/41, Chilton to Eden, 14/8/1936.

3. To allow arms to be exported from Britain to any destination in Spain, regardless of whether it was rebel or government territory

Mounsey argued that the first option was the best for British interests as it was the only policy which made it possible to establish friendly relations with either side once the war had ended. However, he warned that the ‘delays and difficulties that we can interpose will gradually be taken to be discriminatory action against the existing Government in Spain, and will affect their attitude towards His Majesty’s Government in the event of their recovering control of the country’. He said the second option would ‘lay us open to a less justifiable charge on the part of the rebels of favouring the rival party’ but ruled it out because this concern was less important ‘than the consideration that such a policy will align us with France, as against Germany, Italy and Portugal in definite support of one of the contending parties in Spain’. This, he argued, would ‘deprive us of the impartial attitude which must in the future be our strongest card in renewing good relations with whatever party emerges on top as a result of the present struggle’. Finally, Mounsey ruled out the third option because it would have suggested the British government did not recognise any government in Spain and therefore prevent it from establishing friendly relations with the Republic should it have defeated the military rebels.²⁵²

It is clear at this stage that the Foreign Office did not assume a victory for the rebels and the reaction of others in the Foreign Office to Mounsey’s suggestions show that while ideological prejudices against the Republic existed among some, any idealist considerations gave way to realist policy decisions. Alexander Cadogan, a Deputy Under-Secretary and from 1938 Permanent Under-Secretary, for instance, noted that ‘in normal circumstances, if the “existing government” exercised real control and had any chance of surviving – I should say that ... we should [allow and licence] shipments to the established government and not to the rebels’. Regardless of his personal feelings towards the Spanish government, however, his overriding concerns were those pertaining to the international complications of intervention. He went on to note, for example, that

in the event of a breakdown of the agreement M. Blum would be forced to allow supplies to go to the Spanish Government, Italy and Germany would probably then make no secret of supplying

²⁵² TNA.FO371/20573, W9717/9549/41, Mounsey minute, 19/8/1936.

the other side, and we are face to face with an international fight. I should still be inclined to think that we might do more good by remaining neutral than by taking sides in the matter.²⁵³

Anthony Eden gave his own, brief assessment on 21 August: 'I agree that [the first option] is the best we can recommend for the present, and, so far as we can now foresee for the future. That future is however so uncertain that we shall have to review position again if attempt at non-intervention agreement fails'.²⁵⁴

On 24 August the Chiefs of Staff reinforced all of the concerns that existed in the Foreign Office regarding fascist intervention when they submitted a strategic assessment of the situation arising from the military rebellion in Spain. While the Foreign Office was concerned with both the escalation of the conflict and a hostile regime in Spain, the Chiefs of Staff focused primarily on the latter and its strategic implications. They warned that Italy would use the conflict to acquire Spanish territory by coming to an agreement or forming an alliance with the military rebels. 'The effect of this', they said, would be that 'Spanish ports and aerodromes would be available for the use of Italian forces in time of war. This would constitute a most serious menace not only to our use of Gibraltar as a naval and air base, and to our control of the Straits, but also to our imperial communications'. They stressed that Britain's position at Gibraltar had

for many years been based on a continuation of friendly relations with Spain. Apart from the risk of any foreign intervention, should a government inimical to Britain, whether Fascist or Communist, emerge from the present struggle, the question of the security of our base at Gibraltar will require serious examination.

Their summary of interests in the Spanish conflict were 'the maintenance of the territorial integrity of Spain and her possessions' and 'the maintenance of such relations with any Spanish government that may emerge from this conflict as will ensure benevolent neutrality in the event of our being engaged in any European war'. Open intervention by Italy in support of the rebels, they warned, 'would precipitate a major international crisis'. The Chiefs of Staff advised that the best solution to the crisis was to press for the conclusion of a 'rigorous' Non-Intervention Agreement. If this failed, they suggested impressing on the French government 'the desirability of giving Italy no cause for intervention in Spain' because French, and probably Russian, intervention on the side of

²⁵³ TNA.FO371/20573, W9717, Cadogan minute, 20/8/1936

²⁵⁴ TNA.FO371/20573, W9717, Eden minute, 21/8/1936.

the Spanish government 'would lead to open Italian intervention'. Eden was in agreement with what the Chiefs of Staff had to say and minuted, 'I fear that whichever side wins, the outlook for us must be anxious and we must have the ultimate position of Gibraltar in mind'.²⁵⁵

Aside from threatening Britain's control of Gibraltar, the greatest danger of a Rome-Madrid axis was the use or occupation of the Balearic Islands by Italian armed forces in a future war. Galeazzo Ciano gave the British government through its ambassador at Rome several assurances that the Italian government had no designs on the Balearic Islands. However, none of these assurances were in writing and the British government did not make any of them public. As the Civil War in Spain progressed, evidence continued to emerge that suggested these assurances were not genuine. When Ciano gave Maurice Ingram, the British Chargé d'Affaires at Rome, another verbal assurance on 18 August, for instance, Shuckburgh said 'as we know without a shadow of a doubt that both parts of this assurance are untrue, we know what importance to attach to Count Ciano's assurances in general'. Eden felt the same and wanted to inform Ingram 'that we have proof that Count Ciano has given him entirely false assurances' and suggested it might be useful to let Ingram 'know more certainly what sort of man he has to deal with'.²⁵⁶ In late August the Admiralty sent to the Foreign Office a series of telegrams from Captain Alan Hillgarth, the British Consul at Palma de Majorca, which contained evidence of Italian designs on the Balearics. Shuckburgh agreed that the evidence suggested the Italians were trying to secure their position in Majorca for the future and suggested sending a warning that Britain would not accept any alteration to the status quo in the Mediterranean. Concerns regarding Italian designs on Spanish territory revealed a divide between some British policymakers and advisors which centred on the issue of how best to conduct the policy of appeasement. While Eden and some of his colleagues wanted to issue a public warning to the Italian government that Britain would not tolerate any attempt to alter the status quo in the Mediterranean, others feared alienating Mussolini by doing so. Ultimately, Eden managed to secure agreement from the Cabinet only to issue a veiled warning through Maurice Ingram.²⁵⁷ Despite Eden's desire to take a firmer stance with Italy, the broader support within the Cabinet for a policy of general appeasement prevailed.

²⁵⁵ TNA.FO371/20535, W9708/62/41, 'Western Mediterranean: Situation arising from the Spanish Civil War', Committee of Imperial Defence, 24/8/1936; minutes by Shuckburgh and Eden, 28/8/1936.

²⁵⁶ TNA.FO371/20532, W8980/62/41, Ingram to Eden, 18/8/1936; minutes by Shuckburgh and Eden.

²⁵⁷ TNA.FO371/20575, W10508/9549/41, 'Italian Policy in the Spanish Civil War', 2/9/1936.

Spanish Responses to Non-Intervention

The Spanish government opposed the Non-Intervention Agreement from its inception but it did not possess the diplomatic influence to mount any significant opposition against it. In the early weeks of the Civil War, the Republic faced a wave of resignations and questioning of its legitimacy from its own diplomats abroad which created a vacuum of influence in important nations such as Britain and France. During the first six weeks of the conflict, the best hopes the Republic had of influencing international responses to the outbreak of the Civil War lay in the hands of its embassies in London and Paris, for it was from there that emerged both the Non-Intervention Agreement and the encouragement for other powers to subscribe to it. As a result of the political and social polarisation in Spain between 1931 and 1936, the military rebellion set in motion a process of politicisation of Spanish diplomats and many either resigned from the diplomatic service or defected to the rebels. At the start of the Civil War, the Republic had 390 diplomatic representatives abroad but during the course of the conflict some 90% abandoned their government. By the end of July 1936, 244 had already either resigned or defected.²⁵⁸ For his part, López Oliván remained in his post but proved an ineffective ambassador during these crucial weeks. Indeed, despite mounting evidence, it seems López Oliván did not raise any concerns with the Foreign Office during July and August regarding German and Italian intervention in Spain. Although he possessed no desire to pressure the British government to support the Spanish government in any way, he remained in his post until 27 August and therefore prevented somebody else from trying to do so. For their part, by 6 August, Pedro García Conde, the Embassy's Counsellor, and Juan Valdés and José Villaverde, the first and second secretaries respectively, had declared their loyalty to the military rebels.²⁵⁹

In Paris, the Republic was able to mount more opposition to the Non-Intervention Agreement because the ambassador there, Juan Francisco de Cárdenas, revealed as early as July

²⁵⁸ Ángel Viñas, 'Una carrera diplomática y un Ministerio de Estado desconocidos', in Ángel Viñas (ed.), *Al servicio de la República: Diplomáticas y guerra civil* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2010) pp. 267-424 (pp. 267-270, 296); For a focused study on this theme, see J. L. Pérez Ruiz, *Las depuraciones de la carrera diplomática española (1931-1980)* (Burgos: Editorial Dossoles, 2005) pp. 234-300. See also Julio Aróstegui, 'De lealtades y defecciones. La República y la memoria de la utopía', in Ángel Viñas (ed.), *Al servicio de la República. Diplomáticas y guerra civil* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2010), pp. 23-53.

²⁵⁹ AGA.82/2621/5, 'Memorandum: Relación del personal diplomático y consular español que ha manifestado su adhesión a la Junta de Defensa Nacional de Burgos hasta el día de la fecha', 6/8/1936. García Conde would soon transfer to Rome, where he would assume the role of 'National Spain's' ambassador. López Oliván claimed in his resignation telegram that he could not continue in a role that required him to support the procurement of arms with which Spaniards would kill each other, see AGA.12/3218/26/1, Oliván to Barcía, 27/8/1936.

that he was a supporter of the military rebellion.²⁶⁰ In place of Cárdenas, the Spanish government appointed Álvaro de Albornoz, an active republican politician since 1930, on 28 July. A firm supporter of the Spanish government, Albornoz was a vocal opponent of the Non-Intervention Agreement and urged the French government to abandon it. The official Republican line was that although the proponents of the agreement claimed it sought to avoid any foreign interference in Spanish affairs, in reality it had the opposite result by depriving a legally-elected government of its right to purchase arms on the international market with which it could suppress a military rebellion. On 10 August, the Spanish government instructed Albornoz to protest against the French government's decision to prohibit arms sales to Spain. Albornoz wrote to Delbos, the French Foreign Minister, that the 'suspension of the exportation of arms to the Spanish government in precisely the moment in which it requires them to re-establish law and order in its own territory, far from conforming to the principle of non-intervention, constitutes an intervention in Spain's internal affairs'.²⁶¹

As more evidence of Italian and German aid to the rebels continued to emerge, Albornoz reiterated his government's concerns to Delbos on 15 August. He argued that despite the efforts of the French government to secure an agreement of non-intervention, the Spanish government 'views with sorrow that with every day that passes the situation does nothing more than reduce the possibilities the agreement has of achieving its objective'.²⁶² The French government's response, however, gave little room for hope that there would be any alteration to Anglo-French non-intervention. Delbos responded by saying that the French government did not consider the Spanish conflict as an international one but 'it had to ask itself if a conflict of this type was going to emerge from the situation'. Delbos justified the policy on the grounds that the effect the outbreak of the conflict had had on opinions and emotions across a great part of the world gave room for anxiety. He insisted, however, that as the Non-Intervention Agreement sought to prevent the supply of war matériel to both sides, it would benefit the Spanish government because of the military support which Germany and Italy could give to the rebels.²⁶³ At this stage in the conflict, these were not unreasonable assumptions. The extent to which the German and Italian governments would commit

²⁶⁰ Casanova, *La diplomacia española*, pp. 50-51; Miralles, 'El duro forcejeo', p. 125.

²⁶¹ AGA.12/3169/22/1, Albornoz to Delbos, 10/8/1936

²⁶² AGA.12/3169/22/1, Albornoz to Delbos, 15/8/1936

²⁶³ AGA.12/3169/22/1, Delbos to Albornoz, 20/8/1936

themselves to the military rebels was not certain but both had agreed in principle to join the Non-Intervention Agreement. As we have already noted, the British Labour Party and movement were in broad agreement with the government's decision to negotiate a Non-Intervention Agreement on the assumption that it would prevent fascist intervention in support of the rebels. Accordingly, Republican efforts would have had more chances of success if they targeted the British government and sought to weaken the general agreement among the left for the policy of non-intervention in Spain.²⁶⁴

Unlike the Spanish government, the military rebels not only benefited from the waves of diplomatic resignations and defections but they also had an advantage in their relations with the British government because of the support they enjoyed from Germany and Italy.²⁶⁵ Indeed, the ease of establishing diplomatic relations with the German and Italian governments was partly due to how closely aligned the ideology of the military rebellion and its popular support base were with fascism. The British government feared the potential for an alliance between the rebels and the fascist states. The rebels were fully aware of the advantageous diplomatic situation in which they found themselves and when assessing the international situation on 4 August concluded that

The general tone of the diplomatic situation is favourable towards our movement, firstly because across the world today the momentum of the totalitarian states is in full vigour, and, secondly, because even in the countries anchored in liberalism, or those governed by a Popular Front, there exists in relation to the gravity of evil a reaction of nationalist type.²⁶⁶

Importantly, they also acknowledged that the British government's own reaction to the Spanish Civil War was partly a result of its weakness in confronting the fascist states. As early as 4 August, the Military Junta at Burgos stated the British government was pursuing 'the same hesitant and indecisive policy' that had defined its foreign policy in recent years. The report predicted that the British government would maintain a policy of neutrality because it had no reason to favour either side. On the one hand, the military rebels believed the British government could not tolerate a communist state on the Iberian Peninsula because of the dangers it would present to Britain's

²⁶⁴ For instance, Thomas, *Britain, France & Appeasement*, pp. 89-108, has shown how Blum feared breaking up his Popular Front coalition and dismantling its reforms while remaining determined to follow the British government in its policy of general appeasement. Accordingly, while the French government was the initiator of the Non-Intervention Agreement, it followed Britain's lead in regards to Spain during the summer of 1936.

²⁶⁵ Francisco Morente, 'On Hostile Soil: Spanish Republican Diplomats in Berlin at the Onset of the Spanish Civil War', *Contemporary European History*, 26.1 (2017), 49-67; Casanova, *La diplomacia española*, pp. 36-40.

²⁶⁶ AGA.82/2621/5, 'Informe Confidencial', Asesoría de Estado, 4/8/1936.

control of Gibraltar and its relations with Portugal.²⁶⁷ However, the rebels recognised that Britain also feared a ‘galvanised, vibrant and young Spain’ with imperial ambitions because such a regime was likely to form a totalitarian bloc with the fascist states.²⁶⁸ This demonstrates an early awareness among the military rebels of Britain’s vulnerability in confronting the fascist states and how this would alter power dynamics in Anglo-rebel relations.

Although the rebels were confident that they enjoyed the support of the fascist states and that the British government was unlikely to adopt a policy other than one of non-intervention, they resented non-intervention because they viewed it as a policy which wrongly denied them diplomatic legitimacy. This was clear in the British press, which was divided in its support for the two sides in Spain depending on the political leanings of individual newspapers. The *Daily Mail*, for instance, sympathised with the rebels, whereas the *Manchester Guardian* supported the Republic.²⁶⁹ *The Times*, one of the most influential British newspapers, reported in detail the atrocities that had occurred in the Republican zone but maintained an attitude more favourable towards the Spanish government. A summary of foreign press views compiled by the rebel diplomatic cabinet on 11 August, for instance, stated ‘*The Times* continues to consider the Madrid government as a government which fights to sustain democratic institutions in Spain and says it cannot be held responsible for the atrocities committed given its lack of means of controlling the situation’.²⁷⁰ As we will see in later chapters the rebels resented any hostility towards their cause but put little effort into improving British attitudes during the first year of the conflict.²⁷¹

²⁶⁷ Many who supported or led the military rebellion genuinely believed there was a danger of communist revolution in Spain and the violence that occurred in the Republic zone in the summer of 1936 made it easier for the rebels to produce propaganda that justified their actions. However, this also helps to explain why rebel propaganda specifically in Britain focused predominantly on downplaying fascist involvement and highlighting at any opportunity the intervention of the Soviet Union or atrocities. See García, *Truth About Spain*, pp. 122-144, 176-194; Herbert Southworth, *Conspiracy and the Spanish Civil War: The Brainwashing of Francisco Franco* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 1-128. For examples of this propaganda, see Comisión de Investigación, *A Preliminary Official Report on the Atrocities Committed in Southern Spain in July and August, 1936, by the Communist Forces of the Madrid Government* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1936) and *The Second & Third Official Reports on the Communist Atrocities Committed in Southern Spain from July to October 1936 by the Communist Forces of the Madrid Government* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1937).

²⁶⁸ AGA.82/2621/5, ‘Informe Confidencial’, Asesoría de Estado, 4/8/1936.

²⁶⁹ For typical examples, see ‘Death Grips in Spain’, *Daily Mail*, 20/7/1936, which labelled the rebellion a ‘liberation’ movement. For a less sensationalist assessment, see ‘Revolt in Spain’, *Manchester Guardian*, 20/7/1936.

²⁷⁰ AGA.82/2621/ 5, ‘Informe sobre la situación internacional en torno a los acontecimientos de España, según la prensa extranjera’, 11/8/1936.

²⁷¹ On how both sides in Spain attempted to define their cause, see García, *Truth About Spain!*, pp. 103-121.

The rebels also resented the Non-Intervention Agreement and British support for it because they argued strict international adherence to it would work to the advantage of the Republic. On 25 August, for instance, José Antonio de Sangróniz, the head of the rebel diplomatic cabinet at Burgos, sent a memorandum to Generals Franco and Mola in which he raised his concerns regarding the Non-Intervention Agreement. On the one hand, Sangróniz claimed the French government was pushing for an agreement of neutrality among all European states ‘because they know well that it would favour the Reds more than us’. However, he was also concerned that clear evidence of continued German and Italian intervention would force the French government to supply war matériel to the Republic.²⁷² Accordingly, the rebels adopted a strategy of exposing French violations of non-intervention. On 24 August, the diplomatic cabinet at Burgos, based on information from its informants at the French border, had remarked that arms and munitions continuously passed into Spain with the full knowledge of the French authorities and that the French government had permitted Spanish government troops to observe rebel troop movements from French territory. The report also claimed that Jean Herbette, the French Ambassador to Spain, was ‘in reality a liaison agent between the Spanish and French Popular Fronts’.²⁷³ On 1 September, Sangróniz brought these violations of non-intervention to the attention of the British, Argentine, Italian and German embassies with a report detailing war matériel that had passed over the French border into Irun and San Sebastian between 22 and 30 August.²⁷⁴ Such accusations would become a central aspect of rebel foreign policy for the duration of the Civil War. Franco’s dependence on fascist intervention ensured he would not cooperate sincerely with the Non-Intervention Committee’s efforts to prevent foreign support of either side in the conflict and instead justify that which he received by exaggerating Soviet and French assistance reaching the Republic.

Conclusion

The British government subordinated the Spanish Civil War to its broader strategy of general appeasement almost immediately for two reasons. Firstly, it recognised the potential the rebellion

²⁷² AGA.82/2621/5, ‘La beligerancia y el reconocimiento de la Junta de Burgos’, 25/8/1936.

²⁷³ AGA.82/2619/2, Burgos Diplomatic Cabinet minute, 24/8/1936.

²⁷⁴ AGA.82/2621/2, ‘Declaración de la Junta de Defensa sobre conducta del Gobierno francés’, 1/9/1936. This message reached the Foreign Office in a telegram from Chilton a week later, see TNA.FO371/20576, W10993/9549/41, Chilton to Eden, 8/9/1936.

had to spark wider European conflict because of the trajectory of Spain's political polarisation during the previous five years. Secondly, as Spain's conflict had the potential to attract foreign intervention on both sides, the British government opted for a policy of non-intervention because it provided the best means of ensuring that whatever regime emerged from the conflict had less reason to resent the British government and therefore adopt an anti-British foreign policy. As only the rebels received significant foreign support during the initial weeks when the British government was defining its response to the outbreak of the Civil War, it was concerns regarding the threat of fascism, much more so than communism, that determined Britain's attitude over the next three years of conflict. In this sense, non-intervention emerged as a natural extension both of Britain's policy towards Spain before the conflict, which sought merely to maintain friendly relations with whatever regime was in power, and the broader policy of general appeasement, part of which sought to reduce the number of potential enemies in a future conflict in Europe. The nature of non-intervention made the policy susceptible to evolve into a policy of appeasing Franco.

This chapter does not suggest that ideological prejudices were absent from the attitudes of some individuals within the British government and Foreign Office. However, instead of focusing on individual examples of these prejudices, it has drawn on examples of concerns regarding the threat of fascism in Europe and considered them within the wider context of general appeasement. By doing so, it has argued that whatever prejudices did exist within the government or Foreign Office towards the Spanish Republic, realist policy considerations took precedence over any idealist views of the conflict. That is to say that British policymakers and advisors first and foremost advocated a policy of non-intervention because of the constraints of appeasement and due to the support which the military rebels received from the fascist states almost immediately after the start of the conflict.

Because the British government formulated its response to the Civil War within the framework of appeasement, the policy of non-intervention benefited the military rebels while disadvantaging the Spanish Republic. This laid the foundation of Britain's relations with both sides for the duration of the conflict. In the case of the Republic, it suffered from a vacuum of diplomatic influence in London as the British government was making the crucial decisions that led to the Non-Intervention Agreement which ensured that it could mount no real opposition to the agreement or protest effectively against German and Italian intervention during the summer. For their part,

the rebels had nothing to lose diplomatically and the support they enjoyed from Germany and Italy made them a threat to the British government. This fascist intervention, and the military successes it would enable the rebels under the leadership of General Franco to achieve, created a complex power dynamic in Anglo-rebel relations that would push the British government time and again to concede power and influence to Franco.

PART TWO

EMBRACING APPEASEMENT AND THE SLOW DEATH OF NON-INTERVENTION

III

A NEW DICTATOR EMERGES

Power Dynamics in Anglo-Rebel Relations,

September 1936-December 1937

Introduction

In October 1936, Francisco Serrat y Bonastre, a Spanish diplomat who had defected to the rebels, returned to Spain from Bucharest. Arthur Pack, the Commercial Secretary in the British Embassy at Hendaye who did not hesitate to express his pro-rebel sympathies, had helped transport Serrat over the border in his car. From there Serrat would travel to Burgos and then Salamanca, where Franco would appoint him as a semi-official foreign minister in the embryonic rebel state.²⁷⁵ In contrast to the foreign support the rebellion received from countries such as Germany and Italy, Serrat resented the British government's policy of non-intervention. In a memoir about his role in rebel administration he summarised his thoughts towards the international situation in the autumn of 1936:

On the international stage, Franco's Spain did not have any legal standing. We were the 'rebels'. We lacked official relations with all countries. In a word, we did not exist. But, in reality, the situation was very different. Not only could we count on the manifest sympathy of Italy, Germany and Portugal and of all the South American countries except Mexico, but the majority of European

²⁷⁵ After emerging as Generalísimo of the rebel forces, Franco created a state technical council, the Junta Técnica del Estado, which he intended to be a forerunner of a permanent state apparatus once the war was over. The Junta Técnica comprised committees designated to handle various aspects of governance in the rebel zone, such as revenue, justice, education, labour, etc. Francisco Serrat y Bonastre was in charge of the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs. However, Franco also created duplicate ministries for individuals with whom he was closer. One of these was the Diplomatic and Protocolary Office, led by José Antonio de Sangróniz, whom we met in the last chapter. See José Luis Orella, *La formación del Estado Nacional durante la guerra civil española* (Madrid: Actas, 2001).

governments continued dealing with our representatives, even though they were reluctant to allow their substitution for new officials Naturally, I am not referring to France or Britain, where, even supposing there existed some sympathy for our cause, their relations with the Madrid government were too important to abandon.²⁷⁶

Serrat claimed that the British government ‘continues to ignore us completely’. Although this was perhaps an exaggeration, it captures the resentment that the rebels felt towards Britain for maintaining relations with the Spanish government while denying them international legitimacy. Over the course of the next year, Anglo-rebel relations developed into something much more akin to formal diplomatic relations. As part of this process, Franco emerged as a target of Britain’s policy of general appeasement.

This chapter focuses on the period between September 1936, when the Non-Intervention Committee met for the first time in London, and December 1937, when Sir Robert Hodgson, a British diplomat who had been in Russia during the Civil War there, arrived at Burgos as Britain’s diplomatic agent to rebel Spain. It argues that in September 1936, the British government still wanted and attempted to make the Non-Intervention Agreement effective. However, increasingly during this period, military developments in Spain induced the British government to consider a rebel victory as the most likely outcome of the conflict and Franco’s relations with the German and Italian governments pushed it to move towards a policy of appeasement to prevent the formation of a Rome-Berlin-Madrid Axis. In October, for instance, the Cabinet again expressed the concern that ‘As the insurgents appeared to be getting the upper hand there would seem to be some danger that the civil war might end with a Government in power in Spain that was somewhat resentful of our attitude’.²⁷⁷ As a result of the shift from non-intervention to appeasement, the British government gradually side-lined the Republic from its foreign policy towards Spain because its chances of victory, and therefore its potential importance for British geostrategic concerns, appeared increasingly less likely. Meanwhile, Franco, who emerged as the Generalísimo of the rebel forces in late September, began the process of creating a state apparatus towards which the British government could direct a policy of appeasement and facilitated this shift in policy.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁶ Francisco Serrat y Bonastre, *Salamanca, 1936. Memorias del primer «ministro» de Asuntos Exteriores de Franco*, ed. by Ángel Viñas (Barcelona: Crítica, 2014), pp. 50-51, 78-79.

²⁷⁷ TNA.CAB23/86/1, CC 60(36), 28/10/1936.

²⁷⁸ By late November, once it was clear that the assault on Madrid had failed, Franco moved towards creating an authoritarian state which united the various factions fighting to overthrow the Spanish government. In April 1937,

The chapter first examines Britain's attempts to make the Non-Intervention Agreement effective. It then moves on to show that the potential for Franco's incorporation into an anti-British fascist alliance ensured that Britain's policy of non-intervention evolved into a policy of appeasement. The second half of the chapter focuses on Anglo-rebel relations and Britain's attempts to formulate a policy that would weaken Franco's links to the Axis Powers. By viewing Anglo-rebel relations through the lens of appeasement, the chapter also sheds light on the development of Francoist foreign policy and on Franco's own development as a statesman. Although several historians have focused on these aspects of the Franco regime, few have focused on power dynamics in his relations with the British government or how Britain's policy of general appeasement allowed Franco to assert himself on the international stage.²⁷⁹ Moradiellos has focused on both the British and Spanish aspects of Anglo-Spanish relations during the Civil War but did not analyse the ways in which British policy influenced the formulation of Franco's foreign policy, and vice versa.²⁸⁰ As we noted earlier in this thesis, an appeasement policy by default concedes some influence in a diplomatic relationship to the target state. Accordingly, Franco was able to ensure that he continued to enjoy the benefits which this policy granted him by maintaining an obstinate attitude towards the British despite being the weaker partner in the relationship. His relations with the Axis Powers, the military successes these relations helped him to achieve, and Spain's strategic importance to the British government enabled Franco to assert himself as a new dictator that could have an influence on European high politics. As was the case with Hitler and Mussolini, Britain's active attempts to accommodate dictatorships in the 1930s was a source of encouragement for Franco to adopt a more ambitious and aggressive foreign policy and assert himself in his relations with the British government.

Franco merged the Falange and Carlist movements into the Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista (FET y de las JONS), which effectively created a single-party state within the Spanish state and presented a degree of order and unity to the outside world, as Franco desired. Indeed, as he told Count Rodezno, a Carlist leader open to the idea of some reconciliation with the Bourbon line of Alfonso XIII, in January 1937, it was important to unite all of the groups fighting as part of the rebellion to avoid presenting an image of disunity abroad. See Joan Maria Thomàs, *La Falange de Franco. Fascismo y fascistización en el régimen franquista (1937-1945)* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 2001), pp. 38-48; on the fascistisation of its foreign policy, see pp. 163-166; Javier Tusell, *Franco en la Guerra Civil. Una biografía política* (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1992), pp. 98-100.

²⁷⁹ For a brief overview of Francoist foreign policy, see José Mario Armero, *La política exterior de Franco* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1978). In general, historians of Franco's Foreign have focused on his relations with the Axis Powers during the Second World War, see Introduction to this thesis.

²⁸⁰ Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albión*, pp. 152-220.

‘An improvised safety curtain’: Non-Intervention in Practice²⁸¹

The Spanish government’s foreign policy in response to the Non-Intervention Agreement posed no threat to the British government and this ultimately worked in favour of the rebels. The Republic’s policy consisted of opposing the Non-Intervention Agreement, using the League of Nations as a channel through which to oppose it, and simultaneously attempting to cooperate with the Non-Intervention Committee. In September, for instance, Pablo de Azcárate, the new Spanish Ambassador at London, approached the Foreign Office and asked if it could unofficially provide him with information on the Non-Intervention Committee’s discussions of the Spanish government’s complaints of 15 September, which the British government had submitted.²⁸² Shortly afterwards, however, Azcárate asked the Foreign Office to forget the request as the Spanish government ‘had never had any confidence in the committee’ and its opinion of it ‘had been undergoing progressive deterioration and they [the Spanish government] did not wish to give it any countenance or any kind of recognition’.²⁸³ The Spanish government meanwhile sent notes of protest to the German, Italian and Portuguese governments for their violations of the Non-Intervention Agreement.²⁸⁴ Ten days later, the Spanish government brought the issue before the League of Nations. The new Foreign Minister, Julio Álvarez del Vayo, spoke of the violations of the Non-Intervention Agreement before the League Council and denounced it as an internationally-sponsored ‘de facto blockade against the Spanish government’.²⁸⁵ Accordingly, from its inception, the Republic lent legitimacy to the Non-Intervention Agreement and Committee while denouncing it as an illegitimate blockade.²⁸⁶

The Republic’s response to the Non-Intervention Agreement was in part a result of a misunderstanding of British motives to keep it in place. It did not want, for instance, to prevent any foreign intervention in the Civil War. Rather, it wanted to prevent any intervention in support of the rebels while having the freedom to purchase war matériel on the international market. As it told the Non-Intervention Committee in September,

²⁸¹ Phrase Eden used to describe the Non-Intervention Agreement in 1936, see Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, p. 412.

²⁸² On Azcárate’s time in London, see his memoirs, *Mi embajada en Londres durante la guerra civil*, cited above, and Enrique Moradiellos, ‘La embajada en Gran Bretaña durante la Guerra civil’, in *Al servicio de la República. Diplomáticos y guerra civil*, ed. by Ángel Viñas (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2010), pp. 89-119.

²⁸³ TNA.FO371/20583, W14570/9549/41 & W14571, Cadogan minutes, 20 & 23/10/1936.

²⁸⁴ AGA.12/3168/1-3, Spanish government to Portuguese, German and Italian governments, 15/9/1936.

²⁸⁵ AGA.12/3169.22, Text of Álvarez del Vayo speech, 25/9/1936.

²⁸⁶ On this, see Jorge, *Inseguridad colectiva*, pp. 173-356.

Any impartial observer ... will recognise that the rising against the legal Spanish government ... would have been subdued in its embryonic state due to the resistance of the immense majority of the Spanish people if the rebels had not enjoyed, on an increasing scale, the armed support of Germany and Italy.²⁸⁷

Even with the Non-Intervention Agreement in place, the Republic had been trying to find loopholes in it and clandestinely attempting to purchase arms abroad.²⁸⁸ Although as the government of Spain this was a fair argument to make, this was in contrast to what the British government sought to achieve by advocating the Non-Intervention Agreement. Indeed, the British government knew that the German and Italian governments would not simply allow war matériel to go to the Republic while refraining from sending any support to the rebels. Not only did the British government believe that this would result in more intervention on both sides and increase the chances of the Civil War escalating into a wider European conflagration, it would have also provoked the resentment of the rebels if it attempted to deprive them of military aid while allowing it to go to the Republic.²⁸⁹ This, as we saw in the last chapter, was something non-intervention sought to avoid.

The British government initially tried to make the Non-Intervention Agreement effective and had several motivations to do so. Firstly, as we saw in the last chapter, an effective agreement was the only thing which would reduce pressure on the Blum government to stay out of the Spanish conflict. Secondly, the British Labour Movement had lent the government its support on the policy of non-intervention only on the assumption that it would also prevent aid reaching the rebels. Lastly, the Soviet Union based its decision to join the Non-Intervention Agreement partly upon the condition that Hitler and Mussolini, who had accepted the proposal two days before Stalin finally did so, would adhere to the agreement and cease sending aid to the military rebels.²⁹⁰ On 3 October, Walter Roberts, the Head of the Western Department, argued 'the Committee has been accused in many quarters of having sat for nearly a month and done nothing. This is untrue but it has certainly not got very far. This is the first important complaint which has been made and if taken up it would

²⁸⁷ AGA.12/3169/22, Álvarez del Vayo to Non-Intervention Committee members, 15/9/1936.

²⁸⁸ In London, for instance, Buylla suggested to the Spanish government that arms purchased in London could go to France first before arriving at their final destination in Spain, see AGA.12/3187/6, Buylla to Vayo, 14/9/1936. Information such as this led to the rebels sending their own agents to Geneva to counteract the Republic's efforts to purchase arms from Mexico, France, Belgium, the U.S. and Britain, see AGA.82/4640/9, Memorandum, 23/9/1936.

²⁸⁹ See, for instance, the minutes from August 1936 by Mounsey and Cadogan, cited above, in FO371/20573.

²⁹⁰ Alpert, *New International History*, p. 51; Smyth, 'We Are With You', p. 93.

give the Committee a chance of showing what it can do'. Mounsey, acknowledging that doing so could lead to the disintegration of the Committee if it provoked reactions from the German and Italian representatives, ultimately agreed because the Non-Intervention Agreement needed to demonstrate that it was willing to take action.²⁹¹

The German and Italian reactions to British support for the Spanish government's complaints provided an important lesson. Accusations that this was a demonstration not of impartiality, as the British claimed, but of active support for the Spanish government, ensured the Foreign Office would take a more cautious attitude in the future when considering whether or not to bring similar complaints before the Non-Intervention Committee. The day before the Committee met in October, for instance, Robert Vansittart, the Permanent Under-Secretary, met Dino Grandi, the Italian Ambassador at London, who accused the British government of favouring the Spanish government and warned that Italy would interpret this action as an act of partiality 'whereby His Majesty's Government will be ranging themselves on the side of Soviet Russia and Communist Spain against Italy'. Vansittart asked Drummond to speak to the Italian government at the first opportunity lest they 'falsely persuade themselves of our partisan attitude in this matter' and become 'inclined to break up the agreement'.²⁹² As we can see, the Italian government, like Franco, interpreted any action that favoured the Spanish government as a hostile act and the change in British attitudes is evident in the response to further evidence it received of intervention in support of the rebels. When the Spanish Embassy passed to the Foreign Office information it had received from the French consul at Algeciras, for instance, the Foreign Office agreed that it would be unwise to submit it to the Non-Intervention Committee if the British government wanted to maintain its image as an impartial actor.²⁹³

Although the attitude of the British government benefited the rebels, distancing itself from complaints helped to keep the Non-Intervention Agreement in existence and thereby reduce the intervention on both sides in Spain. Indeed, British policymakers did not believe the agreement was working effectively, but, as we have already noted, the agreement allowed the French government to justify non-intervention to public opinion and prevented the Civil War from

²⁹¹ TNA.FO37120578, W12363/9549/41, Roberts and Mounsey minutes, 3 & 4/10/1936.

²⁹² TNA.FO371/20580, W13312/9549/41, Vansittart to Drummond, 8/10/1936.

²⁹³ TNA.FO371/20579, W13121/9549/41, Buylla to Eden, 6 October & Eden minute 14/10/1936.

escalating beyond Spain's borders.²⁹⁴ Throughout the Civil War, however, the role of appeasement guided British policy. Not only did the Non-Intervention Agreement seek to put a brake on Europe's ideological polarisation and descent into war, but it also sought to enable the British government to establish friendly relations with whichever side won and, more importantly, aim to prevent the formation of a Rome-Madrid Axis.

Italy and the Balearic Islands: Preventing a Rome-Madrid Axis

The Foreign Office's concerns in the summer regarding Italian intentions in Spain soon proved to be correct. Although policymakers and advisors in London, as we noted in the last chapter, did not believe the military rebels would willingly give up Spanish territory to the Italians, they did believe that Mussolini might hope to force the rebels to cede territory in return for Italian intervention. Galeazzo Ciano, for instance, reassured the British that the Italian government had no territorial designs on Spain but as Evelyn Shuckburgh, the Western Department expert on Spain, pointed out in a minute on 15 September, these assurances did not 'alter the fact that Italy is helping General Franco and may well be expecting her reward later on'.²⁹⁵

Italian activity in the Balearics Islands was the main concern of the Foreign Office because of their strategic importance in the Mediterranean. Italian assistance had been instrumental, for instance, in the fall of Majorca to the rebels and the continued Italian presence there suggested Mussolini harboured long-term ambitions in Spain. Of particular concern was Arconovaldo Bonaccorsi, an Italian soldier nicknamed Count Rossi with a penchant for consuming large quantities of wine. In victory parades organised to celebrate the capture of Majorca, Rossi rode on horseback at the head of a fascist contingent and received cheers from the crowds. Alan Hillgarth, the British consul at Majorca, warned the Foreign Office early on about Rossi, whom he believed

²⁹⁴ British statesmen often compared the Non-Intervention Agreement to a 'leaky dam' after Eden used the analogy in 1936. In October that year, for instance, Baldwin said in the House of Commons: 'I think we might just as well say that a dam is not effective because there are some leaks in it. If there are some leaks in a dam, it may at any rate keep the water out for the time being, and you may stop the leaks. It is a very different thing from sweeping away that dam altogether', see HC Deb, vol. 316, 29/10/1936, c144. Two years later, in November 1938, Rab Butler referred to Eden's phrase and said in the House: 'Our experience of the policy of non-intervention has been that although there has been foreign intervention on both sides in Spain, that policy has prevented the Spanish war from becoming part of a wider international conflict. To that extent I think that, with all its difficulties, which I have frankly acknowledged at this Box, the policy of non-intervention has been proved worthwhile', HC Debate, vol. 340, 2/11/1938, cc. 326-327.

²⁹⁵ TNA.FO371/20576, W11235/9549/41, Ingram to Eden, 12/9/1936; minute by Shuckburgh, 15/9/1936.

was 'trying to make himself a local Mussolini'. Over the following weeks, Rossi established his own fiefdom on the island and drove about in a red Bugatti accompanied by an armed escort of the Falange.²⁹⁶ Rossi had a habit of delivering wine-fuelled speeches in which he expressed his hatred of Britain. A speech on 17 October in which Rossi roared that the Italian were in Majorca to stay pushed Vansittart to raise the issue directly with Dino Grandi, the Italian Ambassador at London, and urge him to ask Mussolini to take 'early steps to see that this youthful volunteer returned to his native land' and in the meantime 'take no further part in banquets and would restrain from all red wine before he rose to his feet'.²⁹⁷

Italian intervention in Spain ensured that the British government wanted the Non-Intervention Agreement to work. As the Soviet Union freed itself of the obligations of the agreement in response to German and Italian violations and began to send war matériel to the Spanish government in October, the German and Italian governments further committed themselves to Franco. This increase of foreign involvement in Spain worried the Foreign Office because it would provide the Italian government with an excuse to disregard the assurances it had given Britain about its intentions in Spain. George Mounsey, Assistant Under-Secretary in the Western Department, minuted on 24 October, for instance, that the more assistance the Soviet Union provided to the Spanish government, 'the more care will the Italians take to strengthen the rebel position in the Balearic Isles' and give Italy 'an excuse for disregarding her assurances to us on the pretext of ensuring the immunity of those islands, under her protection, from mainland attacks'.²⁹⁸ By early December, after Soviet intervention had enabled Republican forces in Madrid to defend the city against the rebel attack, Hillgarth warned the Foreign Office that, according to reliable sources, the Italians hoped 'to take advantage of any opportunity or invitation to obtain control either in disguise or openly' and that 'when Franco [is] in difficulties Italian influence [is] greater'.²⁹⁹ To argue that the Foreign Office did not want the Non-Intervention Agreement to be effective would be to doubt the clear concerns provoked by Italy's intervention and Mussolini's motivations.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁶ Duff Hart-Harris, *Man of War. The Secret Life of Captain Alan Hillgarth: Officer, Adventurer, Agent* (London: Century, 2012), pp. 153-154.

²⁹⁷ TNA.FO371/20584, W15086/9549/41, Vansittart minute, 24/10/1936.

²⁹⁸ TNA.FO371/20586, W15289/9549/41, Mounsey minute, 25/10/1936.

²⁹⁹ TNA.FO/371/20587, W17441/9549/41, Hillgarth to Eden, 5/12/1936.

³⁰⁰ On what Mussolini wanted to get out of his intervention in Spain and a discussion of different interpretations in the historiography, see Morten Heiberg, 'Mussolini, Franco and the Spanish Civil War: An Afterthought', *Totalitarian*

The extent of British concerns regarding Italian intervention become clear in the way officials within the Foreign Office were willing to contemplate a much tougher policy towards Mussolini. For instance, Vansittart, who had earlier advocated policies that would keep the Stresa front intact and later supported the Hoare-Laval Pact to keep Italy out of the German orbit, wrote a long minute demonstrating his willingness to see Britain at war with Italy over Spain.³⁰¹ He affirmed he would prefer to

tell the Italians in detail what we know of their doings, which are entirely unjustified by any need of the situation either in Majorca and Spain [sic]. Let us, however, be quite clear where we are going, if we do more than we have already done – and that will not suffice to deter Italy. I would not do more unless we are really prepared to show our teeth. Are we? The Chiefs of Staff are very tepid. I do not agree with them – once more. If we allow Italy to take over in Majorca we are “sunk” in the Mediterranean: e.g. Yugoslavia will no longer stand out against Italy, and the map of Europe will alter disastrously for us in the long run. But if we are going to contemplate the possibility of threatening Italy with war about the Balearic Islands, & still more of going to war, we have to rearm much quicker than we are going now. This should clearly go to the Cabinet. I expect that they will not contemplate such a possibility & its consequence. I think they will be wrong ... I consider that keeping the Italians out of these islands is essential on grounds of the highest politics. But we must have no manifestation of impotence after high words.³⁰²

As we can see, the logic of appeasement was present in the minds of the Chiefs of Staff, the government and the Foreign Office but there was some divergence over how to deal with the Italian question. While the Chiefs of Staff and many within the government, which at this stage was coming increasingly under the control of Neville Chamberlain, would not contemplate threatening Italy with war, individuals such as Eden and Vansittart advocated a tougher stance to prevent an alliance between Mussolini and Franco.³⁰³

Movements and Political Religions, 2.3 (2001), 55-68; Brian R. Sullivan, ‘Fascist Italy’s Military Involvement in the Spanish Civil War’, *Journal of Military History*, 59.4 (1995), 697-727.

³⁰¹ Vansittart was known for his dislike of the Third Reich but advocated addressing genuine German grievances to buy time for rearmament, see Doerr, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 180-183, 186, 190; Maurice Cowling, *The Impact of Hitler: British Policy and British Politics, 1933-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 156-157.

³⁰² TNA.FO371/20587, W17441/9549/41, Vansittart minute, 10/12/1936.

³⁰³ By this point, Stanley Baldwin was even more detached from foreign policy than he had been previously and concerned himself primarily with the abdication crisis. Indeed, we can see this clearly in a letter Eden wrote to him in December in which he gave Baldwin a detailed update on what was happening with British foreign policy, see Cambridge University Library (CUL), Baldwin Papers: 1936/i/Spain, Eden to Baldwin, 27/12/1936.

German and especially Italian intervention ensured the policy of non-intervention became inextricably bound to the wider policy of general appeasement and this created a complex power dynamic in relations between the military rebels and the British government. Eden warned his colleagues that a passive attitude towards Italian intervention would destroy British prestige in the Mediterranean, particularly after the Abyssinia crisis. However, Eden encountered difficulty in persuading his colleagues in the Cabinet to adopt a tougher attitude because, as he admitted, 'it would be folly to contemplate the possibility of war with Italy without also having taken into account the possibility of Germany assisting her' due to the 'large measure of Italo-German collaboration [which] has been achieved of late'.³⁰⁴ Italo-German recognition of Franco and the formation of the Rome-Berlin Axis in November was a clear demonstration of the potential for Spain's incorporation into this fascist alliance. When the Italian government informed Franco that it would recognise his administration in November, for instance, Ciano made clear what he hoped would come of Italo-Spanish relations: a treaty of friendship entailing Franco's promise never to act against Italy or its interests and an agreement whereby Italy would make use of Spanish ports and naval bases in the event of war. To complement this, Ciano hoped for an assurance that Franco would not allow France to transport troops from Africa through the Iberian Peninsula and an Italo-Spanish commercial treaty for raw materials.³⁰⁵

German and Italian recognition of Franco alarmed the Foreign Office because it reduced the effectiveness of Britain's policy of striving to establish friendly relations with whichever side emerged from the Civil War. The Foreign Office had already anticipated the German and Italian move to withdraw diplomatic recognition from the Spanish Republic and recognise Franco as the only legitimate Head of State in order to solidify their influence over him. As Mounsey wrote at the beginning of October, almost two months before Italo-German recognition of the Franco regime:

We cannot recognise them [the rebels] as the government of Spain either now or probably for some time to come. Even if they should take Madrid, the existing government may be able to continue the struggle from Valencia or Cartagena, with a good deal of loyal territory on its side, and the whole of Catalonia nominally loyal. But what I am afraid of is that other countries may not be such strict observers of the rules of international law; if Franco takes Madrid, Italy and

³⁰⁴ TNA.CAB24/265/55, Memorandum: 'Spain: The Balearic Islands', 14/12/1936.

³⁰⁵ AGA.82/3611/5, Magaz to Sangróniz, 23/10/1936.

Germany may consider it time to “recognise” him, and in doing so to recognise him at once as the only existing government in Spain, de facto if not de jure. The question would then arise whether in order not to be backward in acknowledging the rising power, we should follow suit, despite the fact that the existing government was still in being and continuing the struggle for mastery The safest course would be to try and keep in touch and keep pace with France, Germany and Italy and Portugal in the whole matter of the different stages of recognition; but whether such a line will be possible must depend on a good deal of unforeseeable circumstances.³⁰⁶

A few days later, the Foreign Office acknowledged that ‘we are becoming increasingly unpopular with the Burgos government’ because of ‘our refusal to give such recognition or to establish any form of unofficial relations’.³⁰⁷ Accordingly, the transformation of the rebellion into a prolonged Civil War and the potential for the formation of a Rome-Berlin-Madrid Axis paved the way for an appeasement policy which the British government would direct towards Franco.

The fears of Franco’s incorporation into the Rome-Berlin Axis turned some opinions in London against the idea of a rebel victory. Among the most important was Eden, who later claimed to transition from a position of indifference as to the outcome of the Civil War to opposing the prospect of Franco’s victory. As he wrote in his memoirs, ‘At the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, I had no political sympathies with either side ... As the war progressed, however, I became more concerned lest the insurgents should win ... From the early months of 1937, if I had to choose, I would have preferred a Government victory’.³⁰⁸ Continued Italian intervention helped to solidify Eden’s hostility towards the rebels. On 2 January, for instance, the British and Italian government formally exchanged notes and signed the ‘Gentleman’s Agreement’ which put in writing the desire of both states to respect and preserve the status quo in the Mediterranean and included a supplementary agreement to leave ‘intact and unmodified’ Spain’s territorial integrity.³⁰⁹ The Italian government, however, had no intention of respecting this agreement as in December Ciano had already informed Pedro García Conde, Franco’s Ambassador at Rome, that regardless of what happened in the Anglo-Italian negotiations, Italy would continue to support the rebels.³¹⁰ When

³⁰⁶ TNA.FO371/20540, W12501/62/41, Mounsey minute, 1/10/1936.

³⁰⁷ TNA.FO371/20540, W12438/62/41, Pollock minute, 5/10/1936.

³⁰⁸ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, p. 441.

³⁰⁹ TNA.FO371/21285, W3322/1/41, Sargent to Drummond, 11/2/1937.

³¹⁰ AGA.82/4641/12, García Conde to Franco, 24/12/1936. Ciano told García Conde that 3,000 Italian troops had just landed at Cadiz, 3,000 more would leave soon and 800 technical experts would depart from Italy the following day.

Eden discovered the arrival of more Italian troops within days of the Gentleman's Agreement, his opposition to a rebel victory solidified. This, however, raised issues regarding the policy of general appeasement which had the support of the Cabinet and what actions the British government could take that would not provoke Franco's hostility. When Eden proposed a Royal Navy blockade of Spain's coasts to combat foreign intervention, Samuel Hoare, the virulently anti-communist First Lord of the Admiralty and from 1940 British Ambassador at Madrid, objected because of his concern that Britain was 'getting near a situation where, as a nation, we were trying to stop General Franco from winning'.³¹¹

Anglo-Rebel Tensions: Franco Asserts Himself on the International Stage

Franco's relations with the fascist powers and his military successes against the Republic gave him the confidence to assert himself on the international stage and this led to increasing tensions between his embryonic regime and the British government. During the winter of 1936-1937, one of the central issues between Franco and the British government was the latter's reluctance to grant any form of diplomatic recognition to the rebels. In retaliation, Franco resorted to refusing to recognise the diplomatic status of British consuls in the territory under his control. William Oxley, the British consul at Vigo, for instance, told the Foreign Office on 7 January that the rebel authorities had 'forcibly searched' him when he was crossing the border between Portugal and Spain. Oxley also spoke with the U.S. consul at Vigo who had a similar experience. When the U.S. consul complained to the Spanish authorities, they told him 'of course you Americans look on we [sic] patriots as rebels, and because of this we do not recognise you as you have not recognised us'. For some months, the rebel government had denied the British and U.S. consulates ordinary diplomatic privileges, such as the use of cypher or not to have their correspondence subjected to censorship. Upon receiving Oxley's telegram, William Montagu-Pollock, one of the Foreign Office clerks chiefly responsible for Spanish affairs, noted 'the rebel authorities are out to make as uncomfortable as possible the position of the consular representatives of any government who has

Moreover, Ciano said he hoped soon to establish a division of 20,000 Italian troops in Spain. Before leaving, the Italian Foreign Minister told García Conde not to say anything about their conversation to anyone except Franco. Original Italian documents regarding Italian troops produced in Ismael Saz & Javier Tusell, *Fascistas en España. La intervención italiana en la Guerra Civil a través de los telegramas de la 'Misión Militar Italiana en España', 15 diciembre 1936-31 marzo 1937* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1981), pp. 86-90.

³¹¹ TNA.CAB23/87/1, 8/1/1937.

declined to recognise the Burgos Junta' and regarded the reports of 'organised Anglophobia' in rebel Spain disquieting.³¹² The Foreign Office withdrew Oxley as a protest against Franco's conduct but soon regretted this when Franco refused to allow the British government to appoint a replacement later in the year. This illustrates the changing power dynamics in Anglo-rebel relations and the British government gradually realised that its diplomatic manoeuvres did not perturb Franco.

In the spring, Franco went further in his willingness to stand up to the British government by blockading Spain's northern coast and issuing a warning that his navy would resist by force any ships, including British ones, that ran the blockade. To deter any ships willing to take the risk, Franco also warned that sea mines were in place. This issue put before the British government a moral dilemma as the blockade sought to prevent food supplies reaching Republican territory in the north and thereby starve the civilian population into surrender. The Admiralty and Samuel Hoare, First Lord of the Admiralty, displayed their pro-Franco sympathies and advised the Foreign Office that Franco's blockade was too effective for British ships to risk carrying goods to Republican ports.³¹³ Hoare even proposed that the British government start to classify foodstuffs as war matériel prohibited under the Non-Intervention Agreement. Eden and many in the Foreign Office, however, were against this and on 11 April Eden succeeded in convincing the Cabinet to allow him to make a statement that the British government would not tolerate Franco's interference with British shipping because they had not recognised Franco as a belligerent.³¹⁴ Of course, still cautious to maintain a policy of non-intervention, Eden agreed to advise British ships not to proceed to Bilbao while the present conditions prevailed but he emerged victorious in ensuring ships would have the protection of the Royal Navy up to the three-mile limit.³¹⁵

As British opinions of the rebels gradually became more divided, Franco's reputation received a further blow when German and Italian planes in liaison with the Francoist chiefs of staff destroyed the town of Guernica in the Basque Country. The rebels denied destroying the town and

³¹² TNA.FO371/21282, W848/1/41, Oxley to Eden, 7/1/1937, Pollock minute 19/1/1937.

³¹³ On the Royal Navy's attitudes towards the Bilbao crisis, see James Cable, *The Royal Navy & the Siege of Bilbao* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). On naval attitudes towards the Civil War in general, see Edwards, *British Government*, pp. 99-131.

³¹⁴ On the legal complexities of belligerent rights and the war in Spain, see Vernon O'Rourke, 'Recognition of Belligerency and the Spanish War', *American Journal of International Law*, 31.3 (1937), 398-413.

³¹⁵ Pablo de Azcárate told the Spanish Foreign Ministry that the Bilbao crisis demonstrated that British Conservatives were in favour of a rebel victory but this view overlooked the concerns which the destruction of Guernica provoked in London, see AGA.12/3099/35/3, Azcárate to Vayo, 17/4/1937.

placed the blame on anarchists and communists fighting for the Republic but only devoted followers of the rebels believed this propaganda.³¹⁶ For many in Britain, including the government and the Foreign Office, the numerous reports published on the destruction of Guernica proved beyond doubt who was responsible.³¹⁷ The Spanish government wasted no time in dispelling rebel propaganda and on 1 May Foreign Minister Álvarez del Vayo told Pablo de Azcárate to inform the British government that the Republic was willing to provide facilities for an independent commission to investigate the destruction of Guernica and establish the facts.³¹⁸ However, clear evidence of German involvement only made the British government more determined to maintain its appeasement policy despite a surge in anti-Franco feeling. Moreover, the press reports on Guernica demonstrated again Franco's hostility towards the British government. Rather than make any real effort to suppress or correct accusations that the rebels were responsible, Franco accused the British and French press of 'serving Soviet aims' and lamented that these press organs had not paid any attention to the murder of over 100,000 people at the hands of the 'Red hordes' in Spain but were now suddenly outraged by the destruction of Guernica. At any rate, Franco's official argument was that the 'Reds' had destroyed the town but that Guernica was a legitimate military target anyway and he therefore would have been justified in attacking it in such a way.³¹⁹

³¹⁶ The best study of the Guernica myth propagated by the Franco regime is Herbert Southworth, *Guernica! Guernica!: A Study of Journalism, Diplomacy, Propaganda, and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); also see, Ángel Viñas, *Guerra, dinero, dictadura: ayuda fascista y autarquía en la España de Franco* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1984), pp. 98-140. The rebel government appointed its own committee to investigate the destruction of Guernica and, predictably, concluded a year later that the Republic was responsible, see *Guernica: Official Report of the Commission appointed by the Spanish National Government to investigate the causes of the Destruction of Guernica on April 26-28, 1937* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1938).

³¹⁷ Among the first was George Steer's report which appeared two days after the bombing of Guernica, 'The Tragedy of Guernica', *The Times*, 28/4/1937. In May, a secretary from the German Embassy at Salamanca visited Guernica and later confessed to a member of staff at the British Embassy at St. Jean-de-Luz that the general impression among everyone in Salamanca was that the rebels had bombed Guernica but the 'Reds' had also burned parts of the town, see TNA.FO371/21291, W9438/1/41, Chilton to Eden, 10/5/1937. Herr von Goss, the Press Attaché of the German Embassy, also told an International Red Cross delegate 'of course we bombed Guernica to smithereens', who then passed this information to Chilton. Chilton told the Foreign Office 'in the face of such frankness on the part of a German whose word may surely be taken as final, it is harder than ever to understand what good the military authorities at Salamanca expected to do with their verbose and evasive denials', see TNA.FO371/21292, W9586/1/41.

³¹⁸ AGA.12/3229/1/15, Vayo to Azcárate, 1/5/1937.

³¹⁹ Reuters received the official statement concerning Guernica on 3 May, see 'Rebel Reply on Guernica', *Manchester Guardian*, 4/5/1937. Guernica was, as the rebels argued, a legitimate military target because it contained an arms factory and was an important rail and road junction. The arms factory, however, was not targeted and the level of destruction suggests ideological hatred played an important role in choosing Guernica, see Alpert, *Franco and the Condor Legion*, pp. 123-132. For an overview of German intervention and a specific focus on the destruction of

Although Franco appeared to have no qualms about British attitudes, some of his supporters in Britain were increasingly concerned by the hardening of official British attitudes against the rebels. The most important of these was the Marquis del Moral who had been a propagandist for the rebel cause since the start of the Civil War.³²⁰ By March 1937, Moral had connected sympathisers of the rebels in Britain in an organised network which became known as the Friends of National Spain in May.³²¹ For some months, Moral had been reluctant to accept the advice of British sympathisers that he go to Salamanca and speak to Franco directly about the danger of British opinion turning against the rebels, but the outrage which the destruction of Guernica caused finally prompted Moral to make the journey. In the preceding months, Moral had been in frequent contact with the Duke of Alba, whom Franco would appoint as his diplomatic agent in London as a result of Moral's visit to Salamanca. Although Moral did not believe the rebels had been responsible, on 29 April he told Alba that Guernica had provided a 'splendid opportunity for the Red propaganda' and therefore there would 'have to be plain speaking at any interview I have'.³²²

Moral left for Salamanca on 8 May and the meetings he had there brought about an important shift in Franco's foreign policy. Firstly, Franco dismissed Luis Bolín, one of his chief propagandists, who had been the target of Moral's complaints regarding the ineffectiveness of the press department in getting information to London.³²³ When Moral later wrote a report of the

Guernica, see Klaus Maier, *Guernica, 26.4.1937: La intervención alemana en España y el "caso Guernica"* (Madrid: Sedmay, 1976).

³²⁰ According to a report he wrote in July 1937, Moral provided much of the funding and initiative for this propaganda, AGA.54/6803, Moral to Alba, July 1937. According to Douglas Jerrold, Moral had been 'the energising factor' in the committee from the early 1930s, see Douglas Jerrold, *Georgian Adventure: The Autobiography of Douglas Jerrold* (London: William Collins, 1937), p. 362 and Duchess of Atholl, *Searchlight on Spain* 3rd edn. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1938), pp. 33-34. In 1933, Moral collaborated with Bolín and Jerrold to write a critical account of the Republic: *The Spanish Republic: A Survey of Two Years of Progress* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1933). Jerrold was the director of Eyre and Spottiswoode's publishing house, which published numerous pro-Franco pamphlets and books during the civil war. Luis Bolín was a wealthy Spanish lawyer and subsequently journalist. From 1932, he worked as the *ABC* London correspondent and frequently wrote articles for the British press to discredit the Second Republic. See García, *Truth About Spain!*, pp. 23-24; Moradiellos, *Neutralidad benévola*, pp. 113-114, 201-202.

³²¹ Prominent members of the Friends of National Spain included Victor Cazalet, Robert Tatton Bower, Lord Howarth of Penrith, Lord Phillimore, who became its President, and Henry Page Croft, whom Churchill would later appoint as Under-Secretary of State for War in 1940. On his political career, see Henry Page Croft, *My Life of Strife* (London: Hutchinson, 1948). The Friends of National Spain was perhaps most important in providing Franco not only with several friendly voices in the House of Commons which could deflect criticisms of the government's non-intervention policy, but also with direct influence as his government would determine the content of the information that these MPs received directly from Spain

³²² PL.Correspondence/M, Moral to Alba, 29/4/1937.

³²³ LHCMA.Bryant/E64, 27/7/1938. A year after Bolín's dismissal, Moral wrote of him, 'Bolín was in charge of the Press for a year and was very largely responsible for the appallingly bad press which the Nationalist Cause received. It was another case of "putting a beggar on horseback", i.e. in his case man who had never had authority and who had

changes in rebel propaganda, he said it was during his trip to Salamanca that ‘an agreement was reached for the basis on which [propaganda] work should be organised’.³²⁴ More importantly, Moral’s visit led to the appointment of the Duke of Alba as Franco’s diplomatic agent. Indeed, on 22 April, Alba had met Franco personally to discuss the concerns Moral had raised in his letters. After this meeting, Alba arranged a trip to London and before the end of April Moral had reserved rooms for him at Claridge’s Hotel for the end of May.³²⁵ Up to this point, Franco had not given Alba an official role and only instructed him to help with the ongoing propaganda efforts of the London group.³²⁶ During Moral’s visit to Salamanca, however, Franco decided to convert Alba’s trip into a diplomatic mission.³²⁷

In the meantime, as the rebel army made its way through the Basque Country and it became clear that losing much of its northern territory would be a strategic blow for the Republic, the Foreign Office still focused on pursuing non-intervention to enable the British government to curry favour with both sides. On 11 May, Chilton spoke with his Spanish friend Francisco Herrera, a former CEDA deputy and a leading conspirator in the 1936 rebellion, who warned him of the ill-feeling that existed in rebel Spain as a result of British naval action at Bilbao and how it had ‘wounded the “amour-propre” of the Nationalist Navy’. While Herrera claimed that he personally deplored these attitudes and realised Spain would need British assistance after the war, he said

no sense of proportion’. For Moral, Bolín had been so incompetent that after his dismissal he was given ‘a cushy harmless berth managing tourists in San Sebastián’. On Bolín’s dismissal, also see García, *The Truth About Spain!*, pp. 34-40, and Paul Preston, *We Saw Spain Die: Foreign Correspondents in the Spanish Civil War* (London: Constable, 2009), pp. 195-196.

³²⁴ AGA.54/6803, ‘Informe hecho por Moral’, July 1937

³²⁵ PL.Correspondence/M, Moral to Alba, 29/4/1937.

³²⁶ AGA.54/7198/9, Olano to Alba, 6/5/1937.

³²⁷ In his memoirs, Luis Bolín claimed credit for Alba’s appointment. However, he said he recommended the appointment of Alba on 2 May. Even if this is true, Alba had already arranged to go to London and in a report he sent to Salamanca shortly after arriving in London in June, he said Franco appointed him on 14 May. This coincides with Moral’s visit and from the correspondence between Moral and Alba in the preceding months located at the Palacio de Liria in Madrid, it seems likely that Moral was largely responsible for Alba’s appointment, see Luis Bolín, *Spain: The Vital Years* (London: Cassell, 1967), p. 281. Along with appointing Alba, Franco endorsed the Friends of National Spain. By July the group had established radio communications with Salamanca, received daily cable communications with information to pass onto the British press, and better conditions for journalists in the rebel zone. By the end of 1938, the Friends had more than 1,000 subscribers and over 500 donors, see AGA.54/6803, ‘Informe hecho por Moral’, July 1937; Centro documental de la Memoria Histórica Salamanca [CDMH]. Incorporados/Delegación Oficiosa del Gobierno Nacional en Londres, boxes 1484 to 1507 & 1597; AGA.54/6803, ‘List of Subscribers’ & ‘List of Donors’, September 1938. Over the next year, the Friends of National Spain developed several sister organisations which supported its cause: United Christian Front, the Bishops’ Committee for the Relief of Spanish Distress, the Spanish Children Repatriation Committee, and the Loyal Friends of Franco and Christian Spain. The last was ‘a small organisation that defends our cause from the well-known recreational beach in Brighton’, AGA.54/6701, Villaverde to Sans Agero, 28/1/1938.

anyone who felt the same in Salamanca was ‘in a minority’.³²⁸ On 12 May, Angus Malcolm, a Secretary at the British Embassy at Hendaye, travelled to San Sebastián and met Ramón Sierra, editor of *El Diario Vasco*, with whom he discussed the hostile press attitudes towards the British government. Sierra claimed he received the anti-British propaganda directly from the propaganda department at Salamanca and had no choice but to publish it. However, he proposed a ‘bargain’ for the British government in order to modify press attitudes in rebel Spain which in reality amounted to bribery. Sierra proposed that he and his colleagues who ran other newspapers would induce the Salamanca government to modify its attitude if Britain would use its influence to secure the surrender of Bilbao. While the Foreign Office desired an improvement in Britain’s relations with the rebels, they were unwilling to agree to this. As Lord Cranborne wrote:

We can have nothing to do with negotiating the surrender of Bilbao. We should certainly be misrepresented as having intervened with the object of releasing Nationalist troops for use on other fronts It would be a very definite intervention in the war which, however it might appear to the Basques, would be intensely resented by the Valencia Government.³²⁹

The British government had to balance these concerns with its policy of avoiding actions which would provoke Franco’s hostility. Ralph Stevenson, the British consul at Bilbao, had earlier in the month advised the Basque government to surrender but the Foreign Office hastened to warn him not to pursue this line any further. Although the Foreign Office was willing to allow British ships to evacuate Basque politicians if their lives were in immediate danger so long as there was ‘no pre-arrangement’ to take this action, it advised that it was ‘intensely important not to give the German and Italian governments an excuse of saying we have intervened’.³³⁰

The humanitarian crisis which resulted from the rebel military campaign in the Basque Country forced the Foreign Office to reassess where the line was between ‘intervention’ and ‘non-intervention’ and provided an important lesson in what Franco would and would not tolerate. A mixture of public and political pressure, combined with some degree of humanitarian concern within the Foreign Office and government, however, led to British assistance in the evacuation of thousands of children from the Basque Country, almost 4,000 of whom went to Britain.³³¹ In terms

³²⁸ TNA.FO371/21292, W9584/1/41, Chilton to Eden, 13 /5/1937

³²⁹ TNA.FO371/21292, W9591/1/41, Chilton to Eden, 14/5/1937, Cranborne minute, 24/5/1937

³³⁰ TNA.FO371/21291, W8661/1/41, Mounsey, Cranborne and Vansittart minutes, 7-10/5/1937.

³³¹ For an overview of children evacuated from the Basque country during the Bilbao crisis, see Dorothy Legaretta, *The Guernica Generation: Basque Refugee Children and the Spanish Civil War* (Reno: University of Nevada Press,

of British policy in Spain, this action was unprecedented. The previous major refugee crisis that the Foreign Office had had to contend with came after the fall of Málaga three months earlier. When Ogilvie-Forbes, the British Chargé d’Affaires, requested an increase in British naval presence at Málaga to ‘dissuade the insurgents from taking unduly drastic action against the city and its population’, the Foreign Office ultimately decided against any significant humanitarian assistance, despite the reports of tens of thousands of refugees subjected to shell fire and bombing during their escape, for ‘political and practical considerations’. The reason was that Franco’s navy was blockading the coast and the Foreign Office wanted to avoid coming into conflict with them and appearing to favour the Spanish government.³³² The rebel government’s hostile reaction to British humanitarian assistance during the siege of Bilbao prompted the Foreign Office to discuss how the British government could ‘redress the balance’ and reassert an attitude of impartiality.³³³ Lord Cranborne argued the Foreign Office had hitherto been mistaken in its assumption that political and humanitarian policies were separate issues and the repercussions from the evacuation of Bilbao had made this clear. Cranborne and Vansittart both agreed that the British government needed to do something to improve its relations with Franco and opinion began to move in favour of appointing an unofficial representative at Salamanca.³³⁴ The most important factor in reducing Anglo-rebel tensions, however, would be a willingness on the part of the British government to embrace a policy of appeasing Franco. Neville Chamberlain’s appointment as Prime Minister opened the door for this to happen.

1985). On the experiences of those evacuated to Britain, see Adrian Bell, *Only for Three Months: The Basque Refugee Children in Exile* (Norwich: Mousehold Press, 1996). These Basque children became propaganda tools for both sides and led to the creation of committee’s sponsored by the rebels and the Republic for their repatriation and continued residence in Britain respectively, see AGA.54/6801 & AGA.54/6804. See also Peter Anderson, ‘The Struggle over the Evacuation to the United Kingdom and Repatriation of Basque Refugee Children in the Spanish Civil War: Symbols and Souls’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 52.2 (2017), 297-318.

³³² TNA.FO371/21284, W3062/1/41, Ogilvie-Forbes to Halifax, 12/2/1937; FO371/21367, W3070/37/41, Ogilvie-Forbes to Foreign Office; ‘The Flight from Malaga’, *The Times*, 17/2/1937.

³³³ Ironically, British assistance in the evacuation of civilians from Bilbao benefited more Francoist supporters and sympathisers than Republicans, see Peter Anderson, ‘British Government Maritime Evacuations in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939’, *War in History*, 26.1 (2019), 65-85 (p. 78).

³³⁴ TNA.FO371/21292, W10096/1/41, Vansittart and Cranborne minutes, 24/5/1937.

A New Phase in Anglo-Rebel Relations

Anglo-rebel relations entered a new phase as summer began. On 28 May, Chamberlain replaced Baldwin as Prime Minister. As Chamberlain prepared to move into 10 Downing Street, Baldwin advised him that, given the rise of dictatorships in Europe in recent years, Britain needed to adopt a new approach to diplomacy. His recommendation was that Chamberlain speak directly with dictators and their diplomats and move away from traditional conference diplomacy.³³⁵ The appointment of Chamberlain coincided with the arrival of the Duke of Alba in London on 1 June.³³⁶ Before leaving Spain, he received instructions on how to conduct his relations with the British government. He was to reiterate that Franco had not entered into any agreement with other powers and that the rebellion was strictly a nationalist one against communist subversion, that Spain had no imperial ambitions, and that the 'New Spain' desired to maintain friendly relations with Britain. However, not all of Alba's instructions were so benevolent. He was also to make it clear that Spain's friendly attitude towards Britain would depend on the attitude the British government adopted towards the Civil War. Indeed, Franco instructed him to make it clear to the British government that Spain could mobilise large numbers of troops in the event of war, that Franco resented the support the Royal Navy gave to ships entering and leaving Bilbao – which he claimed were carrying contraband to the Spanish government – and that the exportation of pyrites, iron ore and minerals would continue as usual, but these could not go to countries which 'currently create

³³⁵ Baldwin mentioned this in a January 1939 speech, printed in 'If War Is Forced on Us', *Manchester Guardian*, 31/1/1939.

³³⁶ Alba, whose name was Jacobo María del Pilar Carlos Manuel Fitzjames Stuart y Falcó, was an ideal candidate for the role of diplomatic agent. As well as his Spanish nobility title as 17th Duke of Alba, he was also the 10th Duke of Berwick. He attended Beaumont College and throughout his life visited Britain frequently. Among his British friends were several aristocrats and politicians, and he was distantly related to Winston Churchill. Kim Philby, the British intelligence officer who was revealed in the 1960s to have been a member of the Cambridge Five, believed Alba to have been an effective ambassador because of these connections and wrote in his memoirs that during the Second World War Alba sent to Madrid 'despatches of the British political scene of quite exceptional quality'. Although the British government knew these would be passed to the Germans, Philby remarked that there was nothing it could do because 'there was no evidence that the Duke had obtained his information improperly. He simply moved with people in the know and reported what they said, with shrewd commentaries of his own', see Kim Philby, *My Silent War* (London: Macgibbon & Kee, 1968), p. 67. During the 1920s Alba had played a leading role in establishing links between the British and Spanish education systems and arranging student exchanges. For a brief period between 1930 and 1931 he was Spanish Foreign Minister. See Luis G. Martínez del Campo, *La formación del 'gentleman' español. Las residencias de estudiantes en España (1910-1936)* (Zaragoza: Institución Fernando el Católico, 2012) pp. 76-83, 161-163. For an early account of Alba's time in London as a diplomat, written before Franco's death, see Rafael Rodríguez-Moñino Soriano, *La misión diplomática de Don Jacobo Stuart Fitz James y Falcó, XVII duque de Alba en la Embajada de España en Londres (1937-1945)* (Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1971).

difficulties for us', such as Britain. In this sense, Alba deliberately conveyed mixed messages to establish further Franco's status as an important dictator and steer the British government towards a more benevolent policy. Alba's ultimate objectives were to convince the British government to recognise Franco as a belligerent and subsequently to recognise his administration as the *de jure* government of Spain.³³⁷ According to Alba, during the 'first phase' of his mission in London he sought 'to destroy the atmosphere created by red propaganda, expound our cause and win the sympathy of my interlocutors' in order to 'prepare the terrain for myself becoming the one that listens, asks questions and the one that is able to ask for things'.³³⁸

The meetings that Alba had with those in or closely connected to the British government during the summer of 1937 demonstrate the diverse attitudes in London towards the conflict in Spain but it is clear that Franco's government viewed Eden as the main obstacle to forcing the British government to adopt a friendlier attitude. In one of his first engagements in June, for instance, Alba met Duff Cooper, now First Lord in Chamberlain's Cabinet, and William Morrison, the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries. Unlike the 'Francophile' Cooper, Alba found a more sympathetic attitude in Morrison and felt he was someone with whom he could speak plainly about the situation in Spain.³³⁹ The following week, on 16 June, Alba met Lord Hailsham, at the time Lord Chancellor and former Secretary of State for War, at the Marquis del Moral's house. Eden had given Hailsham permission to meet Alba, which shows that he wanted to establish some form of communication between the British government and the rebels in Spain. During this meeting, they discussed the issue of belligerent rights and Hailsham told Alba that it was still too early to

³³⁷ AGA.54/7198/9, 'Para el Gobierno inglés', no date.

³³⁸ FNFF.26946, Alba to Francisco Franco and Nicolás Franco, 9/6/1937. Although Alba had many friends in Britain, he relied on the organised network Moral had established to assist him in influencing British opinion towards the conflict. Upon his arrival in London, Alba worked closely with the Friends of National Spain, whose principal purpose he claimed was 'to help us with our propaganda'. In fact, Alba used the group to make it seem as if rebel propaganda originated from British people which he believed had 'a great importance in a nation where impartiality and common sense are considered a monopoly of the English race'. To facilitate this, Alba hosted the group's meetings at his office on Hans Place, where he was able to supply British members with information which they could use to ask questions in Parliament and intervene in debates on Spain, see AGA.54/6700/1, Alba to Sangróniz, 19/7/1937.

³³⁹ FNFF.26946, Alba to Francisco and Nicolás Franco, 9/6/1937. Alba was able to speak with people even higher in rank. Later that night, for instance, Alba went to the house of Lord Londonderry, who introduced him to King George VI. Londonderry took the King and Alba to a private room so they could discuss the Civil War. According to Alba, the King listened intently during their 45-minute conversation and showed an interest in the future regime Spain would adopt – particularly if Spain would restore the monarchy – and appeared to have modified his attitude since the last time they met in 1936.

know what Chamberlain's attitude towards this was. However, he added that Eden, 'influenced by the Foreign Office, French pressure, and the League of Nations', would be against it and that his opinion was usually 'decisive'. According to Hailsham's judgement, Herbert Morrison and Thomas Inskip were favourable towards Franco, some other Cabinet ministers undecided, and Eden, Lord Halifax, John Simon and Duff Cooper were all were hostile. Alba told Salamanca that 'it is upsetting to see that among the ministers that are adverse towards us are those who direct British foreign policy, Eden and Halifax'. He went on to say 'my impression after my meeting with the Lord High Chancellor is not optimistic' but said he was determined to meet with others, especially Halifax 'whom I know and who due to his prestige and reputation as a balanced man has influence in the Cabinet'.³⁴⁰

The divide that was emerging between Eden and Chamberlain over how to conduct British foreign policy was clear to Alba and, like the German and Italian Ambassadors, von Ribbentrop and Grandi, he identified Chamberlain as a potential friend of Franco's government while he increasingly saw Eden as an obstacle in Anglo-rebel rapprochement. Several people whom Alba met reinforced this. Leslie Hore-Belisha, the Secretary of State for War who met Alba regularly, told him that he needed to speak to Eden if he wanted to have any chance of influencing the British government's policy towards Spain.³⁴¹ Others presented Eden in a much more negative light. For example, the editor of *The Observer*, James Louis Garvin, told Alba on 9 June that Eden was unlikely to separate British from the French government, which he claimed was under the direction of Moscow. Others also told him that Eden was a freemason and Alba gradually became more convinced that British hostility towards the rebels was the product of a Judeo-Masonic conspiracy of which Eden was the principal representative.³⁴² After a month in London, Alba told Sangróniz that Eden was a 'vain' and 'intransigent' man who 'considers an enemy anybody who does not think like him' and that there was little chance of meeting him because he 'avoid meeting me at all costs'.³⁴³

Alba's perceptions of Chamberlain demonstrate both an understanding of the influence the new Prime Minister would come to have over British foreign policy and the importance he attached

³⁴⁰ AGA.54/6700/1, Alba to Sangróniz, 17/6/1937.

³⁴¹ AGA.54/6700/1, Alba to Sangróniz, 28/6/1937.

³⁴² AGA.54/6700/1, Alba to Sangróniz, 7/7/1937.

³⁴³ AGA.54/6700/1, Alba to Sangróniz, 28/6/1937.

to the goal of general appeasement. In early July he told Salamanca that there was a ‘widespread belief that much depends on Chamberlain, a strong man who with his robust personality can change the direction of British foreign policy’.³⁴⁴ Alba believed Chamberlain was ‘a man with few friends, and only his wife, with whom he is very close, has influence over him’.³⁴⁵ On 27 July and 2 August Chamberlain held private meetings with Dino Grandi to discuss Anglo-Italian relations and Abyssinia without informing the Foreign Office. Chamberlain assured the Italian ambassador that Britain would enter into negotiations at any time and gave the impression that Eden’s hostile attitude towards Mussolini would not get in the way.³⁴⁶ It is likely that someone told Alba at least about the first meeting because on 30 July 1937 he told Salamanca, ‘every day it becomes clearer that the current Prime Minister is determined to intervene more and more in the conduct of British foreign policy’ and ‘there is no disadvantage for us in seeing that it is Chamberlain and not Eden who intervenes in trying to solve the complicated problem of relations between this country and Italy’.³⁴⁷ Although Chamberlain would not yet meet him personally, Alba tried indirectly to influence the Prime Minister’s attitude towards Spain. In early July, for instance, he attended a social event at which Chamberlain’s predecessor, Baldwin, was present and had a long conversation with him. Alba saw this as a good opportunity because he believed Chamberlain and Baldwin spoke on the phone ‘every morning’ and it was ‘not too much to assume that they speak about politics’. Accordingly, Alba’s objective in the conversation was ‘to try to influence him as much as possible’ to make those who controlled British foreign policy abandon their hostile attitudes towards Franco.

³⁴⁴ AGA.54/6700/1, Alba to Sangróniz, 7/7/1937

³⁴⁵ AGA.54/6700/1, Alba to Sangróniz, 10/6/1937. Over the course of the next eight years he would spend in London as agent and later Spanish ambassador, he developed a close friendship with Chamberlain’s wife, Anne, which they maintained beyond the end of the Second World War. Although his style of diplomacy was no doubt that of a ‘gentleman’, it is likely that Alba tried to use his friendship with Anne to influence Chamberlain’s attitude towards Franco once he had established a personal relationship with the Prime Minister. Letters between Alba and Anne Chamberlain can be found in the Palacio de Liria (Madrid) archive. Interestingly, there is no correspondence with Alba in Anne’s papers located at the Cadbury Research Library (University of Birmingham), despite the vast amount of correspondence in the collection.

³⁴⁶ On these conversations, see William C. Mills, ‘The Chamberlain-Grandi Conversations of July-August 1937 and the Appeasement of Italy’, *International History Review*, 19.3 (1997), 594-619 and H. Matthew Hefler, “‘In the way’: intelligence, Eden, and British foreign policy towards Italy, 1937–38”, *Intelligence and National Security*, 33.6 (2018), 875-893.

³⁴⁷ AGA.54/6700/1, Alba to Franco, 30/7/1937

Appeasement Replaces Non-Intervention

Alba's arrival in London coincided with important military developments in Spain which made his diplomatic mission easier. Rebel military successes in northern Spain dealt another fatal blow to the Republic and made Franco's victory seem even more certain, including to those within the British government. As Alba noted on 7 July, for instance, 'in some political circles, people are now finally starting to believe in our victory'.³⁴⁸ This was particularly important because of the role German and Italian assistance played in Franco's successes in the north. On 25 June, Chilton warned that 'the fact that German and Italian influence is at present exceedingly strong in the Nationalist capital, and that both these powers are in a position to capitalise on the vital military assistance they are rendering the "cause" to secure economic or other benefits for themselves, ought constantly to be taken into account'. Chilton also told the Foreign Office not to expect any favours from Franco unless Britain was 'prepared to give something in return'.³⁴⁹

The Foreign Office soon realised that these military successes not only strengthened Franco's diplomatic standing but boosted his confidence to stand up to the British government with the knowledge that British policymakers feared his potential incorporation into the Rome-Berlin Axis. As Charles Howard noted on 8 July, for instance,

I don't doubt that Franco's recent successes at Bilbao combined with German-Italian influence have gone to his head & that he now feels that he is in a position to use threats ... and make us feel awkward as regards the future. And he is right, for we do feel extraordinarily uncomfortable.³⁵⁰

One tactic Franco employed was to refuse to allow the British government to appoint a new consul in the Basque Country once it fell to the rebels. As we saw above in the case of Oxley, this left the British without diplomatic representation in parts of rebel Spain and it was more concerning because Franco allowed the German government to appoint a consul which raised concerns in London that Nazi Germany would establish a monopoly on mines now under Franco's control.³⁵¹ Franco even shunned Henry Chilton, who had maintained contact with the rebel government since

³⁴⁸ AGA.54/6700/1, Alba to Sangróniz, 7/7/1937.

³⁴⁹ TNA.FO371/21296, W12446/1/41, Chilton to Eden, 25/6/1937.

³⁵⁰ TNA.FO371/21296, W13036/1/41, Howard minute, 8/7/1937.

³⁵¹ On Anglo-German economic rivalry in Spain, see Charles E. Harvey, 'Politics and Pyrites during the Spanish Civil War', *Economic History Review*, 31.1 (1978), 89-104 (pp. 99-100).

the beginning of the Civil War. In late July, for instance, Chilton complained to the Foreign Office that during recent weeks he had addressed several communications to Salamanca but Franco's government had not even acknowledged them. When Sangróniz, the head of the diplomatic cabinet at Salamanca, visited France on at least two occasions during this time, he made no effort to contact the British Embassy. 'In short', Chilton complained, 'we appear to have been sent to Coventry by Salamanca ... My opinion is that we can no longer expect Salamanca to continue to treat us as though our relations were on a sound basis: if politically we ignore the existence of General Franco's government they will refuse to acknowledge any right on our part to pursue with them the normal methods of diplomacy'.³⁵²

Franco's more assertive approach once he became a target of appeasement and this evolution in Anglo-rebel relations forced the British government to move towards the idea of granting some form of recognition to this new dictator in order to drive a wedge between him and the Axis Powers. In July the British government attached the issue of increasing numbers of foreign 'volunteers' to question of belligerent rights. This played on Franco's desire for some form of recognition from the British government and sought to use it to reduce the level of foreign involvement in Spain. On 9 July, for instance, Lord Cranborne wrote

By granting belligerent rights to General Franco under pressure we should undoubtedly be regarded in Europe as recognising the success not of him & those Spaniards who support him, but of Italy and Germany. This is the reason why it seems of the first importance that any grant of such rights to him should be preceded by the withdrawal of Italian and German forces – for then we could recognise him on his own merits, as representing a united body of national opinion.

In this regard, Cranborne wanted to strengthen the Non-Intervention Agreement. He went on to note, however, that if the disagreements on the Non-Intervention Committee regarding the withdrawal of volunteers led to its disintegration, the British government 'might have to pocket our pride' and suffer a 'crushing diplomatic defeat' to have any chance of separating Franco from the Axis.³⁵³ Italian encouragement strengthened Franco's resolve to maintain his obstinate attitude. On 1 August, Pedro García Conde, the rebel ambassador at Rome, spoke with Galeazzo Ciano who said the British government was finally beginning to accept Franco's eventual victory as inevitable

³⁵² TNA.FO371/21298, W14504/1/41, Chilton to Eden, 27/7/1937.

³⁵³ TNA.FO371/21296, W13036/1/41, Cranborne minute, 9/7/1937.

and ‘a little push now would be enough to make it decide’ on which side to place its bets. Franco himself, Ciano claimed, would be able ‘to give this push perfectly through the conquest of Santander. A rapid and decisive attack in that area would constitute ... an excellent wedge to dispel the remaining scruples that keeps England in its state of indecisiveness.’³⁵⁴ Ciano did not believe the fall of Santander would be ‘the beginning of the end’, which he considered to be ‘still distant’, but it would at least be ‘a hard knock for Red Spain’.³⁵⁵

Despite the realisation that Franco’s victory seemed increasingly likely, the relationship between rebel Spain and the Axis Powers made this an unappealing outcome because the British government still had not developed a policy that divided them. As Eden was about to leave for a holiday in Yorkshire in early August and hand over control of the Foreign Office to Lord Halifax, he left a note which said the future in Spain was difficult to predict but ‘I am sure that I do not desire an early victory for Franco’.³⁵⁶ Some in the Foreign Office shared Eden’s concerns. Lord Cranborne, for example, produced a memorandum reassessing Britain’s policy in Spain which is worth quoting at length:

A nation torn by revolution presents no immediate danger to any other power. While conditions remained chaotic, we had no reason for anxiety. That phase of the Spanish conflict is however now over. It has ceased to be a revolution. It has become a civil war. There are two Spanish governments, each with its internal administration and its own foreign policy. The foreign policies of these governments must directly concern us. But in the nature of things it is the foreign policy of General Franco which must cause us the most serious preoccupation. For it is his government that controls that area of Spanish territory that dominates the Straits of Gibraltar on both sides and that abuts on Gibraltar itself. The western entrance into the Mediterranean is a vital interest to Great Britain. It must be a main purpose of British policy to secure it. The position is complicated by the fact that though we have been scrupulously impartial in the war, it happens that we have continued to recognise the Valencia government as the legitimate government of Spain, whereas the German and Italian governments, whose interests are potentially inimical to this country, have given de jure recognition to General Franco’s administration and have offered him material assistance. This gives them valuable advantages. They have, for one thing, his good

³⁵⁴ AGA.82/4641/12, García Conde to Franco, 1/8/1937.

³⁵⁵ Ciano, *Diary*, 24, 25, 26 and 30/8/1937, pp. 1-3.

³⁵⁶ Borthwick Institute for Archives, University of York (BIA), Hickleton Papers/A4.410.21.1, Eden to Halifax, 1/8/1937.

will, which we have not. They have moreover constant diplomatic communication with Salamanca, whereas we are dependent on devious & sporadic contacts.

Cranborne ruled out abandoning non-intervention or aiding the Republic 'unless we are prepared to go to war'. Instead, he revived an idea the Foreign Office had been pondering throughout the year of sending to rebel Spain a diplomatic agent. By doing so, Cranborne suggested 'the myth that we have throughout the conflict been biased [in favour of the Republic] in our attitude would, by day to day contact with [Franco], be dissipated'. Cranborne concluded by remarking 'A Franco Spain is not necessarily a weakness to the British Empire. It might easily be a strength. But it rests with us to take the first step, if the foundations of future friendship are to be well and truly laid'.³⁵⁷ George Mounsey and Anthony Eden were in full agreement with Cranborne's conclusions. For his part, Mounsey advised his colleagues always to keep in mind the 'great importance to us both politically and commercially to see to it that we are in good relations with whatever power emerges in Spain' and 'from the international aspect also it is important to give General Franco some indication that he does not need to depend entirely on Italy and Germany for his foreign connections'. Accordingly, Eden, who had earlier in the year shelved the idea because of the reaction it would provoke in the Opposition, said he was now 'willing to consider offering an agent to General Franco'.³⁵⁸

Although Franco sought some form of diplomatic recognition, he used the advantages which being a target of appeasement granted him to dictate the terms of an exchange of diplomatic agents. In August, Franco's navy detained four British ships that were attempting to enter Santander. As Chilton had struggled to make contact with Franco's government, and as the latter refused to allow the British government to appoint replacements for Oxley at Vigo and Ralph Stevenson at Bilbao, the British government could do little to secure their release. In late August, Eden prepared a memorandum for the Cabinet on this issue:

The principal ground for this obstructive and unsatisfactory attitude of the Salamanca Government is that they resent being treated as if they did not exist, and are endeavouring to force us to recognise them by refusing to allow us the advantages of diplomatic representation in their

³⁵⁷ TNA.FO371/21298, W14857/1/41, Cranborne minute, 21/7/1937. Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albi6n*, pp. 193-197, suggests the British felt comfortable relying on the British economic strength to weaken Franco's ties to the Axis Powers. However, it is clear in both Cranborne's and Mounsey's minutes that Franco would only look for British economic aid after the war if the British government established friendly relations with him before then.

³⁵⁸ TNA.FO371/21298, W14857/1/41, Mounsey & Eden minutes, 22/7/1937 & Chilton to Eden, 30/7/1937.

territory unless we give them similar advantages. No doubt, also, they are endeavouring to use this situation in order to force us into recognising their belligerent status, but a large part of the difficulty is one of contact and mutual understanding.³⁵⁹

In this sense, the British government realised that Franco was using the advantages of being a target of appeasement. However, as appeasement policies concede influence to their target state and allow it, to some extent, to dictate the terms of a diplomatic relationship, there was little the British government could do to force Franco's hand unless it was willing to abandon its policy and its goals.

Further demonstrations of solidarity between Franco and Mussolini made the British more malleable. Mussolini, at Franco's request, escalated his intervention and on 2 August Italian submarines in the Mediterranean began sinking merchant ships suspected of carrying war matériel and other supplies to the Spanish government. On 7 August, Franco told the Italian government that Salamanca would assume all responsibility for the sinking of merchant ships except those flying the British flag unless 'it is certain that a ship with the British flag is carrying war matériel', in which case 'the ship must be torpedoed'.³⁶⁰ By the end of August, there had been attacks on twenty-six ships in the Mediterranean. Eight British ships were included on this list, seven of which were sunk after 23 August.³⁶¹ This was a clear indication of Franco's confidence in British weakness, but Italian assurances surely strengthened this resolve. On 22 August, for instance, Mussolini told García Conde, 'I am a true friend of Spain and I will be until the end ... Nobody can doubt my words; I always follow through on what I say'.³⁶² The fall of Santander with Italian help strengthened Franco's hand with the British. On 27 August, Mussolini publicly congratulated Franco's forces, and the Italian troops who assisted them, for their military successes in Santander. Eden minuted just after this incident that the fall of Santander marked 'the beginning of the end', but

it is clearly not in our interest that the end should come quickly, in as much as a complete and early victory for Franco would greatly increase the prestige of Italy especially in view of

³⁵⁹ TNA.FO371/21299, W16115/1/41, Eden memorandum, 25/8/1937.

³⁶⁰ AGA.82/4640/9, Sangróniz to García Conde, 16/7/1937.

³⁶¹ Edwards, *British Government*, p. 118.

³⁶² AGA.82/4641/12, García Conde to Franco, 22/8/1937.

Mussolini's exchange of messages with Franco and the hardly concealed assistance of the Italian Navy to the Nationalists.³⁶³

In an attempt to weaken Italian prestige, Eden accepted the French government's proposals for a conference to deal with the attacks on shipping in the Mediterranean which took place at Nyon between 10 and 14 September. Although the German and Italian governments refused to participate after the Soviet Union publicly blamed Italy for the attacks, the British government's attempts at rapprochement with Mussolini ensured Italy received an invitation to participate in naval patrols in the Mediterranean.³⁶⁴

Rather than a diplomatic victory for the British government, Nyon was a further demonstration of British weakness to the fascist states and therefore a source of encouragement. As Ciano noted in his diary on 21 September, 'It is a great victory. From accused torpedoers to Mediterranean policemen, with the exclusion of the Russians, whose ships have been sunk'.³⁶⁵ We can see how this encouraged Mussolini in the action he took after Nyon. He decided, for instance, to increase Italian presence in the western and central Mediterranean by sending twelve bombers to Majorca with orders to commence regular attacks on Republican ports. Within four months, the Italian bomber force in the Balearic Islands and attacks on Republican ports and shipping had doubled.³⁶⁶

The Nyon Conference resulted in a temporary cessation of attacks in the Mediterranean but failed to weaken the links between Franco and Mussolini. In October, Geoffrey Thompson, First Secretary at the British Embassy at Hendaye, visited London. Thompson had spent six months in Valencia before transferring to Hendaye and could speak with some authority on conditions in both the Republican and rebel zones. While he wrote in a memorandum that it was still possible that there would be a communist dictatorship in the event of a government victory, he was concerned more with the result of a rebel victory because Franco's government had absorbed 'Italian fascist ideas and methods'. Anyone who believed Franco would never give up any of Spain's territory to a foreign power, according to Thompson, was wrong, not because of Franco himself but because 'Spain is but another Italian step in the direction of giving effect to the *mare nostrum* policy which began two years ago with the attack on Abyssinia' and it 'will not be easy for Spain to show her

³⁶³ TNA.FO371/21401, W18118/9260/41, Eden minute, 8/1937.

³⁶⁴ On the Nyon conference and Anglo-Italian relations, see William C. Mills, 'The Nyon Conference: Neville Chamberlain, Anthony Eden, and the Appeasement of Italy in 1937', *International History Review*, 15.1 (1993), 1-22.

³⁶⁵ Ciano, *Diary*, 21/9/1937, p. 10.

³⁶⁶ Salerno, *Vital Crossroads*, pp. 29-39; Gooch, *Mussolini and His Generals*, pp. 353-354.

friends to the door'. Thompson's summary of the situation in Spain is worth quoting at length because it impressed Eden to the extent that he brought it before the Cabinet:

Franco is between the devil and the deep sea; he certainly has nothing to gain from trouble with Great Britain, but he cannot both rid himself of his friends and win the war. For the assistance he has received he will, this at least is my personal view, have to pay a price not in the form of territory, but more probably in the shape of alliances covering military leases of ports as naval or air bases, the said ports to be fortified by the leasing Power, and, of course, economic concessions on a wide scale. The alliance solution, which would also presumably embrace Portugal, would eliminate any question of Spanish pride being ruffled by the cession of territory.³⁶⁷

As we saw earlier in this and the previous chapter, the concerns Britain had regarding rebel relations with Italy in the summer and autumn of 1936 remained intact. Moreover, it is important to bear in mind the broader context of increasingly tighter relations between Italy and Germany. Mussolini visited Germany in September and over the next three months firmly attached his foreign policy ambitions to those of the Third Reich. Indeed, in October, Mussolini remarked that Italy's relations with Germany 'constitute the strict direction of our policy. We should now consider the Rome-Berlin Axis in a long-term historical perspective'.³⁶⁸

Eden was the primary obstacle in the way of British non-intervention transforming completely into a policy of appeasing Franco. Although Eden wanted to appoint Robert Hodgson as a diplomatic agent, there was still some uncertainty surrounding whether Franco would even accept an exchange of agents without British recognition of him as a belligerent. It seems likely that the Duke of Alba was able to influence Franco on this issue. In October, for instance, he informed Franco that, based on what many of his 'friends' in London had told him, Britain was 'on the eve of a movement of greater sympathy towards us', but first Franco needed to do two things: continue to repeat that he would cede no Spanish territory and accept in principle the Non-Intervention Committee's plan for the withdrawal of volunteers. Only by doing so would British public opinion stop viewing the Spanish conflict through the lens of the Italian question, because 'our friendship with Italy is the principal factor, almost the only one, which creates mistrust of National Spain'.³⁶⁹ Moreover, Franco was in the process of forming his first real government and

³⁶⁷ TNA.FO371/21300, W19220/1/41, Thompson memorandum, 13/10/1937.

³⁶⁸ Cited in Salerno, *Vital Crossroads*, pp. 29-30. For an analysis of these developments and the military planning that went along with them, see Gooch, *Mussolini and His Generals*, pp. 315-383.

³⁶⁹ AGA.54/6700/1, Alba to Franco, 29/10/1937.

acknowledged that improving relations with the British government might be the only chance of manoeuvring it into granting some form of recognition and thereby weaken the Republic's diplomatic standing. Accordingly, in November he accepted the appointment of Hodgson as Britain's diplomatic agent and officially appointed Alba as his diplomatic agent in London.³⁷⁰

It is worth pointing out, however, that Franco was able to dictate the terms of this exchange. For instance, Franco only agreed to release the British ships he had detained a few months earlier if the exchange of agents included the exchange of sub-agents who would effectively act as consuls. Moreover, since Alba was already acting as an unofficial ambassador, the British asked Franco's government to appoint somebody else so that the exchange of agents did not appear to public and political opinion as a form of diplomatic recognition but Franco wanted to keep Alba in the role.³⁷¹ Once these negotiations had commenced, a rebel plane even sank a British merchant ship but the British government turned a blind eye to the incident lest it delay the exchange of agents further.³⁷² Such was the determination of the British government to improve its relations with the Franco regime.³⁷³

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that, during late 1936 and throughout 1937, Franco and his government gradually acquired the characteristics of a regime towards which the British government could direct a policy of appeasement. Since the start of the conflict, the British government sought to ensure that whatever regime emerged from the Civil War did not adopt a foreign policy hostile

³⁷⁰ Hodgson later wrote a book about Spain which, although not an account of his time as diplomatic agent, drew on his experiences there, see *Spain Resurgent* (London: Hutchinson, 1953). He was an advocate of the Franco regime and remained so beyond the Second World War. In 1946, for instance, he wrote to Alba's successor as ambassador, Domingo de las Barcenas, upon hearing that he would be leaving his post in London. Hodgson told Barcenas that he did not believe accusations that Franco had been an ally of the Axis Powers during the Second World War and suggested he merely used them for his own ends in order to preserve Spain's neutral position, see FNFF.14879, Hodgson to de las Barcenas, 20/12/1946.

³⁷¹ For Anglo-rebel negotiations on the exchange of agents, see TNA.FO371/21401.

³⁷² On 30 October, a rebel seaplane sank the merchant ship *Jean Weems* while it was flying the British flag. There were no injuries, but the crew would not land safely at shore until five hours later, see 'British Ship Sunk by Seaplane', *The Times*, 1/11/1937. On 15 December, MPs questioned Eden on what the British government was doing about attacks on ships and asked him to provide a list of all ships sunk since the start of the Civil War, see HC Debate, vol. 330, 15/12/1937, cc1135-1142.

³⁷³ The news that the Japanese government was planning to grant de jure recognition to Franco in November arguably made such an improvement more necessary as the three principal threats identified by the British government – Germany, Italy and Japan – had all firmly committed themselves to the Franco regime.

towards British interests. By maintaining a policy of non-intervention, the British government hoped neither side would do so. However, during the construction of his regime, Franco went in search of international recognition and legitimacy, which he believed the British government wrongly denied him. As his military successes and support from the German and Italian governments instilled him with the confidence to assert himself on the international stage, Franco adopted a foreign policy that was increasingly detrimental to British interests. With strengthened diplomatic standing, Franco possessed a considerable degree of agency in Anglo-rebel relations, forcing the British government to convert its policy of non-intervention into one of tacit appeasement.

Throughout the period covered in this chapter, Eden proved to be an obstacle in the way of Anglo-rebel rapprochement. Although Eden wanted to establish something resembling formal diplomatic links with Franco, his attitudes towards the rebels gradually hardened as a result of the close relationship between Franco and the fascist dictators. By December 1937, it was clear to many that the policy of non-intervention bore some responsibility for this. When Chilton told the Foreign Office of the growth of an ‘aggressive form of fascism’ in Spain in December, for instance, Mounsey argued ‘The democracies will have themselves to thank if this forecast proves correct’ because the policy of non-intervention had pushed Franco to align himself closely with Hitler and Mussolini. Eden, however, noted in the border next to Mounsey’s minute, ‘There are others who think that the democracies should have done more to help the government, thus obviating this danger’. He made his views clear in his own minute: ‘None the less there is much to make us uneasy in [Chilton’s] despatch. I continue to dislike the prospect of a Franco victory’.³⁷⁴ As a result of Eden’s attitudes towards the Civil War, Franco, encouraged by Alba’s despatches since his arrival in June, took a positive view of the divergence between Eden and Chamberlain, much like his allies Hitler and Mussolini did, and looked forward to a time when the new Prime Minister would wrest control of foreign policy from his Foreign Secretary.

³⁷⁴ TNA.FO371/21302, W22043/1/41, Mounsey & Eden minutes, 23 & 26/12/1937

IV

APPEASING FRANCO

Making Friends with ‘National Spain’, January 1938-February 1939

Introduction

Neville Chamberlain genuinely believed he could prevent the Second World War. He was so confident in his ability to negotiate with dictators that his domineering attitude towards foreign policy pushed Anthony Eden to resign on 20 February 1938. Essentially, the difference between the two was their understanding of the word ‘appeasement’. For Eden, to appease was simply to secure peace, but Chamberlain’s understanding of the word went further: he sought, naïvely, to guarantee peace by satisfying the demands of dictators, and increasingly at any cost.³⁷⁵ Eden’s resignation broadly coincided with political developments in rebel Spain as Franco established his first regular government at Burgos, equipped with a Foreign Ministry under the direction of General Francisco Gómez-Jordana y Sousa.³⁷⁶ Franco already enjoyed the recognition of states such as Germany and Italy, and during 1938 several other states, including Portugal and the Vatican, recognised his new government.³⁷⁷ The British government’s refusal to grant de jure

³⁷⁵ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, p. 394.

³⁷⁶ On 30 January, Franco had announced a new administrative law which established the structure of his new government and the names of his cabinet ministers appeared the following day, see Stanley Payne, *The Franco Regime, 1936-1975* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), pp. 180-182.

³⁷⁷ By the time the British government recognised Franco in February 1939, he enjoyed the de jure recognition of Germany, Italy, Holy See, Albania, Portugal, Japan, Guatemala, El Salvador, Hungary and Manchukuo and de facto recognition of Turkey, Romania, Greece, Czech, Switzerland, the Low Countries, Bulgaria, Norway, Poland, Denmark, Finland, Estonia, and Sweden, see AGA.82/3106/33. The British government considered itself one of the governments to have granted de facto recognition, see TNA.FO371/22699, W15442. However, the government’s ambiguity on this issue led to confusion among legal experts and the British courts at the time about what this actually meant in terms of its relations with Burgos, see Herbert Briggs, ‘De Facto and De Jure Recognition: The Arantzazu Mendi’, *American Journal of International Law*, 33.4 (1939), 689-699; H. Lauterpacht, ‘Recognition of Insurgents as a De Facto Government’, *Modern Law Review*, 3.1(1939), 1-20.

recognition to the Franco government, or even recognise him as a belligerent, was therefore a thorny issue in Anglo-rebel relations.³⁷⁸

While historians have noted that Italy was the main issue between Eden and Chamberlain, their conflicting views on Spain have received less attention.³⁷⁹ However, just as it was in Rome and Berlin, Eden's resignation was also a cause for celebration in Burgos.³⁸⁰ A few days after Lord Halifax replaced Eden as Foreign Secretary, for instance, Alba told Jordana, 'while we must not expect a radical change in the policy of this country towards our noble cause, we must view with satisfaction the fact that [Eden], who, as a personal enemy of Mussolini, exhibited profound antipathy for us, no longer controls the foreign policy of this country'.³⁸¹ That is not to say that Eden did not to some extent embrace a policy of appeasing Franco. As we saw in the last chapter, Eden sought to curry favour with Franco in the hope of preventing rebel Spain's absorption into the Rome-Berlin Axis despite coming actively to dislike the prospect of his victory by early 1937. Nevertheless, this celebration surrounding Eden's departure from the Spanish perspective is important because it demonstrates that regardless of the ways the Non-Intervention Agreement benefited the rebels by discriminating against the Republic, both sides viewed British policy as one of hostility. This did not end with Eden's resignation, but, as we will see in this chapter, Anglo-rebel rapprochement accelerated just as it did between Britain and Italy once Chamberlain was able to establish his control over foreign policy.³⁸² In this sense, this chapter offers a more dynamic assessment of the developments that led to Britain's recognition of Franco by analysing the ways in which Chamberlain's brand of appeasement took hold of British foreign policy and affected Anglo-rebel relations.

³⁷⁸ Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Entre Hendaya y Gibraltar* (Barcelona: Ediciones Nauta, 1973), pp. 101-115.

³⁷⁹ For examples, see D.R. Thorpe, *Eden: Life and Times of Anthony Eden, First Earl of Avon, 1897-1977* (London: Pimlico, 2004); David Carlton, *Anthony Eden: A Biography* (London: Penguin Books, 1981); Bouverie, *Appeasing Hitler*, pp. 157-170. Few historians have even focused specifically on Chamberlain's attitudes towards Spain, but a good overview is Glyn Stone, 'Neville Chamberlain and the Spanish Civil War', *International History Review*, 35.2 (2013), 377-395.

³⁸⁰ The Italian government in particular loathed Eden and considered him a threat to its ambitions, see Robert Mallett, 'Fascist Foreign Policy and Official Italian Views of Anthony Eden in the 1930s', *Historical Journal*, 43.1 (2000), 157-187. Hitler, too, often complained that those who supported Eden's view were a threat to peace because of their hostility towards the foreign policy of the fascist states, see Frank McDonough, *The Hitler Years: Triumph, 1933-1939* (London: Head of Zeus, 2019), p. 351.

³⁸¹ AGA.82/3627/1, Alba to Jordana, 26/2/1938.

³⁸² José Alfonso Durango has pointed out that the Anglo-Italian Agreement of April 1938 created more favourable conditions in which to improve Anglo-rebel relations, and Franco's desire to do so, but German and Italian intervention made this more difficult, see 'España y la política internacional del fin de la guerra civil al comienzo de la mundial', *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, 3 (1992), 257-272 (pp. 259-260).

Alongside these political changes in rebel Spain and Britain, however, it is important to bear in mind the military situation in the Civil War because this bolstered Franco's diplomatic and legal standing while gradually confirming in the mind of the British government that the Republic could not win the war. By 1938, Franco's military position in the north was secure and he had the resources to launch a fall-scale attack towards the east. After losing its hold on its territory in the north, the Mediterranean and the Pyrenees became the principal routes through which war matériel from abroad could reach the Spanish government. In April, Franco's forces reached the Mediterranean coast and cut the Republic's territory in two, forcing Negrín to form a new government as pessimism began to spread among his ministers.³⁸³ Although the Republican Army delayed rebel forces in the Battle of the Ebro during the summer, the closure of the French border and Franco's attacks on shipping in the Mediterranean effectively brought an end to shipments of Soviet aid and cemented the Republic's international isolation.³⁸⁴

As long as Barcelona remained under the Republic's control, attitudes in London remained open to the possibility that the war could turn in its favour, even if they thought it unlikely, or at the very least allow the Republic to resist indefinitely. Negrín's government intended to resist until the outbreak of a broader European conflict that would bring the western democracies to the aid of the Republic in an alliance against the fascist states. Accordingly, even as the Republic appeared increasingly less capable of winning the war, it could play an important role in the war effort of the Allies.³⁸⁵ By the end of January 1939, however, Franco had destroyed this possibility and the Republic's authority over parts of southern and central Spain disintegrated from within. It is in this context that the British government eventually decided to recognise Franco's government in February 1939 but it is worth emphasising that the aim of currying favour with both sides, established in the summer of 1936, remained a part of British policy until the Republic's defeat was beyond any reasonable doubt. Moreover, this aim was in conflict with the goal of appeasing Franco and separating him from the Axis Powers. Ultimately, therefore, one objective had to

³⁸³ Indalecio Prieto, Minister of National Defence, was among those who believed the Republic's defeat to be inevitable, although in his memoir he attributed his ousting from the Cabinet to a communist plot, see *Cómo y por qué salí del Ministerio de Defensa Nacional. Intrigas de los rusos en España* (Mexico City: Impresos y Papeles, S de RL, 1940).

³⁸⁴ Howson, *Arms for Spain*, p. 131.

³⁸⁵ On the Republic's strategy, see Bahamonde Magro and Cervera Gil, *Así terminó la guerra*, pp. 17-50; Graham, *Republic at War*, pp. 316-390; for a brief overview of the disintegration of the Republic, see Ángel Viñas, *La República en guerra. Contra Franco, Hitler, Mussolini y la hostilidad británica* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2012), pp. 353-364;

triumph over the other, and the military situation by early 1939 convinced the British government that it could finally stop hedging its bets and go all in on a rebel victory.

The impact which the two sides in Spain had on the terms and timing of that decision and the role of appeasement therein are often absent in studies of British policy towards the Spanish Civil War.³⁸⁶ Jill Edwards discusses recognition as the final, natural step in a policy which had always favoured the rebels.³⁸⁷ Enrique Moradiellos has argued that long before the Anschluss in March and the Munich Agreement in September, Spain had served as the principal arena of Britain's policy of appeasing Hitler and Mussolini but he emphasises that the difference between these two examples and Spain was that fears of communist revolution in Spain in the event of the government's victory remained an integral part of British assessments of the conflict until Franco's victory put an end to the 'Spanish problem'. Accordingly, unlike Czechoslovakia and Austria, Franco's victory over the Republic was the preferred outcome.³⁸⁸ However, this argument overlooks how British non-intervention, rather than serving as a convenient cover for the continued appeasement of Germany and Italy, evolved into a policy of appeasing Franco. By focusing on Anglo-rebel relations in this way, we can also assess the agency which this policy of appeasement granted Franco in his relations with the British government and the impact this had on his development as a statesman.³⁸⁹ Indeed, the perception of Chamberlain's weakness was a source of encouragement for Franco to be bolder and more assertive in his relations with the British government.

This chapter shows that sympathy for Franco or prejudice against the Republic were not entrenched in Britain's non-intervention policy and such attitudes were much more fluid depending on the military situation in Spain and the perceived threat posed by Francoist Spain's incorporation

³⁸⁶ Ángel Bahamonde Magro and Javier Cervera Gil have studied in detail the last phase of the Civil War from the Republic's perspective and considered its relations with the British government but the primary focus is on the internal divisions within the Republican zone, see *Así terminó la guerra*, pp. 271-347. Paul Preston has more recently taken a similar approach. Although he has paid more attention to the Republic's relations with the British government, he gives little consideration to the rebels and their influence on British policy, see *Last Days*, pp. 39-86. David Jorge, in his pioneering study of the Republic and its relations with the League of Nations, discusses only in minor detail the days leading up to the recognition of Franco, see *Inseguridad colectiva*, pp. 621-634.

³⁸⁷ Edwards, *British Government*, pp. 181-210.

³⁸⁸ Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albión*, pp. 347-359, 371.

³⁸⁹ For Franco's political views, see Preston, *Franco*, p. 61, 326, 518. Debates surrounding the Franco regime's fascist identity persist, but historians generally accept that it at least incorporated elements of fascism, see Stanley Payne, *Fascism in Spain, 1923-1977* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999); Ferran Gallego, *El evangelio fascista. La formación de la cultura política del franquismo (1930-1950)* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2014).

into the Rome-Berlin Axis. As we will see, the British government found nothing to sympathise with in Franco's attacks on British merchant ships in the summer of 1938. Moreover, in the autumn, the search for an international solution to the Civil War which the British government hoped to impose on the two sides in Spain went completely against Franco's will and, if successful, could only have created a regime with a closer resemblance to the Republic than to that which Franco was attempting to establish with the help of Hitler and Mussolini. In fact, as British policymakers became increasingly focused on driving a wedge between Franco and the Axis Powers, opinions not only turned against the idea of a rebel victory but began to favour a victory for the Republic by 1939. The reality of the military situation and the determination of the Axis Powers to ensure Franco's victory by this point, however, ensured the British government maintained its passive attitude in the pursuit of appeasement.³⁹⁰ With Eden out of the way, Chamberlain was free to solidify this policy of appeasing Franco.

Chamberlain Takes Over

Eden's resignation in February 1938 highlights the hostility which the rebels perceived in British policy up until this point. On 25 February, for instance, the Vizconde de Mambblas, a well-travelled Francoist backchannel diplomat, produced a long report detailing the development of British policy towards Spain since 1936 to advise the new Foreign Ministry at Burgos on how it might now develop its relations with Britain. Based primarily at Hendaye and having visited London on several occasions during the conflict, Mambblas was well-placed to advise Burgos on British attitudes.³⁹¹ According to his assessment, it was 'undoubtable that Great Britain used to desire a Republican victory' but the fall of Bilbao forced the British government to readjust its policy and its aim was now to prolong the war for as long as possible to exhaust Spain and the Axis Powers. By exhausting Spain 'physically and morally', Mambblas said the British government hoped to 'drug' Franco's victory with two objectives: firstly, to destroy his faith in Germany and Italy, and

³⁹⁰ On Franco's relations with the Axis Powers and their conception of Spain's strategic and economic importance, see Ros Agudo, *La guerra secreta de Franco*, pp. 24-36.

³⁹¹ Like Alba, Mambblas had no difficulty meeting with those in the highest echelons of British society. In January 1937, he dined with bankers of the Rothschild and Royal families, Lord Cranborne, Alexander Cadogan, and Austen and Ivy Chamberlain, among many others. At the time he claimed British policy was guided by 'anti-fascist obsession', the search of a middle ground between fascism and communism ("ni comunismo ni fascismo") and 'fear', see Mambblas to Sangróniz, 24/1/1937, in Francisco Franco Salgado-Araujo, *Mi vida junto a Franco* (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1977), pp. 357-365.

secondly, to use the power of British finance to make Spain dependent on Britain for its post-war reconstruction. In this regard, he argued that the British government's appointment of Hodgson was nothing more than an attempt to protect Britain's economic interests in Spain and a willingness 'to consider National Spain as the POSSIBLE VICTOR, but nothing more'.³⁹² Mambblas's assessment is interesting for three reasons. Firstly, it demonstrates that, despite the advantages that the Non-Intervention Agreement gave to the military rebels, they still saw British policy as one of hostility. Secondly, it shows a sound awareness of Britain's aim of driving a wedge between Franco and the Axis Powers. Thirdly, as we saw in the last chapter, it is an accurate assessment of the way Eden's attitude towards the Civil War developed during 1937.

Franco celebrated Eden's resignation because he believed Chamberlain's taking control of foreign policy would make Britain more malleable and, indeed, British policymakers seized the opportunity to use Eden as a scapegoat and present his departure as the beginning of a new era in Anglo-rebel relations. Five days after Eden's resignation, for instance, Alba met the then Home Secretary Samuel Hoare, who pleaded that the British government needed some success in its foreign policy to ensure public opinion did not believe Eden had been right. Moreover, while Eden had been unwilling to meet Alba personally, Hoare insisted he would try to arrange a meeting between Eden's replacement – Lord Halifax – and Alba 'in the house of some friends'.³⁹³ The following month, the Secretary of State for War, Leslie Hore-Belisha, told Alba that there would soon be a change in Britain's attitude towards Franco and placed the blame on Eden for the earlier hostility and the refusal to recognise Franco as a belligerent.³⁹⁴

³⁹² AGA.82/3103/19/1, Mambblas to Jordana, 25/2/1938 [capitals in original].

³⁹³ AGA.82/3627/1, Alba to Jordana, 25/2/1938. It is possible that the paths of Eden and Alba crossed in Geneva when they were both there at the same time, although the lack of documentation suggests neither made much of a meeting if one did take place. In June 1938, Alba seems to have met Eden's secretary, which Eden was aware of, although Alba was very vague when reporting this meeting to Burgos, see PL.Correspondence, Alba to Jordana, 3/6/1938. Despite the passivity of British policymakers after Eden's departure, Alba did give reassurances that Franco would not cede territory to Germany or Italy and that he would be no threat to Britain in the future. At times this proved difficult. In March, for instance, the British press wasted no time in publishing reports of a speech by General Queipo de Llano, Franco's ferocious Commander of the Army of the South, in which he claimed the rebels would turn their attention to Gibraltar after the Civil War. The reports turned out to be a mistranslation, but Jordana scrambled to order Alba to refute the claims and correct it, see "'We Will Take Gibraltar'", *News Chronicle*, 1/3/1938; 'Gen. de Llano and Gibraltar', *Daily Telegraph*, 1/3/1938; 'Gib, "A Den of Pirates"', *Daily Mail*, 1/3/1938; 'Llano Says: "We shall have Gibraltar"', *Daily Express*, 1/3/1938.

³⁹⁴ AGA.82/3627/1, Alba to Jordana, 17/3/1938. For his part, Alba developed a new approach to diplomacy, copied from the Spanish Embassy, of sending an official note to the Foreign Office and simultaneously informing the press of its contents to ensure exposure of an alternative narrative of the Civil War and, in this case, even managed to get anti-Franco newspapers to publish corrections of Queipo de Llano's speech, see 'Gibraltar: The Other Version', *News*

Franco used this perceived malleability to his advantage by emphasising his military successes and the relationship his regime was likely to have with the Axis Powers in the future in the hope of influencing British policy.³⁹⁵ In early April, for instance, when the rebels reached the Mediterranean coast and split the Republic's territory in two, Franco sought to strengthen his offensive by making the British government exert pressure on the French to close the Pyrenees border and prevent any supplies from reaching the resisting government forces.³⁹⁶ When Édouard Daladier formed a new Radical-Socialist government in France on 10 April and made plans to visit London later in the month, Jordana instructed Alba to take advantage of the visit by urging the British government to emphasise the importance they attached to the closure of the French border.³⁹⁷ The instructions Alba received to guide his meetings in London ahead of the French visit suggested there could be no improvement in Anglo-rebel relations until the Pyrenees border was closed and demonstrated an evolution in Franco's diplomatic lexicon from the veiled warnings and the obstinate attitude which we saw in the last chapter to overt threats:

Due to our geographical position, it is in Britain's interests to conserve our friendship, and it is not going too far to say [Britain] needs Spain, given that at any given moment we could weigh in heavily on European politics. With Britain in good harmony with Spain, it could have the peace of mind of having its communications and access to the Mediterranean assured; with Spain against

Chronicle, 3/3/1938; 'Gibraltar: Franco's Agent and Recent Speech', *Yorkshire Post*, 3/3/1938. For correspondence between Alba and Jordana concerning this incident, see AGA.82/3627/1.

³⁹⁵ Moradiellos interpreted Mamblas's report somewhat differently. According to him, Franco and Jordana adopted Mamblas's suggestion of courting British goodwill while ensuring the continued support of Mussolini. Such an assessment leaves out Franco's perception of British weakness and how he deliberately used this against the Chamberlain government, particularly in the case of the bombing of merchant ships in the summer, see *La perfidia de Albión*, pp. 254-257.

³⁹⁶ The French government had turned a blind eye to the transport of war matériel across its border for much of the conflict. The open border was supposed to equip the French with a negotiating tool in their relations with the Spanish rebels and facilitate the attempts of the Non-Intervention Committee to make the agreement more effective. However, as Helen Graham has pointed out, it strengthened Franco's arguments against reducing aid he was receiving from Germany and Italy, see Graham, *Republic at War*, p. 367. For an analysis of French policy and the border issue, see Thomas, *Britain, France & Appeasement*, pp. 89-114. On Franco's attempts to use the British to exert pressure on the French government, see Juan Carlos Pereira Castañares, 'De una guerra a otra. La política exterior del franquismo (1936-1945)', in *Cruzados de Franco. Propaganda y diplomacia en tiempos de guerra (1936-1945)*, ed. by Antonio César Moreno Cantano (Gijón: Ediciones Trea, 2013), pp. 13-34.

³⁹⁷ AGA.82/3103/7, Jordana to Alba, 20/4/1938. Two of Daladier's ministers encouraged Franco to take this approach before they formed a new government in April. On 13 March, for instance, Franco's diplomatic agent at Paris, José Quiñones de León, met Camille Chautemps and Gorges Bonnet, who would become Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister respectively, who told him British pressure in Paris would help to counteract the opposition of left-wing groups and that the Daladier government would only be able to close the border if it could present it 'as an imposition of Britain', see AGA.82/3103/12, Quiñones de León to Jordana, 13/3/1938.

it and united with other countries that could eventually be Britain's adversaries, the difficulties would be increased considerably.³⁹⁸

Alba was pleased to discover soon after Halifax's admission to Dino Grandi that the British government was actively applying pressure on the French to close the border.³⁹⁹ Although this was not the direct result of pressure from Burgos, it was important for reinforcing the belief that Franco could influence British foreign policy.

Developments in Anglo-Italian and Anglo-German diplomatic relations during this period served to confirm the new direction in which Chamberlain was able to take British foreign policy now that Eden was out of the way. Within two months of Eden's resignation, for instance, Chamberlain maintained a passive attitude towards the Anschluss in March and the British and Italian governments signed the Anglo-Italian Agreement on 16 April. According to the agreement, once Mussolini had made 'substantial progress' in the withdrawal of Italian forces from Spain as a demonstration of his commitment to respect the Mediterranean status quo, the British government would take steps to bring about the international recognition of the Italian conquest of Abyssinia. Chamberlain was using appeasement in a renewed attempt to drive a wedge between Rome and Berlin, but from the Spanish perspective these developments suggested the British government had accepted Franco's victory as inevitable.⁴⁰⁰ Pablo de Azcárate, in response to the Anglo-Italian Agreement, for instance, accepted the reality of the situation in a letter to Álvarez del Vayo: 'As much as it pains me to admit it ... one has to accept reality exactly as it is: the British government has done its calculations and decided to accept the risks which a rebel victory might pose to its imperial interests'.⁴⁰¹ For the Spanish government the agreement between Italy and Britain

³⁹⁸ AGA.82/3103/7, Jordana to Alba, 25/4/1938; AGA.82/3104/20, Jordana to Alba, 25/4/1938; Alba's note to Foreign Office in TNA.FO371/22643, W5387/83/41, Alba to Halifax, 28/4/1938. The tone employed here is in some ways similar to that which Mussolini used when talking about Anglo-Italian interests in the Mediterranean and it is possible that Franco was trying to imitate his Italian counterpart. In a November 1936 speech, when Mussolini declared the existence of the Rome-Berlin Axis, for instance, he combined friendly sentiments with warnings about what Italy could tolerate: 'We do not intend ... to threaten that road [Britain's use of the Mediterranean], we do not propose to interrupt it, but, on the other hand, we demand that our rights and vital interests should also be respected', cited in Nir Arieli, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East, 1933-1940* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 78.

³⁹⁹ AGA.82/3653/43/22, Alba to Jordana, 19/5/1938. At the same time, Henry Page Croft was requesting that the British government land troops in Barcelona to police the city as a means of ensuring the Republic's surrender and subsequently handing the city over to Franco's forces as a friendly gesture, see CAC.CRFT1/13, Croft to Halifax, 6/4/1938, Halifax's rejection of the plan 27/4/1938.

⁴⁰⁰ On Britain's strategy to separate Hitler and Mussolini during this period, see McKercher, 'Anschluss: The Chamberlain Government and the First Test of Appeasement', pp. 274-294.

⁴⁰¹ Cited in Jorge, *Inseguridad colectiva*, pp. 518-519.

amounted to the latter's tacit acceptance not only of the presence of Italian troops in Spain but that many would remain and continue fighting with the rebels until Franco had secured victory.⁴⁰² Although Alba warned that criticism from Opposition MPs would for the time being prevent the British government from recognising Franco in any capacity, he was optimistic because he believed attacks on the government for signing the Anglo-Italian Agreement and the implications for Spain were creating more sympathy for the rebel cause.⁴⁰³ Indeed, the fact that the Spanish Civil War was so bound up with the policy of general appeasement generated a willingness to accept a Franco victory if it allowed the British government to avoid a European war.

Bombing British Ships: Avoiding War with Franco, May-August 1938

Despite Chamberlain's desire to curry favour with the Franco regime and no firm idea of what an alternative policy might look like, the summer of 1938 was the closest the British government came to abandoning its policy of non-intervention. However, its attachment to the goal of general appeasement prevented it from doing so. For much of the Civil War it had been a common practice of the rebels to bomb merchant ships trading with the Republic but in the summer of 1938 Franco began deliberately to target British ships as part of his broader diplomatic strategy to force Britain to recognise him as a belligerent. Although the attacks provoked widespread condemnation in London from both politicians and the public, the British government allowed appeasement to guide its approach to the emerging crisis. An opinion poll conducted earlier in the year, for instance, revealed that 54% of Britons were in favour of some form of reprisals against attacks on British merchant ships while only 14% were against such measures.⁴⁰⁴ Nevertheless, when the Cabinet discussed potential solutions on 1 June – such as imposing economic sanctions, stationing British war vessels in Republican ports to fire at rebel aircraft or mounting anti-aircraft guns on merchant ships to fend off attacks – it ruled all of them out because they either increased the risk of war with

⁴⁰² For the views of the Spanish government, see AGA.82/3668/27 & AGA/12/3168/14. The Spanish government was justified in thinking this. The Anglo-Italian Agreement contained assurances from Ciano about Italian intentions in Spain. One of these stated: 'if this evacuation [of Italian troops] has not been completed at the moment of the termination of the Spanish civil war, all remaining Italian volunteers will forthwith leave Spanish territory and all Italian war material will simultaneously be withdrawn', thus implying that the British government was prepared to accept their presence in Spain until Franco had achieved victory, see HC Debate, vol. 335, 2/5/1938, cc533-669.

⁴⁰³ AGA.82/3104/22, Alba to Jordana, 3/5/1938.

⁴⁰⁴ A third of respondents were undecided, but a clear majority was in favour of reprisals, see Jim Fyrth, *The Signal Was Spain: The Spanish Aid Movement in Britain, 1936-1939* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1986), pp. 37-38.

Franco or, at the very least, forced the British government into adopting a policy which benefited the Republic. The Cabinet's sense of its own weakness on this issue was clear in the issue of economic sanctions, which Halifax argued would cause more harm to Britain and to Franco.⁴⁰⁵

Chamberlain's inaction combined with absolute confidence in victory encouraged Franco to maintain an obstinate attitude and try to use the attacks on ships to force the British government into granting him some form of recognition. Franco's argument in favour of continuing the attacks was that ships were carrying war matériel, bolstering the Republic's resistance and thereby delaying his inevitable victory.⁴⁰⁶ This led Franco to believe that he was leading a regime which the British government wrongly denied international legitimacy by not formally recognising it. This helps to explain his proposal in June for a neutral port at Almería through which non-military provisions could pass into the Republican zone for humanitarian purposes as a demonstration of 'the National Government's good disposition'. The only condition for this neutral port was the establishment of an international commission comprised of representatives who would offer the 'absolute guarantee that our enemies will not be able to take advantage of this humanitarian initiative to receive war matériel, without which it will be completely and immediately defeated'.⁴⁰⁷ Franco was attempting to dictate terms in Republican Spain before he even controlled it and embroil the British government in his efforts to prevent supplies reaching the Republic's territory in the north-east. Accordingly, this would have manoeuvred the British government into facilitating Franco's planned assault on Catalonia.⁴⁰⁸

Franco's reasons for wanting the British government to recognise him as a belligerent and bestow on him some form of legitimacy was understandable. From the British perspective, however, the situation was much more complicated and the refusal to grant belligerency was connected to the motivations behind non-intervention which had existed since the summer of 1936. Indeed, denying Franco belligerent rights, although running the risk of souring Anglo-rebel relations, served the aims of currying favour with both sides in the Spanish conflict. The Non-Intervention Agreement enabled the British government to circumvent a declaration of neutrality

⁴⁰⁵ TNA.CAB23/93/4, 1/6/1938.

⁴⁰⁶ On 9 June, the rebels gave the British Agency a list of ships using the British flag which had transported war matériel to the Republican zone, AGA.82/3568/22/1; for Franco's public attitude, see speech in Francisco Franco Bahamonde, *Palabras del Caudillo, 19 abril 1937-31 diciembre 1938*, 2nd edn. pp. 245-249.

⁴⁰⁷ AGA.82/3104/20, Jordana to Alba, 9/6/1938.

⁴⁰⁸ Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, pp. 501-562.

which, under international law, would have allowed private individuals and firms to sell war matériel to both the rebels and the Spanish government and suggested that the British government viewed both sides as equals.⁴⁰⁹ As we noted in chapter two, this was exactly what the British government sought to avoid, not least because it would have opened it up to accusations from the Spanish government that it had stood idly by while the rebels procured arms British sources. According to the British government's thinking on the issue, the overall impact of this would have been to allow more intervention on both sides because there would have been no barriers in the way of the German and Italian governments openly aiding Franco and counteracting any aid which reached the Republic. Moreover, recognising Franco as a belligerent could have actually created more tensions in relations between the British and rebel governments because the latter would have had the right to stop, search and detain British ships carrying war matériel. For its part, the Spanish government was willing to tolerate a situation in which the British government granted belligerency to both sides on the condition that this only came after all foreign intervention in support of the rebels had ceased and all foreign troops in their ranks had left Spain. Overall, with all of these complex issues in mind, the disadvantages outweighed any advantages and enabled the British government to claim it had favoured neither side in the conflict.

Although Chamberlain was not willing to be complicit in efforts to weaken the Republic's resistance, the bombing of British merchant ships highlighted how few options the British government had and forced him to concede more influence in Anglo-rebel relations to Franco. On 14 June, for instance, Chamberlain prepared a speech to deliver in the House of Commons regarding the attacks on merchant ships but provided Alba with a copy in advance so he could 'approve' its content. The speech did not include a reference to the proposed neutral port at Almería, which Alba said was to avoid provoking a reaction in the Labour Party, but he interpreted it as an important move by Chamberlain. As he told Jordana, 'the fact that Mr. Chamberlain told me what he was going to say before making his speech is something which we should appreciate, as it is clear proof of his friendly feelings towards us'.⁴¹⁰

Franco's government understood that the relationship between non-intervention and appeasement prevented Chamberlain from taking a stronger stance and this reinforced the

⁴⁰⁹ For a discussion of international law and belligerent rights, see O'Rourke, 'Recognition of Belligerency and the Spanish War', p. 409.

⁴¹⁰ AGA.82/3104/20, Alba to Jordana, 14/6/1938

perceptions in Burgos of British weakness. On 15 June Alba conveyed to Burgos the predicament the British government faced. As he informed Jordana, the British government had

thought seriously about taking reprisals, driven by the press and, overall, public opinion, and was agitated like it has been on few other occasions. Later ... it began to understand that the problem of bombardments had no solution other than to concede to us belligerent rights or adopting methods that would lead to a European war.⁴¹¹

Chamberlain's own feelings on this issue are clear in a letter he sent to his sister Hilda on 25 June. He told her that he had gone over 'every form of retaliation' but it was clear nothing could work 'unless we are prepared to go to war with Franco which might quite possibly lead to war with Italy and Germany and in any case cut right across my policy of general appeasement'.⁴¹²

While Chamberlain was determined to maintain his policy of appeasement, he faced strong public and political pressure to resolve the issue of attacks on British ships. In fact, this pressure influenced Franco to modify his attitude because it was in his interests that a passive government remained in power in London. The Friends of National Spain, for instance, told Alba that if attacks on British shipping continued, Chamberlain would have two options: to take reprisals against the rebels in order to recover the popularity he had lost, or reshuffle the Cabinet and include members who would inevitably be hostile towards Franco.⁴¹³ In the case of the latter, Alba's friends said it would not be long before divisions within the Cabinet would force the government to call a general election, which could bring into power those who wanted to abandon non-intervention. They therefore asked that Franco modify his attitude to ease the pressure on Chamberlain at least until the end of July, when Parliament was due to adjourn.⁴¹⁴ The extent to which this pressure from British allies influenced Franco is unclear, but the possibility of bringing down the British government must have got through to Franco because he suspended attacks on British ships that

⁴¹¹ AGA.82/3104/20, Alba to Jordana, 15/6/1938.

⁴¹² CRL.NC/18/1/1057, Chamberlain to Hilda, 25/6/1938.

⁴¹³ The 'adverse effects' caused by the bombing of ships even forced Moral to delay an appeal for subscribers to the Friends of National Spain 'until this had somewhat died away', AGA.54/6803, Moral memorandum, 16/7/1938. Since its inception, the Friends had occasionally succeeded in diverting criticism away from the government's policy in the House of Commons. In April 1938, for instance, a Jewish Labour MP, Manny Shinwell, was criticising the government's policy in Spain when Conservative MP Robert Tatton Bower, a member of the Friends of National Spain interrupted and shouted, 'Go back to Poland!'. Interpreting this as an anti-Semitic remark, Shinwell caused a furore when he crossed the House and punched Bower in the face, see HC Deb, vol. 334, 4/4/1938, cc3-16; AGA.54/6701, Alba to Jordana, 6/4/1938

⁴¹⁴ AGA.82/3104/20, Alba to Jordana, 28/6/1938.

were not in Spanish ports, although those in ports were still legitimate military targets as far as Franco was concerned.⁴¹⁵

Not only did the attacks on ships push Britain further in the direction of appeasing Franco, it also highlighted the changing power dynamics in Anglo-rebel relations. With the hope that it would make Franco realise the risks he was running, the Foreign Office recalled Hodgson to London for an indefinite period to cause ‘the impression that he may be withdrawn’ and to put a ‘brake upon the more irresponsible cases of bombing ships’.⁴¹⁶ However, rather than make Franco concerned about his relations with the British government, he used it as an opportunity to give Hodgson a note to take to London which reiterated his argument that any captain who chose to travel to Republican ports rendered his vessel a legitimate military target, that a neutral port at Almería was the only solution, and which sought to extract some form of diplomatic recognition from the British government. For instance, Franco wanted the British government to give Hodgson the title of Chargé d’Affaires and provide Alba with all the diplomatic privileges of this title in London.⁴¹⁷ Moreover, Franco demanded belligerent rights and promised that British recognition of a rebel blockade of Spain’s Mediterranean coast, combined with support for the neutral port at Almería to allow humanitarian provisions into the Republican zone, would force the Spanish government to surrender almost immediately and finally put an end to the conflict.⁴¹⁸

The British government’s failure to influence Franco by recalling Hodgson highlighted British weakness in Anglo-rebel relations, but the acknowledgement of this failure was also

⁴¹⁵ The ‘Friends of National Spain’ became very vocal on the issue of belligerent rights in the House of Commons and in their letters to newspaper editors. For an example, see Henry Page Croft to Editor, *The Sunday Times*, 25/6/1938. However, as Vice Admiral E.A. Taylor pointed out, granting belligerent rights would not solve the issue because, according to the Territorial Waters Jurisdiction Act of 1878, the ‘territorial waters of one side are enemy territory to the other, and therefore either side can take what military action they please’, see letter to Editor in *The Times*, 26/6/1938. Jill Edwards has rightly pointed out that belligerent rights became an obsession of the rebels, not because it had any meaning but because it would be a symbol of some form of international legitimacy, see *British Government*, p. 203.

⁴¹⁶ TNA.FO371/22689, W8649/7512/41, Butler minute, 24/6/1938.

⁴¹⁷ TNA.Metropolitan Police (MEPO): Office of the Commissioner: 3/730 contains correspondence with the Home Office regarding the diplomatic status of Franco’s agents in Britain. The Police Commissioner told the Home Office on 18 March 1938 that while these agents would have some official protection and could communicate with their government confidentially like a consular official, they would not have diplomatic status or have any formal recognition as ‘this would involve the de jure recognition of General Franco’s administration’.

⁴¹⁸ The Foreign Office informed Azcárate of what Hodgson’s note said which suggests the British government still engaged the Spanish Republic in his foreign policy relating to Spain, see AGA.12/3199/11/20, Azcárate to del Vayo, 2/7/1938. In fact, when the British agency at Burgos formally rejected the proposal for a neutral port at Almería, it mentioned the Spanish government’s attitude specifically as a reason not to support the idea, see AGA.82.3568/21, British Agency to Jordana, 14/7/1938.

because Hodgson's absence diluted Britain's attempts to separate Franco from the Axis Powers. Indeed, by mid-July, Foreign Office opinion was unanimous in the view that Hodgson should return to Burgos as soon as possible because recalling him had deprived the British government of its principal channel through which it could counter German and Italian influence. As George Mounsey noted on 20 July, for instance, only by returning could the British government 'hope to exercise some restraining influence on General Franco ... and in his absence, there is no possible way of countering German and Italian influence or of receiving reports on the developments taking place in this connection'.⁴¹⁹ This diplomatic failure led the British government to believe that it ought to search for a solution to the Spanish problem that did not involve Franco. The possibility of excluding Franco from great power discussions was one advantage the British government had in its relations with the rebel government. However, the attempt to do so was also a clear sign that Chamberlain had reached an impasse with an obstinate Franco.

From Munich to Rome: Searching for an International Solution to the Spanish Problem

The difficulties which the British government encountered in its relations with Franco led it to search for a peaceful solution to the Civil War that it, along with the other principal European powers, could impose on the two sides in Spain. The type of solution that the British government had long favoured was mediation between the two sides and an armistice to bring the fighting to an end.⁴²⁰ As Chamberlain told his sister Ida on 18 June, at the height of the crisis provoked by the attacks on merchant ships, 'if only we could get an armistice all this bombing of civilians and ships would cease and what suffering and misery would be saved'.⁴²¹ However, this was not acceptable to either of the warring sides. For the Spanish government, international mediation would bestow

⁴¹⁹ TNA.FO371/22690, W9550/7512/41, Mounsey minute, 20/7/1938.

⁴²⁰ Earlier in the year Chamberlain had established a prisoner exchange commission led by Field Marshal Philip Chetwode, to whom the rebels initially were much more receptive. Negrín's government, to the dismay of the British, continued to execute prisoners in the hope of forcing Britain to join in an international, rather than singly British, exchange commission, and force Franco to adopt a more humanitarian approach to the conflict. On the Chetwode Commission, see Peter Anderson, 'The Chetwode Commission and British Diplomatic Responses to Violence behind the Lines in the Spanish Civil War', *European History Quarterly*, 42.2 (2012), 235-260. For broader coverage of prisoner exchanges during the Civil War, see Javier Rubio, *Asilos y canjes durante la guerra civil española. Aspectos humanitarios de una contienda fratricida* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1979) & Antonio Manuel Moral Roncal, *Diplomacia humanitarismo y espionaje en la Guerra Civil española* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2008), pp. 374-386.

⁴²¹ CRL.NC/18/1/1056, Chamberlain to Ida, 18/6/1938. We ought not to underestimate the emotional impact this crisis had on Chamberlain. On 26 June, for instance, First Lord Duff Cooper noted in his diary that Chamberlain seemed depressed because he could find no solution to the problem, see CAC.DUFC/15/1/23, diary entry, 26/6/1938.

upon Franco some degree of legitimacy. For the rebels, meanwhile, their military successes ensured Franco could reject British proposals for mediation, particularly as the German and Italian governments were committed to ensuring his total victory over the Republic and Franco himself was unwilling to settle for anything less. Accordingly, while Chamberlain favoured mediation, he did not publicise this attitude because it was unlikely to succeed. The Duke of Alba interpreted this silence to mean that Chamberlain feared Franco's hostility. As he told Burgos in June, for example,

Having managed, for the moment, to ensure Chamberlain does not express publicly his desire for mediation, there is no doubt that in private he is sympathetic to the idea. This is a disgrace, however, and it can be explained ... by the deep-rooted custom in this country to make concessions to the parties that are not in power and to public opinion. Therefore I completely agree with you that we should strive to publicise our firm intention that in no case will we welcome any other solution than our total and definitive victory.⁴²²

In this sense, Alba helped to reinforce the perception of British weakness.

Military stalemate at the Ebro River in the summer and early autumn presented an opportunity to attach the Spanish problem to the Czechoslovakia crisis that escalated during the summer.⁴²³ By September, Chamberlain judged the situation to be so serious that he travelled to Germany to meet Hitler personally and arranged an international conference to take place at Munich at the end of the month. The infamous Munich Conference was an attempt to impose a solution on the Czech government so it is unsurprising that Chamberlain sought to use the meetings to do the same with Spain. Indeed, in his meetings with Hitler and Mussolini, he tried to get their support for an international effort to bring a peaceful end to the Civil War and received encouraging responses. Hitler, for instance, said he would think about it, while Mussolini expressed special interest in an international solution because he was 'fed up' with Spain where he had lost '50,000 men dead and wounded' as Franco 'continually threw away chances of victory'.⁴²⁴ Chamberlain

⁴²² AGA.82/3104/22, Alba to Jordana, 23/6/1938. Hodgson also told the British government that due to the present attitude in Burgos there was no chance of Franco accepting any proposals for mediation and the British government agreed to shelve the idea for the time being, see TNA.CAB23/94/4, 6/7/1938; CAC.ACAD/1/7, Cadogan diary, 1/7/1938.

⁴²³ Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, pp. 544-553.

⁴²⁴ CRL.NC/18/1/1070, Chamberlain to Hilda, 2/10/1938; CRL.NC/8/26/3, Chamberlain's personal notes from Munich, 29-30/9/1938. The frustration Mussolini expressed at Munich was genuine as Mussolini had become irritated by the military stalemate at the Ebro. A month before the Munich Conference, for instance, he had told Ciano, 'Make a note of it in your book that today, August 29, I predict Franco's defeat. This man does not know how, or does not want, to make war. The Reds are fighters: Franco is not', see Ciano, *Diary*, 29/8/1938, p. 119.

left Munich with such optimism that he expressed in the Cabinet his hope of ‘stopping the [Spanish] war before the winter’.⁴²⁵

Franco tried to fight back against efforts to exclude him but the Czechoslovakia crisis proved a major, if unintended, success for Britain’s non-intervention policy.⁴²⁶ As he was concerned that a war might erupt between the fascist powers and the western democracies in which the latter would militarily support the Spanish Republic, Franco declared his neutrality.⁴²⁷ Leading up to Munich Conference, Franco had attempted to assert his influence in his relations with the British government. When French Foreign Minister Georges Bonnet informed Franco’s agent in Paris, Quiñones de León, for instance, that France would send troops into Catalonia to secure the Pyrenees border if the Czech situation led to a European war, Jordana asked Alba to find out the extent to which Britain would ‘support France in the knowledge of her proposals to attack us in collaboration with the Reds’. According to Jordana, Franco would consider even a passive attitude from the British government as ‘indirect help to France’.⁴²⁸ Alexander Cadogan told Alba that Britain would exercise its influence to ensure the French government did not send troops into Catalonia, which demonstrates a desire to maintain a friendly policy towards Franco. However, on 28 September, as the deadline approached for the Czech government to respond to Hitler’s demand that it cede the Sudetenland or face war, Burgos permitted Alba officially to inform the British government that Francoist Spain would remain neutral in a European conflict.⁴²⁹

Far from conniving at a Francoist victory or even maintaining a consistent preference for it, attitudes in London hardened against the rebels both because of Franco’s attitude and his relations with the Axis Powers. When Alba returned from a holiday in Switzerland on 12 September, for instance, he told Burgos of an evolving hostility towards Franco in London and his

⁴²⁵ TNA.CAB23/95/12, 3/10/1938.

⁴²⁶ Historians tend to view the Munich Conference as the end of the Republic’s hopes of securing British support but seldom acknowledge it as a success of the non-intervention policy. For examples, see Edwards, *British Government*, pp. 177-178, 202-203; Preston, *Last Days*, pp. 15-19; Moradiellos, *El reñidero de Europa*, pp. 236-238.

⁴²⁷ Preston, *Franco*, pp. 312-313.

⁴²⁸ AGA.82/3104/20, Jordana to Alba, 15/9/1938; AGA.82/3104/20, Jordana to Alba, 10/9/1938; unable to meet Halifax, Alba communicated the message through Cadogan, see AGA.82/3104/20, Alba to Jordana, 16/9/1938.

⁴²⁹ On 28 September, Alba met Lord Hailsham and asked him to pass on this message, which the British government said they appreciated. Hailsham also said he was quite sure France would not send troops into Spain, especially if Franco committed himself to neutrality, but would mobilise troops on her southern border as a precaution. Understandably, Alba focused on trying to discover what the conference at Munich sought to achieve but Hailsham could only say that Spain was likely to be a topic of discussion, see AGA.82/3104/20, Alba to Jordana, 29/9/1938. Jordana had unofficially told Hodgson on 23 September that he hoped to maintain Spanish neutrality, see TNA.FO371/22698, W13084/12909/41, Hodgson to Halifax, 23/9/1938.

difficulty in arranging meetings with anyone but observed that there had been ‘many comings and goings between the Red embassy and the Foreign Office which has not happened since the start of the war’.⁴³⁰ This coldness towards the rebels was not limited to London. John Leche, now the British Chargé d’Affaires in Barcelona who earlier in the conflict was openly supportive of the military rebels, advocated an alliance between the British and Spanish governments if the Czech crisis escalated into a European war, although the Foreign Office would not entertain this because, as Pollock noted, ‘Mr Leche cannot seriously think that we desire to drag Spain into a European war. We shall be lucky if we can induce Gen. Franco to remain neutral’.⁴³¹

Such attitudes were particularly concerning to Franco after the Munich talks because Hitler and Mussolini avoided contact with him for some days afterwards. On 3 October, for example, the Marquis de Magaz, Franco’s Ambassador at Berlin, said someone had told him that when Hitler and Mussolini said goodbye to one another ‘many present could hear the word “Spain” in their dialogue’ but he had received no information directly from them.⁴³² It is in this context that Franco quickly made a point of expressing his ‘warmest congratulations’ to Chamberlain for his ‘magnificent efforts for the preservation of peace in Europe, towards which he has been working with such enthusiasm’.⁴³³ This flattery, however, did not make the British government less enthusiastic about finding a solution to Spain without Franco’s involvement. As Alba told Jordana on 5 October, ‘We must be under no illusion: the British government still has not lost hope of being able to present itself to the public as the maker of mediation in Spain, which is what this country has always considered as the solution to our problem’.⁴³⁴ By this point, Alba even claimed that all

⁴³⁰ AGA.82/3104/22, Alba to Jordana, 12/9/1938. It is possible that Alba was referring to the frequent contact between members of the British government and Josep Batista i Roca, a delegate of the Catalan government, who discussed plans for a negotiated settlement between the two sides in Spain. The British government showed significant interest in this and possibility of establishing a federal system in Spain if mediation became possible. See Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Conservative Party Archive, Conservative Research Department [CRD] 1/75/1-1/75/3 for notes on discussions between Roca and British Conservatives in the summer and autumn of 1938. Interestingly, Chamberlain, an undated entry in Chamberlain’s notebook, probably in preparation for the trip he would make to Rome in January 1939, showed that he wanted to ask Mussolini to use his influence with Franco to ‘promise rights’ for the ‘local autonomy claimed by Catalans and Basques’, see CRL. NC 2/25, Chamberlain’s notebook, entitled ‘a few political notes’, no date.

⁴³¹ TNA.FO371/22660, W12756/86/41, Leche to Halifax, 15/9/1938. Spanish Foreign Minister Álvarez del Vayo later recalled that Leche arrived in Spain as a rebel sympathiser but left with the ‘reputation of a rabid Bolshevik’, see *Freedom’s Battle* (London: William Heinemann, 1940), p. 232.

⁴³² AGA.82/3104/10, Magaz to Jordana, 3/10/1938.

⁴³³ AGA.82/3627/1, Alba to Halifax, 3/10/1938.

⁴³⁴ AGA.82/3104/22, Alba to Jordana, 5/10/1938. On 9 October, Ciano relieved concerns in Burgos when he left García Conde a note which said ‘nada de mediación, nada de armisticio’, cited in Tusell, ‘La primera política exterior’, p. 66.

in the Foreign Office – with Mounsey as the only exception – were convinced mediation was the only remedy for the Spanish problem and had even advised the press to support this notion.⁴³⁵

Franco attempted to fight back against this turning tide of opinion by agreeing to the withdrawal of 10,000 Italian troops to fulfil the Non-Intervention Committee's requirement of a 'substantial' withdrawal before it could grant belligerent rights. By doing so, Franco hoped to ensure Mussolini and Chamberlain did not exclude him from their negotiations regarding the Mediterranean and reduce the effectiveness of Negrín's speech in Geneva in which he announced that the Republic would withdraw all foreign volunteers from its ranks.⁴³⁶ Franco instructed García Conde in Rome, for instance, to ensure Mussolini did not present the withdrawal of the 10,000 troops as an exclusively Italian policy.⁴³⁷ Moreover, he deliberately timed the withdrawal to coincide with the visit to Burgos of Francis Hemming, the Secretary of the Non-Intervention Technical Sub-Committee.⁴³⁸ Franco seemed genuinely to believe that the withdrawal of 10,000 Italian troops would be sufficient to convince the British government to recognise him as a belligerent and Jordana clashed with Hemming on this issue. For Chamberlain, however, this number was 'not good enough', although he used it as justification to ratify the Anglo-Italian Agreement signed earlier in the year.⁴³⁹ In this sense, we can see that Franco overestimated Chamberlain's sympathy while underestimating his determination to prevent a Rome-Madrid Axis in the Mediterranean. Of course, it is worth pointing out that Chamberlain deliberately sought to avoid a situation in which Franco believed the British government was his adversary. For example, in late October, Chamberlain's sister-in-law invited both him and Alba to a dinner party to give them the opportunity to discuss the Civil War. According to Alba, Chamberlain demonstrated

⁴³⁵ AGA.82/3627/2, Alba to Jordana, 24/10/1938. Jordana told Alba to reiterate that 'the fact that now military successes are not as categorical as before does not detract from the reality of our victory', see AGA.82/3627/2, Jordana to Alba, 23/10/1938.

⁴³⁶ Even when the Spanish government announced in Geneva in September that it would withdraw all foreign volunteers from its ranks in an attempt to persuade the League to restore its right to purchase arms on the international market, the British government did not seriously consider a change in policy. As David Jorge notes, 'if the Republic believed that the democracies would pressure Hitler and Mussolini [also to withdraw their troops], it could not have been more mistaken', see *Inseguridad colectiva*, pp. 568-569. The Republic's decision to withdraw all foreign combatants, aside from no longer benefiting from their presence militarily, was a deliberate attempt to contrast its attitude towards foreign intervention with that of Franco, who had maintained an obstinate attitude on the issue even after accepting the 'British Plan'. For the Republican delegation in Geneva, see AGA.12/3171.

⁴³⁷ AGA.82/3104/30, Jordana to García Conde, 22/9/1938.

⁴³⁸ AGA.82/3104/30, Jordana to García Conde, 2/10/1938.

⁴³⁹ TNA.CAB24/279/31, 21/10/1938. The British War Office estimated that in September 1938 there were 41,000 Italians in Spain, see Edwards, *British Government*, pp. 177-179; AGA.82/3576/27.

sympathy for Franco and wanted to grant belligerent rights but the potential duration of the war and the public and political criticism he would receive held him back.⁴⁴⁰

The hardening of attitudes against Franco in London are also clear in Britain's relations with the Spanish government during this period. When French Prime Minister Daladier planned to visit London in late November, for instance, Halifax arranged a meeting with Azcárate to ask him what policy he believed Britain should pursue towards Spain. The next day, Halifax invited Azcárate to his house for dinner to discuss the issue further. According to Azcárate, Halifax praised the Spanish government's decision to withdraw all foreign volunteers from its military ranks and contrasted it with Franco's obstinate attitude on the issue. Moreover, Azcárate noted that the *Kristallnacht* pogrom against Jews in Germany was working in the Spanish government's favour because it strengthened the arguments of those within the Conservative Party opposed to Chamberlain's brand of appeasement. Because of Franco's relations with the Axis Powers, Azcárate believed those who were turning against fascism were developing more favourable attitudes towards the Spanish government.⁴⁴¹ This was certainly true for Halifax, who now began to diverge from Chamberlain on the issue of appeasing Germany.⁴⁴²

Despite the changing attitudes in London, Mussolini's commitment to Franco ensured that the British government had to choose between supporting the Spanish government, which it believed would provoke a war with the Axis Powers, and accepting Franco's victory. Chamberlain hoped to discuss further the idea of mediation with Mussolini and arranged to visit Rome in the new year but Franco's military breakthrough on the Ebro in November sapped his optimism. As he told his sister Ida before departing, for instance, 'I will be very glad when this Rome visit is over ... Franco's military successes have created great difficulty for us'.⁴⁴³ There was good reason for his pessimism. Franco's breakthrough dissipated Mussolini's frustrations and revived his

⁴⁴⁰ AGA.82/3104/20, Alba to Jordana, 26/10/1938.

⁴⁴¹ AGA.12/3167/13/4, Azcárate to Vayo, 17/11/1938.

⁴⁴² Halifax was willing to 'shelve' appeasement temporarily but not abandon it, see Kershaw, *Making Friends with Hitler*, pp. 259-266. On Conservative perceptions of brutality against Jews in Germany and the impact this had on attitudes towards Anglo-German relations, see Crowson, *Facing Fascism*, pp. 30-34, 108, 147-148. TNA.CAB27/624 FP (36), 14/11/1938.

⁴⁴³ CRL.NC/18/1/1081, Chamberlain to Ida, 8/1/1939. Chamberlain said in December that he intended to get 'something for something' from Mussolini, but neither Mussolini nor Ciano took the meetings seriously as they had already decided they would support Franco until he obtained complete victory, see CAB23/96/12, 21/12/1938; Ciano, *Diary*, 11/1/1939, p. 176. For a detailed study of the Anglo-Italian discussions, see Paul Stafford, 'The Chamberlain-Halifax Visit to Rome: A Reappraisal', *English Historical Review*, 98 (1983), 61-100.

commitment to a rebel victory. Indeed, in response to rumours that the French government was going to abandon non-intervention, Mussolini warned Chamberlain and Halifax that if France began openly to assist the Republic, he would escalate Italy's intervention even at the risk of provoking a European war.⁴⁴⁴ It is worth noting that the Foreign Office took such threats seriously. For instance, when the Earl of Perth, the British Ambassador at Rome, warned that Mussolini had thirty battalions 'equipped and ready' to go to Spain, Ingram wrote 'When Signor Mussolini makes decisions of the nature indicated in this telegram, experience has shown that he is very unlikely to be induced to recede from them'.⁴⁴⁵ Accordingly, even before the end of January 1939 when Barcelona would finally fall to the rebels, the British government received explicit warnings that anything other than tacit acceptance of Franco's victory would mean war with Italy.

As well as bringing an end to Chamberlain's attempts to bypass both sides in Spain and seek an internationally coordinated effort for mediation, Mussolini's attitude undoubtedly revitalised Franco's confidence in his dealings with the British over the next six weeks leading up to the de jure recognition of his government. In the days before Chamberlain's arrival in Rome, for instance, García Conde expressed the concerns in Burgos that there might be an Anglo-Italian agreement detrimental to Franco's progress in the Civil War. Ciano reassured him that he had 'just signed an authorisation for the urgent despatch of 3,000 men'.⁴⁴⁶ On 8 January, Mussolini reiterated that he would accept nothing less than Franco's total victory and, upon hearing García Conde's concerns regarding rumours of French intervention, said 'At the smallest act of French open hostility in Spain Italy will intervene with all its force'.⁴⁴⁷ With the Republican forces defeated at the Ebro and confidence in Mussolini's continued support, Franco could now turn his attention to Catalonia, deal the Republic its last fatal blow, and strengthen his demands that the British government recognise his regime.

⁴⁴⁴ Mussolini and Ciano were already aware of rumours of French intervention, and on 5 January Ciano wrote in his diary, 'Excellent news in Spain. The only danger is a possible mass intervention by the French, coming through the Pyrenees. There are already rumours on this subject. In order to avert such a threat, I have informed London and Berlin that, if the French move, this will mean the end of the policy of non-intervention. We, too, will send our regular divisions. This means that we shall make war against France on Spanish territory', see *Diary*, p. 173.

⁴⁴⁵ TNA.FO371/24114, W882/5/41, Perth to Halifax, 16/1/1939, Ingram & Sargent minutes 17 January. A day earlier, on another telegram from Perth, Coulson minuted that large-scale intervention would probably force the British government to put some pressure on the French government, see *Ibid*, W737/5/41, Coulson minute, 16/1/1939; Ciano, *Diary*, 16/1/1939, p. 178.

⁴⁴⁶ AGA.82/3104/32, García Conde to Jordana, 4/1/1939.

⁴⁴⁷ AGA.82/4642/1, García Conde to Jordana, 8/1/1939.

Recognising Franco

Alexander Cadogan, who had replaced Vansittart as the Permanent Under-Secretary in January 1938, had often provided a sympathetic ear to Alba during his frequent visits to the Foreign Office and at the start of the Civil War demonstrated clear ideological prejudices against the Spanish government.⁴⁴⁸ Because of this attitude, a memorandum he wrote on 18 January 1939 is worth quoting at length:

If Franco – after a victory – is to be under the domination of Germany or Italy, then his victory would be a “Bad Thing”. If we think it would be so bad that it would really adversely affect the situation in the Mediterranean, then we should welcome any help that should be given to the Barcelona side. But for Heaven’s sake do not let us encourage or assist or even condone a half-and-half assistance. That would be the repeat of the mistake of half-hearted sanctions against Italy, and we should get the worst of both worlds. If we thought it essential that Franco should not win, and that there was any chance that Barcelona could, we ought to favour help to Barcelona, but help on such a scale as to make it really possible for Barcelona to hold their own against – if not take back a bit from – Franco.

Cadogan’s comments are interesting primarily for two reasons. Firstly, they demonstrate Franco was now firmly embedded in Foreign Office conceptions of appeasement. Secondly, they represent a dramatic shift in the thinking of an individual who at the start of the conflict had questioned whether a Spanish government still existed on account of the violence and chaos in the Republican zone. As Cadogan concluded, ‘if anyone could show me how to produce a victory by the Barcelona Government over Franco, I should plump for it. Short of that, half-hearted assistance to Barcelona is going to prolong the slaughter and bring no good to us or to anyone else, and will hasten a European war’.⁴⁴⁹

Others shared Cadogan’s fears. On 20 January Sir John Coulson, chiefly responsible for Spanish affairs in the Western Department, wrote a list of ‘pros and cons’ of maintaining or altering British policy in Spain which received the backing of Orme Sargent and George Mounsey and

⁴⁴⁸ See, for instance, the minute he wrote in August 1936 in which he doubted the Republican government still existed or had had any control over its subjects, TNA.FO371/20572, W9707, Cadogan minute, 20/8/1936. Chamberlain disliked Vansittart because of his anti-German attitude which he saw as an obstacle to reaching an agreement with Hitler. Eden, who, like Chamberlain, also wanted to reach an agreement with Germany, supported this move, see Doerr, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 218-219.

⁴⁴⁹ TNA.FO371/24115, W1464/5/41, Cadogan minute, 18/1/1938.

which Halifax considered ‘very useful’ in preparation for attending a Foreign Policy Committee meeting. While Coulson admitted that maintaining British policy in its current form benefited Franco, he could think of no alternative which did not require the government to give its ‘full support of active intervention by the French and by our own active intervention’. He emphasised, however, that this would provoke full-scale German and Italian intervention and lead to the outbreak of a European conflagration. Coulson concluded that ‘before our present policy is reversed, it must be decided that the victory of the Spanish Government is a vital imperial necessity which warrants the taking of those risks.’⁴⁵⁰ It is significant that in January 1939, when there remained little doubt that Franco would ultimately win, the Foreign Office began at least to entertain the idea of abandoning the Non-Intervention Agreement and actively supporting the Spanish government. Not only does that demonstrate that fears of Spain’s absorption into the Rome-Berlin Axis played a much greater role than any fears of a Republican victory, but it also shows that ideological prejudices were not entrenched in official views of the conflict in Spain or in the policy of non-intervention.

Accordingly, in January 1939 there was still scope for the Spanish government to influence British policy. On 26 January, for instance, Azcárate met Halifax and stressed that despite the fall of Barcelona the Republic still possessed twelve provinces, ten million inhabitants, a considerable army, a fleet with a ‘magnificent naval base’, five large ports and the conviction that the majority of Spaniards supported the Republic. Azcárate claimed that neither Halifax nor anybody else within the British government believed the fall of Barcelona would be the end of the Spanish struggle and was shocked by Halifax’s reaction as he explained to him the Republic’s military position:

[Halifax] showed special interest in what I told him about the immense possibilities the Republic still has, to the point of bringing a map on which we both looked not only at the Catalonia zone, but all the territory in the southern and central zone. I had the impression that it was the first time

⁴⁵⁰ TNA.FO371/24115, W1471/5/41, Coulson memorandum: ‘Pros and Cons of Maintaining or Revising Present Policy in Spain’, 20/1/1939. Even some Conservative MPs became vocal in their criticism of the government’s policy. Vyvyan Adams, MP for Leeds West, for instance, wrote an article for the *Daily Telegraph* in which he criticised non-intervention for having allowed the governments of Germany and Italy to establish themselves in Spain and advocated aiding the Republic to prevent them from doing so any further. Halifax, confused, responded to Adams arguing that abandoning non-intervention now would have exactly the opposite effect, see ‘British Policy Towards Spain’, *Daily Telegraph*, 24/1/1939; British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics, Vyvyan Adams Papers: Ordered Correspondence Files, ‘Spain & Franco, January 1939’, V/1/4/15, Halifax to Adams, 27/1/1939.

he had seen a map with so much detail, and the extension and value of the territory the Republic still possessed in the centre and south of Spain.⁴⁵¹

As we can see, the changing perceptions of the Civil War demonstrated by the words of Cadogan and Coulson were not confined to the Foreign Office but were obvious even to the Spanish government's ambassador. Indeed, Azcárate remained hopeful that 'as soon as our resistance is organised, things can change considerably here' because the British government was finally realising 'what a Spain dominated by Italy and Germany would represent in such a situation'.

The reality, however, was that the Republic was on the verge of defeat and the British government's primary aim was to separate Franco from the Axis Powers. Owen O'Malley, now Chargé d'Affaires, and in the minority of those who at this stage considered a communist regime in Spain in the event of the Republic's victory a possibility, advised the Foreign Office to assess how it would approach the end of the Civil War now that it was in sight. Summarising O'Malley's views, a Foreign Office official wrote

If we waste no time in granting him recognition now and show him a generally friendly attitude ... we stand a handsome chance of obtaining an ally and playing a large part in the reconstruction of Spain. For this reason, Mr. O'Malley hopes that we are carefully considering our attitude in the event of the collapse of the Republican Government, so that we shall not be taken by surprise when the time comes, thus allowing other nations to steal a march on us.⁴⁵²

It is significant that the British were thinking specifically about the collapse of the Spanish government, which at this stage was only a matter of time. Throughout the Civil War, the best diplomatic card in the Republic's hand was that it was a legitimate government fighting against a German-and Italian-backed military rebellion, and this was also the strongest argument in Britain against Chamberlain's policy. In January 1939, for instance, a survey undertaken by the Institute of Public Opinion found the Republic had the support of 71% of the British public while only 10% were in favour of recognising the rebels as the legal government.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵¹ FPI.AJAV/945/15, Azcárate to Vayo, 26/1/1939.

⁴⁵² TNA.FO371/24126, W1081/8/41, Pollock minute, 26/1/1939.

⁴⁵³ Avilés Farré, *Pasión y farsa*, p. 60; Antonio César Moreno Cantano, 'Literatura de propaganda religiosa en España en tiempos de guerra', in Antonio César Moreno Cantano (ed.), *Cruzados de Franco. Propaganda y diplomacia en tiempos de guerra (1936-1945)*, (Gijón: Ediciones Trea, 2013), pp. 50-72 (p. 60). For a succinct overview of British popular support for the Republic, see Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 93-120.

Azcárate made efforts to bolster the image of the legitimacy of the Spanish government and put a brake on Britain's recognition of Franco. In preparation for the return of MPs to Parliament after the Christmas break, for example, Azcárate met several Labour-Party politicians, journalists and Foreign Office officials in the hope of influencing their attitudes towards Spain. After meeting Attlee and the deputy leader of the Labour Party, Arthur Greenwood, Azcárate concluded 'I am sure that after hearing directly the personal attitude of the [Spanish] government it will influence what attitude they adopt in the debate'.⁴⁵⁴ Azcárate was correct, and Attlee opened the debate with a long list of criticisms against the British government's attitude towards Spain, called for the abandonment of the arms embargo and argued that the Republic 'can yet be victorious'.⁴⁵⁵

However, despite broad support for the Republic in Britain, it is worth considering the political developments in rebel and Republican Spain on which the British government would ultimately base its decision to recognise Franco. While Azcárate focused his efforts on maintaining the image of the Republic as a legitimate and organised government, Alba counteracted his efforts by starting a campaign in favour of de jure recognition of Franco and met his 'MP friends' on the morning of the Commons debate to discuss their tactics. Alba also met Mounsey, perhaps the most sympathetic ear in the Western Department at this stage, and hinted that recognition 'would serve to make us forget [Britain's] unfriendly attitude' and supplied him with a 'list of grievances' to serve as a reminder of all the times that the British government had 'jeopardised us or missed the opportunity to do us small favours', which Alba said had a 'profound effect'.⁴⁵⁶ According to Mounsey's record of the conversation, Franco wanted the friendship of Britain 'to be able to take a firmer stand with Italy and Germany' which demonstrates Alba was again playing on British fears of a Rome-Berlin-Madrid Axis and using it to influence attitudes towards Franco's government.⁴⁵⁷

The development of relations between Franco and the Axis Powers at this time added weight to Alba's warnings and played into British thinking on the issue of recognition. Through

⁴⁵⁴ FPI.AJAV/945/15, Azcárate to Vayo, 29-31/1/1939.

⁴⁵⁵ AGA.82/2671/43/3, Alba to Jordana, 27/1/1939. Alba's discussion with Henry Page Croft transpired in the latter's long statements on the situation in Spain with which he aimed to derail the debate, see HC Debate, vol. 343, 31/1/1939, cc63-72.

⁴⁵⁶ AGA.82/3580/1, Alba to Jordana, 31/1/1939. Alba listed the help given to British ships when evacuating civilians from the Basque Country in 1937 despite Franco's blockade, continued humanitarian efforts of a similar nature in southern Spain, and Britain's refusal to grant belligerent rights.

⁴⁵⁷ TNA.FO371/24152, W1800/1443/41, Mounsey minute, 31/1/1939.

intercepted communications of German, Italian and Japanese diplomats, the British government knew by early February that all three states were applying pressure on Franco to join the Anti-Comintern Pact.⁴⁵⁸ Franco was hesitant about joining before the end of the Civil War lest it provoke the British and French governments to intervene in support of the Republic but said rebel Spain was already a part of the Anti-Comintern Pact 'at heart'.⁴⁵⁹ It was exactly this type of alliance which British policymakers and advisors had anticipated and feared since the start of the conflict in 1936.

The Republic's legal standing, its potential to continue its resistance for the foreseeable future and the level of support among British public and political opinion remained the only obstacles in the way of Britain's recognition of Franco. However, almost simultaneously with the fall of Barcelona, the Republic's political disintegration destroyed its image as a legitimate government. Between 31 January and 6 February, for instance, Ralph Stevenson held a series of meetings with Spanish ministers which confirmed this. Negrín and Álvarez del Vayo claimed the entire Spanish government was unanimous in its intention to continue its resistance from the centre and south of Spain at all costs but thirty minutes before the meeting Stevenson received an assurance from a 'junior minister' that there existed 'violent differences of opinion in the Cabinet on the question of further resistance'. Perhaps more crucially, President Manuel Azaña, who distanced himself physically from his government by taking up residence in France, undermined Negrín and del Vayo by reaching out to the British. On 4 February, an Under-Secretary in the Spanish Foreign Ministry brought Stevenson 'a secret and personal message' from Azaña which

⁴⁵⁸ TNA.HW12/236, 073677, 6/2/1939.

⁴⁵⁹ AGA.82/3105/28, Jordana to Magaz, 28/1/1939. The German government first asked Franco to join the Anti-Comintern Pact earlier in the war but began to press the issue again in January 1939. Magaz, Franco's ambassador at Berlin, told Ribbentrop he could see no reason why Spain should not join, but he would first have to consult his government, see AGA.82/3102/1, Magaz to Jordana, 23/1/1939. The rebel government eventually decided to join on 21 February 'on the condition that it is not made public until the war is over so we can normalise our diplomatic relations with principal countries', see AGA.82/3104/28, Jordana to Berlin and Rome Embassies, 21 February 1939. It was for this reason that the Italians continued to apply pressure on Franco to join. Ciano had said on 8 January that among Mussolini's foreign policy objectives was an 'alliance with Spain as soon as the war is won', *Diary*, 8/1/1939, p. 175. On 14 February Ciano told García Conde that Mussolini wanted Spain to join the Anti-Comintern Pact and gave the vague warning that 'an attack against Spain now would affect only Spain, whereas signing the pact would mean [such an attack] would be against all signatories', see AGA.82/4643/3, García Conde to Jordana, 14/2/1939. On 20 February, Ciano wrote in his diary 'If Franco joins, we shall put an end to the rumours which are spreading, even in Italy, about his too many intimate contacts with the Western Democracies', see Ciano, *Diary*, 20/2/1939, p. 192. This was the not first instance of Italian concerns regarding Franco's relations with Britain. Much earlier in the war, Mussolini had expressed to Franco his concern that Alba was too much of an 'Anglophile', see AGA.12/3120/52(II), MAE minute, 22/8/1938.

said the President was ‘at complete variance with Doctor Negrín’s policy of continued resistance’.⁴⁶⁰

The political situation in the Republican zone raised the genuine question of whether Negrín was still leading a legitimate government. Whether this changed the British determination to recognise Franco in any significant way is doubtful, but it helped it to happen much sooner and the Spanish government was aware of this. Before Azaña isolated himself in France, for instance, Azcárate had warned that the fall of Barcelona would not radically alter British policy towards Spain ‘on the condition that the President and the government transfer to the centre zone’.⁴⁶¹ We can see the impact Azaña’s isolation had on British thinking in a Cabinet meeting on 8 February, when Halifax told his colleagues that the recognition of Franco depended on three considerations.⁴⁶² Firstly, whether the fighting would or could continue. Secondly, he urged his colleagues to consider the ‘constitutional position’ and questioned whether without Azaña a Spanish government still existed. Lastly, he said the Cabinet must bear in mind political reactions to any decisions the government in relation to recognition. By the time of this meeting, Halifax felt certain Franco would eventually win and argued ‘the sooner this country got on terms with General Franco and made up lost ground the better’.⁴⁶³

With this in mind, the diplomatic tactics of Burgos and the Spanish government were, respectively, to accelerate and delay Britain’s recognition of Franco. Azcárate recognised the importance that the British government placed on a peaceful end to the conflict and recommended to Negrín and Álvarez del Vayo that cooperation with Britain for a negotiated surrender would find support in the Chamberlain Cabinet because it would allow it to improve Britain’s diplomatic relations with Hitler, Mussolini and Franco while depriving political opponents the opportunity to criticise the government on account of its lack of humanitarian concern. As Azcárate noted on 11 February, the British government ‘does not need us’ to establish relations with Franco but ‘we are indispensable to putting an immediate end to the conflict’.⁴⁶⁴ Accordingly, the Spanish government

⁴⁶⁰ TNA.FO371/24127, W2559/8/41, Stevenson to Halifax, 8/2/1939

⁴⁶¹ AGA.12/3214/3, Azcárate to Vayo, 31/1/1939.

⁴⁶² Azaña denied that his abandonment of Spanish territory weakened the government’s legal standing and Republican leaders urged him to resign, see Diego Martínez Barrio, *Memorias* (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1983), pp. 405-406. Some ministers went as far as considering the President’s actions treasonous and worthy of prosecution, see Ángel Viñas and Fernando Hernández Sánchez, *El desplome de la República* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2010), p. 133.

⁴⁶³ TNA.CAB23/97/6, 8/2/1939

⁴⁶⁴ Azcárate, *Mi embajada en Londres*, p. 128.

proposed three conditions under which it would surrender immediately if Franco agreed: no political reprisals taken against those who supported or fought for the Republic; a free, independent Spain; and the freedom for Spaniards to choose their form of government.

Before considering Britain's response to these proposals, it is worth highlighting the Cabinet's attitude towards recognition at this stage. On 13 February, Halifax discussed recognition of Franco and again showed himself to be firmly in favour of granting recognition sooner rather than later:

We have much headway to make up if we are to establish friendly relations with, and secure fair treatment for British interests in, the New Spain, and it is therefore of primary importance to efface as soon as possible the bitterness at present prevailing against his Majesty's Government among General Franco's adherents The full advantages to be derived from recognition of General Franco ... can only be obtained if His Majesty's Government can take the initiative, and at the earliest date, in granting this recognition. The Duke of Alba has repeatedly assured us, as we believe on instructions from Burgos, not only that this is General Franco's own wish, but that he is anxious to be recognised by His Majesty's Government before the French or any other government takes this step. It is only by taking this initiative ... that we can to some extent wipe out the past from General Franco's mind, and embark on our new relations with him on an equal footing with others, and perhaps even with an advantage over some.⁴⁶⁵

As we can see, Alba clearly had an effect when communicating Franco's attitude to the British government. Moreover, time was against the Spanish government's efforts to ensure British collaboration in a negotiated peace because, although mediation was the British government's preferred option, it was less important to Chamberlain than his policy of general appeasement. Accordingly, Chamberlain did little when Franco simply rejected Negrín's proposal except offer to communicate Azcárate's suggestion of negotiated solely on the point of no political reprisals.⁴⁶⁶

While historians have doubted the sincerity of Britain's support for surrender proposals, we ought to bear in mind that even Chamberlain genuinely wanted Franco to accept the proposal for no political reprisals.⁴⁶⁷ On 19 February, for instance, he wrote to his sister that he was 'very

⁴⁶⁵ TNA.CAB23/97/7, Halifax Memorandum, 13/2/1939.

⁴⁶⁶ Azcárate acknowledged in his memoirs three decades later that 'despite all our efforts to maintain a kind of façade of confidence in the resources at the Republic's disposal, the rapid and continuous political and military deterioration in Spain obliged us ... to retract and concentrate our action around the point relating to reprisals', see *Mi embajada en Londres*, p. 130.

⁴⁶⁷ Moradiellos, *La perfidia*, pp. 348-352; Preston, *Last Days*, pp. 105-108.

hopeful about Spain' after hearing the Spanish government would surrender if Franco gave 'reasonable assurances about reprisals' and that he had 'kept back recognition to see if we can get this surrender arranged as clearly that is the best order'.⁴⁶⁸ This helps to explain why the British government allowed a series of delays before eventually discarding the idea when Azcárate failed to get Negrín's approval.⁴⁶⁹ Indeed, for this reason Alba avoided contact with the British government during these days even though it would have been 'easy to do so' because he feared Chamberlain or Halifax 'would try to insert some condition or obtain something in exchange for recognition, which is of course unacceptable on our part'.⁴⁷⁰ When Franco rejected proposals for any form of mediation, even those relating only to political reprisals, the British, in fact, accepted a mere statement from him that only those guilty of a crime would receive retribution.⁴⁷¹

The available evidence suggests the British government genuinely wanted to facilitate a non-violent end to the Civil War and feared what would result from a Francoist victory achieved with German and Italian assistance. Accordingly, the seemingly perfunctory British attitude towards the proposals was not representative of a desire to see an end to the communist threat in Spain but of concerns surrounding Franco achieving victory before giving him reason to adopt a friendly British policy in the future. As Chamberlain had said regarding the proposal to surrender if Franco promised no political reprisals, for instance, he was unwilling to allow delays that would prevent the British government from 'establishing excellent relations with Franco who at present seems well disposed to us'. Moreover, Chamberlain hoped that 'if the Italians are not in too bad a temper, we might get Franco'.⁴⁷² When the British government decided it would recognise Franco

⁴⁶⁸ CRL.NC/18/1/1086, Chamberlain to Hilda, 19/2/1939. Cadogan was in full agreement with putting the conditions to Franco. As he noted in his diary, 'Pray Heaven, with any luck, "Spain" will be over soon', CAC.ACAD/1/7, 16/2/1939.

⁴⁶⁹ Bahamonde Magro and Cervera Gil have suggested that Negrín probably did not authorise this proposal because he disagreed with it, although they claimed there was no conclusive documentary evidence to prove this, see *Así terminó la guerra*, p. 441. However, at 12:30am on 25 February Pascua, the Spanish Ambassador at Paris, did receive Negrín's approval, in which the latter said he 'reiterates acceptance of the Foreign Office proposal' and was 'surprised' they continued asking for confirmation when he had already promised the loyal conduct of the Spanish government, see AHN.Pascua/5/1, Pascua to Negrín, 24/2/1939, and Negrín to Pascua, 25/2/1939.

⁴⁷⁰ AGA.82/3104/21, Alba to Jordana, 13/2/1939.

⁴⁷¹ TNA.CAB23/97, 22/2/1939. Peter Anderson has written on British attitudes towards the Francoist repression and argued that Chamberlain sacrificed the opportunity to obtain from Franco better guarantees for political prisoners and those likely to be targeted by the Francoist repression, see 'Scandal and Diplomacy: The Use of Military Tribunals to Keep the Francoist Repression Afloat during the Civil War', in Peter Anderson and Miguel Ángel del Arco Blanco (eds.), *Mass Killings and Violence in Spain, 1936-1952: Grappling with the Past* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 72-88 (pp. 84-86).

⁴⁷² CRL.NC/18/1/1086, Chamberlain to Hilda, 19/2/1939.

with no conditions attached, the Republic's victory was impossible without foreign support and it was in the process of internal political disintegration with an estranged president. The Foreign Office had said as early as 15 February that perhaps Azaña's absence removed 'the cloak of the Republican constitution and their claim to be a de jure government'.⁴⁷³ By 22 February, the British government did not believe that delaying its recognition further for the sake of such a government was worth the risk of nudging Franco into the arms of Hitler and Mussolini.

So strong was the determination to divide Franco from the Axis Powers that the British government even allowed Franco to dictate the terms of its recognition of his government. Indeed, while the British government had decided to recognise Franco, it had yet to decide what would happen to its diplomatic relations with the Republic. On 15 February, the Foreign Office still assumed the Republic would remain a de facto government in territory still under its control although acknowledged this would arouse 'General Franco's displeasure'.⁴⁷⁴ This assumption remained in place even after Azcárate failed to get Negrín's approval for a negotiated surrender. When Hodgson informed Burgos of this, however, Jordana told him directly, and asked Alba to reiterate it to the British government, that Franco would not tolerate this:

Please communicate to that government that we would feel ourselves obliged to reject de jure recognition and, of course, we could not permit the reestablishment of our relations without the total and absolute rupture with the Reds with whom ... we cannot understand how any government could continue to deal. I have spoken about this with the British Agent Mr Hodgson to express myself in this way and to communicate our attitude.⁴⁷⁵

Hodgson passed on this message to the Foreign Office and urged that de facto recognition of the Republic would only allow the German and Italian governments to strengthen their position in Spain. On 27 February, just hours before Chamberlain announced the British government's

⁴⁷³ The definition of statehood in international law is a slippery concept. According to the 1933 Montevideo Convention, a 'state' must possess '(a) a permanent population; (b) a defined territory; (c) government; and (d) capacity to enter into relations with the other states'. If we accept that the Republic fulfilled (a), (b) and (c), it is questionable whether it did for point (d), firstly because Azaña was at odds with his ministers and secondly because the chaos in central Spain and the Casado *coup* prevented Negrín from communicating effectively with his representatives abroad. At any rate, the military and political disintegration of the Republic made it possible for the British government to *justify* its recognition of Franco. Mariano Aznar-Gómez has put it nicely: international recognition of a state 'is no more than a subjective assessment of an empirical reality', see 'The Extinction of States', in *Evolving Principles of International Law: Studies in Honour of Karel C. Wellens*, ed. by Eva Rieter and Henri de Waele (Leiden: Brill | Nijhoff, 2012), pp. 27-51 (p. 50).

⁴⁷⁴ TNA.FO371/24152, W3359/1443/41, Becket and Mounsey minutes, 15/2/1939.

⁴⁷⁵ AGA.82/3104/21, Jordana to Alba, 25/2/1939.

recognition of Franco in the House of Commons, Mounsey said Alba had just asked to see him urgently:

[He] read me a vehement telegram from Burgos, protesting that General Franco would not accept de jure recognition and the establishment of diplomatic relations with H.M.G. if the latter did not completely break ties with the “Reds” It seems to me that, in view of the action taken by other governments, any advantage we may still derive from our de jure recognition will be completely lost if it is coupled with continued de facto recognition of the Republicans.⁴⁷⁶

Franco seems to have possessed a genuine disbelief in Britain’s intention to continue to recognise a government it considered beyond the pale of humanity. Franco’s unwillingness to accept British recognition until there no longer existed any relations with the Spanish government, however, determined the British course finally to recognise ‘National Spain’ as the only Spain.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that British fears of a Rome-Berlin-Madrid Axis, which had existed since the start of the Civil War, were the primary driving force behind the decision to recognise Franco. Throughout 1938, in its attempts to drive a wedge between Franco and his German and Italian allies, the British government gradually conceded more influence in its relations with the rebels and tipped the power dynamic in Franco’s favour. Indeed, by February 1939, despite the British government favouring mediation and acknowledging that a rebel victory presented the greatest danger to British interests, and despite the fact that the rebels had deliberately attacked British merchant ships, Franco was even able to dictate the terms of British recognition. This attitude, and Britain’s incorporation of Franco into its policy of general appeasement, explain the abandonment of the Republic more than any fears of communism or ideological prejudices against it. Indeed, as we have seen, such views of the Spanish government hardly existed by 1939, and even those who had previously possessed such feelings, such as Cadogan, had expressed unequivocally their preference for a Republican victory – *if it did not risk war with the states Britain was appeasing*.

Regardless of whether we present British appeasement in a positive or negative light, it was a symptom of the British government’s weakness when confronting dictators who challenged the

⁴⁷⁶ TNA.FO371/24152, W3451/1443/41, Hodgson to Halifax, 26/2/1939; Mounsey minute 27/2/1939.

status quo in the 1930s. In this sense, appeasement was a realist approach to foreign policy for a state that sought to avoid war against enemies it perceived to be more aggressive, ambitious and, at least collectively, militarily stronger. Of course, until February 1938, Eden's determination to take a firmer stand against the Mediterranean dictators put a brake on the drift towards institutionalising Chamberlain's brand of appeasement in British foreign policy, but in the case of diplomatic relations with Franco's government even Eden acted under the constraints of the geostrategic importance of the Iberian Peninsula and the possibility of a fascist or authoritarian Spain joining the Rome-Berlin Axis.

Once Eden resigned and allowed Chamberlain to consolidate his control of British foreign policy, this brand of appeasement became institutionalised and altered the nature of Anglo-rebel relations. Not only did the British government appear more passive in response to the demands of dictators, but this evolution took place simultaneously alongside Franco's military successes and the increasing likelihood of his absolute victory over the Republic. Accordingly, this marked a significant but gradual shift in British government's policy towards Spain, but it did not discard its aim of currying favour with both sides until the Republic's defeat was beyond any reasonable doubt. By early 1939, both the British government and the Foreign Office were confident this was the case, even if they acknowledged the dangers a Francoist victory would post to British strategic interests. Nevertheless, without a complete reversal of its policy and a move militarily to support the Republic when Mussolini had shown his willingness to go to war over the Spanish issue, the recognition of Franco offered the best chances of achieving some success with non-intervention. Accordingly, much like Abyssinia, Austria and Czechoslovakia, the abandonment of the Spanish Republic became a tool which the British used to appease Franco. However, because appeasement policies by default concede influence within a diplomatic relationship to the target state, the Spanish problem was far from over for the British government.

PART THREE
FROM CIVIL WAR TO WORLD WAR

V

HOPING FOR BENEVOLENT NEUTRALITY

Making Amends for Non-Intervention, March-August 1939

Introduction

In the days following the British government's recognition of Franco, several British newspapers contacted the Duke of Alba for comment. Rather than take the opportunity to communicate some message of optimism as to the future of Anglo-Spanish relations or even rejoice in Franco's victory against the Republic, Alba refused to give journalists his time. Only a selection of Catholic newspapers, which Alba said had helped to maintain support for Franco among British Catholics during the Civil War, received a response from the new Spanish ambassador.⁴⁷⁷ To have given them his time, Alba argued, would have suggested Franco's government attached importance to British recognition which, according to the Francoist line, was long-overdue anyway.⁴⁷⁸ Now that Franco was officially Spain's head of state and was about to embark upon the process of constructing his regime, the British government faced the task of making amends for the offence it

⁴⁷⁷ Arthur Hinsley, the Archbishop of Westminster, had been a firm supporter of the rebels throughout the Civil War and even had a signed photograph of Franco, see WDA.Hi.2/217, Hinsley to Franco, 28/3/1939. On the support of British Catholics for Franco, see Ben Edwards, *With God on Our Side: British Christian Responses to the Spanish Civil War* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. 31-44; Frederick Hale, 'Fighting over the Fight in Spain: The Pro-Franco Campaign of Bishop Peter Amigo of Southwark', *Catholic Historical Review*, 91.3 (2005), 462-483.

⁴⁷⁸ AGA.82/3628/7, Alba to Jordana, 4/3/1939. Alba's reluctance to speak to newspapers might also have been a result of his own insecurities regarding whether Franco would now appoint him as ambassador. Mussolini and Hitler both opposed Alba's appointment as they considered him too anglophile, which fuelled speculation in the press, for example see 'Britain Counts a Victory over Franco's Allies', *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8/3/1939.

had caused Franco during the previous three years to ensure he did not define Britain as Spain's enemy.⁴⁷⁹

Few historians have focused on Anglo-Spanish relations between the end of the Civil War and the outbreak of the Second World War.⁴⁸⁰ One reason for this is that historians usually consider Anglo-Spanish relations during the Civil War and Second World War as isolated periods, rather than a sustained strategic programme on the part of the British government. Moradiellos, for instance, argues that revolutionary preoccupations guided British policy towards Civil War until the 'Spanish problem disappeared'.⁴⁸¹ Although Spain was no longer a problem in the sense that its Civil War could not escalate into a wider European conflict, to consider the end of the Civil War as the end of the 'Spanish problem' is to overlook the extent to which fears of fascism and Franco's potential alliance with the Axis Powers drove British policy between 1936 and 1939. Richard Wigg has written on Anglo-Spanish relations during the Second World War and argued that British policy under Churchill amounted to appeasing Franco to ensure he did not enter the war on the side of the Axis Powers. In this sense, Wigg shows the level of continuity in Britain's approach to Spain between 1936 and 1945 but does not attempt to trace this policy back to the start of the Civil War.⁴⁸²

When historians have focused on Anglo-Spanish relations between the end of the Civil War and the outbreak of the Second World War, they have tended to do so without interrogating exactly how the British government formulated its Spanish policy or the reciprocal influence which Chamberlain's and Franco's foreign policies had on each other. Glyn Stone, for instance, has focused on the Anglo-French relations and the attitudes of both governments towards Spain but he casts only a dim light on Franco's own role and the influence he had on the formulation of British

⁴⁷⁹ The Cold War reinforced Franco's belief that he had genuinely fought a crusade against communism and he maintained his resentment for Britain's attitude for the rest of his life. In 1962, for instance, Franco lamented that 'Without the help that France and especially Russia gave to the Reds, our war would have lasted three months, avoiding the enormous bloodshed of those three years and the subsequent devastation in Spain The United States and England were completely blind and they still have the blindfold over their eyes, despite all the evidence uncovered since', see Francisco Franco Salgado-Araujo, *Mis conversaciones privadas con Franco* (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1976), p. 363.

⁴⁸⁰ For an overview of Franco's Foreign policy in this period, see José Alfonso Durango, 'España y la política internacional del fin de la guerra civil al comienzo de la mundial', *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, 3 (1992), 257-272; Preston, *Franco*, pp. 323-342.

⁴⁸¹ Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albión*, p. 324.

⁴⁸² Wigg only provides some brief context on the Civil War, such as Alba's appointment in 1937, see *Churchill and Spain*, p. 6.

foreign policy during this period.⁴⁸³ Moradiellos has offered the most comprehensive overview of Anglo-Spanish relations during this period but it serves primarily to provide context for Churchill's premiership. Moreover, although he incorporates both Spanish and British archival records, Moradiellos, like Stone, does not consider exactly how the British government formulated its approach to Spain during this period, nor how Franco perceived British policy and used it to inform his own foreign policy.⁴⁸⁴

This chapter argues that the 'Spanish problem' had far from disappeared at the end of the Civil War. In fact, the British government and Foreign Office had identified the issue of Spanish neutrality in a future European war in the event of a rebel victory as early as the summer of 1936 and the situation after Franco's victory was exactly the scenario British policymakers had feared. In March, for instance, Franco joined the Anti-Comintern Pact and signed a Treaty of Friendship with Germany. On 8 May, he followed in the footsteps of his German and Italian counterparts and withdrew Spain from the League of Nations.⁴⁸⁵ Meanwhile, Hitler and Mussolini further consolidated their alliance in the Pact of Steel on 22 May.

The direction in which Franco seemed to be taking Spain in the aftermath of the Civil War was in line with Hitler's Mediterranean strategy in the preceding years. Indeed, before and during the early part of the Second World War, Hitler had respected the Mediterranean as an autonomous sphere of Italian interest but this formed an important part of his planning for a potential conflict with the western democracies in the sense that the possibility of Italian belligerency would create difficulties for them in their own planning for war.⁴⁸⁶ German intervention in the Spanish Civil War complemented this aim by increasing political tensions in the Mediterranean and providing the opportunity to establish closer relations with Italy. As early as 1937, the Third Reich considered

⁴⁸³ Glyn Stone, 'Britain, France and Franco's Spain in the Aftermath of the Spanish Civil War', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 6.2 (1995), 373-407. For a broader study of Anglo-French relations during this period, see John Herman, *The Paris Embassy of Sir Eric Phipps: Anglo-French Relations and the Foreign Office, 1937-1939* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1998), on the period between the Civil War and Second World War, see pp. 156-178.

⁴⁸⁴ Moradiellos, *Franco frente a Churchill*, pp. 39-97

⁴⁸⁵ As we saw in the last chapter, the British government was aware of the pressure on Franco to join the Anti-Comintern Pact even before recognising his government. Even after his victory, however, Franco hoped to delay the announcement of his adherence to the pact which demonstrates his hope of getting the best of both worlds and not fully committing himself to any definite foreign policy for the time being, see *DGFP*, D.III, The Foreign Minister to the German Embassy in Spain, 3/4/1939, pp. 887-888; the ambassador in Spain to the Foreign Ministry, 3/4/1939, pp. 888-889; 'The Anti-Comintern Pact', *The Times*, 8/4/1939.

⁴⁸⁶ Shortly before Ribbentrop and Ciano signed the Pact of Steel, Hitler reassured the latter that Italy would continue to direct Axis policy in the Mediterranean, Salerno, *Vital Crossroads*, p. 126.

for the first time the possibility of a war against Britain in which Italy would be, at the least, benevolently neutral.⁴⁸⁷ By the end of the Civil War, Hitler could have some confidence in Franco adopting a similarly friendly attitude. In this respect, while there was no longer a risk of the Civil War escalating into a wider European conflict, the ‘Spanish problem’ persisted. As we can recall from the introduction where we discussed the four possible successful outcomes of selective accommodation policies identified by Timothy Crawford, the post-Civil War period marked a transition in British policy towards the Franco regime from ‘re-alignment’ to ‘de-alignment’. The British government anticipated a certain degree of commitment to the Axis Powers on Franco’s part, but now hoped to neutralise him before this commitment increased to the point when he would also follow them into a war against Britain.⁴⁸⁸

As well as focusing on how the British government formulated a policy that aimed to drive a wedge between Franco and the Axis Powers, this chapter shows how Franco not only benefited from British concerns but also used this policy of appeasement to ensure he continued to receive these benefits. As historians such as Javier Tusell have pointed out, Franco’s foreign policy during this period depended on the opportunities which circumstances in Europe presented but he also used Spain’s strategic significance to assert himself on the international stage.⁴⁸⁹ This chapter goes further by arguing that Franco also incorporated British concerns about his relations with the Axis Powers into the way he presented himself on the international stage in order to ensure he would continue to extract benefits from his relations with Chamberlain’s government.

The chapter focuses first on Franco’s relations with and attitude towards the Axis Powers and British perceptions of the ideological links between Franco, Hitler and Mussolini. The chapter

⁴⁸⁷ Hitler’s attitude towards the Mediterranean began to shift from the summer of 1940 after victory over France. From this point, due to Britain’s refusal to negotiate a peace settlement with Germany, Hitler sought to bring the region under German influence. For an analysis of German strategy in the Mediterranean during the Second World War, see Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (Research Institute for Military History) (ed.), *Germany and the Second World War. Volume III: The Mediterranean, South-East Europe, and North Africa, 1939-1941: From Italy’s Declaration of Non-Belligerence to the Entry of the United States into the War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 180-197. See also Salerno, *Vital Crossroads*, pp. 16-20. Hitler’s change in attitude towards the Mediterranean was shaped also by the fact that German plans to invade Britain encountered increasing difficulties. Accordingly, Gibraltar emerged as a natural target as it was a key strategic base for Britain, see Norman Goda, ‘The Riddle of the Rock: A Reassessment of German Motives for the Capture of Gibraltar in the Second World War’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 28.2 (1993), 297-314; Norman Goda, ‘Hitler’s Demand for Casablanca in 1940: Incident or Policy?’, *International History Review*, 16.3 (1994), 491-510.

⁴⁸⁸ See Crawford, ‘Preventing Enemy Coalitions’, pp. 156-158.

⁴⁸⁹ Javier Tusell, ‘Los cuatro ministros de asuntos exteriores de Franco durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial’, *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, 7 (1994), 323-348 (p. 323). See also Stanley Payne, *Franco and Hitler: Spain, Germany and World War II* (London: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 44-57; Preston, *Franco*, pp. 323-339.

then moves on to examine how the British government devised a foreign policy that would drive a wedge between Spain and the Axis. The second section shows how the British government attempted to maintain a policy of non-intervention when it came to Spain's internal affairs in order to reassure Franco that British policy was one of friendliness. The clearest manifestation of this came in British attitudes towards the post-war Francoist repression and the abandonment of humanitarianism.⁴⁹⁰ The third section shows how the British government combined this passive policy with an active one that sought to assist Franco in the difficulties he encountered in ensuring the French government fulfilled its obligations under the Berard-Jordana Agreement.⁴⁹¹ According to this agreement, signed on 25 February, Spain and France would maintain friendly relations and Franco would maintain an independent foreign policy if the French government returned Spanish gold reserves, war matériel and other resources which the Republican government had transferred over the French border in the final months of the Civil War

The aim of this strategy was to make amends for the policy which the British government had pursued during the Civil War, particularly because the Franco regime made it clear that it considered non-intervention as a policy which wrongly denied it international legitimacy. The final section examines British attitudes towards economic assistance to the Franco regime. It shows that, initially, the British government hoped to use the potential for economic assistance as a tool to draw Franco away from Hitler and Mussolini. However, Franco's foreign policy ultimately forced the British government to alter its attitude and offer assistance to Franco as it became clear that he did not intend to distance himself from the Axis. Overall, the chapter shows that the British government maintained a policy of appeasing Franco and this perpetuated the power dynamics in his favour. Accordingly, Franco's foreign policy ensured that the British government maintained its policy of appeasement in the hope of ensuring Spain's neutrality.

⁴⁹⁰ As Peter Anderson has argued, shifting our focus on the post-war repression to international observers offers a new perspective. Britain's blind acceptance of Franco's assurances regarding political reprisals in February, for instance, became a 'cornerstone of British diplomacy' and allowed the repression to continue unopposed, see 'Scandal and Diplomacy', p. 73.

⁴⁹¹ See Juan Avilés Farré, 'Lequerica, embajador franquista en París', *Historia 16*, 160 (1989), 12-20.

Franco and the Axis Powers

After recognition, Franco formulated his foreign policy with the knowledge that the British government was still committed to its goal of general appeasement. Indeed, the Franco regime even interpreted the appointment of Maurice Peterson as a sign of British weakness. When Jordana discovered that Peterson would be the new ambassador, for instance, he asked Alba to send to Burgos all the information he could gather on his personality and the ‘significance’ of his appointment.⁴⁹² Alba, in an appraisal that was both inaccurate and unflattering to Peterson, said the new British Ambassador was ‘of weak will and lacking personality’ and that his appointment suggests his role ‘will be strictly to follow orders’.⁴⁹³ Events over the next few weeks served to reassure Franco that British foreign policy was unlikely to change. For example, after the German invasion of Czechoslovakia in March and the Italian invasion of Albania in April, the Marquis de los Arcos, Spanish Chargé d’Affaires while Alba was on holiday, said the British government remained determined to maintain the policy of appeasement. Despite the reaction of public opinion to the invasion of Albania, the Marquis de los Arcos said British policymakers placed higher importance on preventing the deterioration of Anglo-Italian relations.⁴⁹⁴ This suggests that the Franco regime did not see the Anglo-French guarantee to Poland on 31 March or the guarantee to Greece in response to Albania as demonstrations of British strength but instead as a continuation of the policy of general appeasement.⁴⁹⁵

Franco appreciated the benefits that his association with the Axis Powers would get him and he incorporated British fears of his alignment with Hitler and Mussolini into his statesmanship. Indeed, in the aftermath of the Civil War Franco publicly celebrated his relations with the Axis Powers while making clear his indifference or hostility towards the western democracies. When Peterson was due to present his credentials in April, for instance, Franco had agreed in advance to

⁴⁹² AGA.54/6829/A-136, Jordana to Alba, 28/2/1939.

⁴⁹³ AGA.54/6829/A-136, Alba to Jordana, 2/3/1939.

⁴⁹⁴ AGA.54/6706, Marquis de los Arcos to Jordana, 11/4/1939.

⁴⁹⁵ Historians have debated whether the Anglo-French guarantee to Poland was a continuation of the policy of appeasement or a belated attempt to stand up to German aggression. A.J.P. Taylor, for instance, argued the former but said this was justified as the guarantee sought to ensure peace, see *Origins of the Second World War*, pp. 259-261. For a discussion of the historiographical debates on this, see G. Bruce Strang, ‘Once More Unto the Breach: Britain’s Guarantee to Poland, March 1939’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 31.4 (1996), 721-752; Anna Cienciala, ‘Poland in British and French Policy in 1939: Determination to Fight – Or Avoid War?’, *Polish Review*, 34.3 (1989), 199-226. On the Italian invasion of Albania and the guarantee to Greece, see Salerno, *Vital Crossroads*, pp. 114-120. For Salerno, Chamberlain at this stage ‘was still prepared to do almost anything to save the British Empire by averting war in Europe and the Mediterranean’ (p. 120).

converse with him in French, a language for which there was more common ground between the two. On the day, however, not only did Franco refuse to speak with Peterson in private, but he also refused to speak French. Although Peterson could speak Spanish, Franco spoke in a way too difficult for Peterson to follow, forcing him to use Major Mahoney, the British Military Attaché, as a translator.⁴⁹⁶ In this sense, Franco sought to make clear his resentment for Britain's policy of non-intervention and reinforce the idea that he had not forgotten who his allies were in the Civil War.

This attitude was a reflection of the public manifestations of Spain's solidarity with and gratitude to the Axis Powers for their help in the Civil War and Peterson had the difficult task of weakening this links.⁴⁹⁷ When Peterson reflected on this, he told the Foreign Office that

In the realm of foreign affairs a newcomer to Spain, even a month or so ago, might have been excused for thinking that no civil war, but a world war, had just ended. The Axis Powers, Japan, Portugal and Spain had, it seemed, defeated the Soviet Union, France, and, almost, Britain. The flags of the conquerors (not forgetting Manchukuo) hang in the hotels of Burgos and San Sebastian This feeling of solidarity with the Axis Powers was fed, and is still being fed, by a press which had, until perhaps quite recently, passed entirely under the domination of the German and Italian news-agencies.⁴⁹⁸

Despite the low opinion of Peterson in Spain, the Foreign Office selected him because he served the requirements of Britain's policy towards the Franco regime. He was an experienced diplomat and, having worked as Counsellor at the British Embassy in Spain a decade earlier, he spoke Spanish and was knowledgeable on Spanish affairs.⁴⁹⁹ Throughout the spring and summer, the Foreign Office relied on his advice for its attempts to develop a better understanding of Spanish

⁴⁹⁶ Peterson believed he turned this into a small victory, however, as Franco was 'a small man', especially in comparison to Mahoney, who was an 'extremely tall one', see TNA.FO371/24150, W6173/824/41, Peterson to Halifax, 12/4/1939.

⁴⁹⁷ On 29 June, for example, Barcelona hosted Athletic Bilbao in the first football match at *Les Corts* stadium since the Civil War. Where a Catalan flag once flew, the new Spanish national flag was hoisted up alongside those of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, the 'friendly nations', according to press reports, who had fought alongside Spain to 'save civilisation', see Sid Lowe, *Fear and Loathing in La Liga: Barcelona vs. Real Madrid* (London: Yellow Jersey Press, 2013), p. 56.

⁴⁹⁸ TNA.FO371/24130, W7645/8/41, Peterson to Halifax, 9/5/1939.

⁴⁹⁹ On Maurice Peterson's time in Spain before and after the Civil War, see his memoirs, *Both Sides of the Curtain* (London: Constable & Company Ltd, 1950), pp. 153-235.

psychology and how Spaniards might respond to the outbreak of a European war. An early example of this came in April from Walter Roberts, who believed Spain's attitude

would be governed by the strong sense of obligation now felt by Nationalist Spaniards to Germany and Italy for the help which has been given to them. This sensitiveness to what is regarded as a debt of honour is very common among Spaniards and it would prevail over their normal instinct to maintain a neutral attitude, and would lead them to grant without protest all sorts of facilities to the Germans and Italians But as war memories recede, it will fade. The longer, therefore, war can be avoided, the better will be the chance of a 'neutral' Spain.⁵⁰⁰

Accordingly, the British government sought to avoid any action that would push Franco further towards the Axis Powers.

One of the ways the British pursued the goal of general appeasement was by anticipating the reaction which targets of the policy would have to how Britain conducted its relations with other states. This was arguably most important in Anglo-Soviet relations because of the attitudes of Franco and the Axis Powers towards communism.⁵⁰¹ In his initial assessment of the Franco regime, Peterson maintained that its anti-communist rhetoric was genuine and was likely to sit at the forefront of Spanish foreign policy until Franco had decided 'on a more positive platform' on which to build his regime. Accordingly, Peterson warned that Britain's negotiations with the Soviet Union formed a potential obstacle to more amicable relations between Britain and Spain.⁵⁰² However, one of the principal preoccupations of the British government and Chiefs of Staff in the spring and summer of 1939 was whether or not to form an alliance with the Soviet Union. Although anti-communist sentiments were strong among British Conservatives, the primary obstacles to an Anglo-Soviet alliance were the uncertainty surrounding the Soviet Union's military strength and reliability in the event of a conflict with Germany, the impact an alliance would have on smaller European states – particularly the Baltic states, Poland and Romania, who refused to accept a

⁵⁰⁰ TNA.FO371/24129, W6302/8/41, Roberts minute, 24/4/1939.

⁵⁰¹ This tendency in British foreign policy had existed for several years. For instance, in early 1934, when Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss asked the British government to support his appeal to the League regarding German interference in Austria's internal affairs, he was met with little enthusiasm as British policymakers feared support for the appeal would antagonise Hitler, who was by then German Chancellor but not Führer. On British concerns regarding Mussolini's opposition to an alliance with the Soviet Union, see Lamb, *Mussolini and the British*, pp. 255-265.

⁵⁰² TNA.FO371/24129, W6926/8/41, Peterson to Halifax, 27/4/1939. Alba reassured officials in London that the Anti-Comintern Pact was nothing more than an alliance against communism, and Jordana told Peterson the same. However, Ciano had always claimed this was only a theory and the Pact was 'in fact unmistakably anti-British', cited in Lamb, *Mussolini and the British*, pp. 189-190.

guarantee of security from the Soviet Union – and the effect it would have on the signatories of the Anti-Comintern Pact, including Spain, that would see it as a policy of encirclement.⁵⁰³

Spain's attitude towards an Anglo-Soviet alliance was particularly important because it forced the British government to try to find a balance between its strategic planning in both Eastern Europe and the Iberian Peninsula. In May, for instance, the British Chiefs of Staff produced a report entitled 'Balance of Strategical Value in War as between Spain as an Enemy and Russia as an Ally' which concluded that, although Spain was militarily weak and exhausted after the Civil War, its alliance with Germany and Italy could present considerable difficulties for Britain and France in a European war.⁵⁰⁴ The Chiefs of Staff and the Cabinet believed that if the Soviet Union remained neutral in a European conflict, an agreement with the Soviet Union would not offset the disadvantages of Spain's open hostility.⁵⁰⁵ In the worst case scenario, for example, the Chiefs of Staff warned that Spanish hostility could render Gibraltar unusable while German and Italian use of the Canary and Balearic Islands could cause problems for Britain's Atlantic communications and French communications with North African territories. Moreover, regardless of Spain's military strength, Franco's belligerency would at least force the French government to divert some of its troops to defend a third frontier.⁵⁰⁶

British concerns regarding Franco's attitude towards Anglo-Soviet rapprochement demonstrate his incorporation into the policy of general appeasement. When the Cabinet discussed the report from

⁵⁰³ Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, pp. 216-245. On the difficulties of simultaneously satisfying Polish, Romanian and Soviet conditions, see Geoffrey Roberts, 'The Alliance that Failed: Moscow and the Triple Alliance Negotiations, 1939', *European History Quarterly*, 26.3 (1996), 382-414. For a more recent study critical of the Anglo-French role in the failure of an alliance, see Michael Jabara Carley, 'Fiasco: The Anglo-Franco-Soviet Alliance That Never Was and the Unpublished British White Paper, 1939-1940', *International History Review*, 41.4 (2019), 701-728. Historian Daniel Hucker has shown recently that British public opinion was favourable towards an alliance which allowed the Soviet Union to increase its demands, thereby making negotiations more difficult and turning sections public opinion one again against cooperation with Russia, see 'Public Opinion, the Press and the Failed Anglo-Franco-Soviet Negotiations of 1939', *International History Review*, 40.1 (2018), 65-85.

⁵⁰⁴ TNA.CAB24/286/5, CP 108(39), 'Balance of Strategical Value in War as between Spain as an Enemy and Russia as an Ally', Report by Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee, 10/5/1939.

⁵⁰⁵ TNA.CAB23/99/6, CC 27(39), 17/5/1939.

⁵⁰⁶ Major Mahoney told the Foreign Office in April that, according to a 'trustworthy' informant, even if Franco remained neutral, 'the opportunity for causing embarrassment and distress to the French would be much too good to be missed, and, therefore, ostentatious Spanish troop movements towards the Pyrenees and Moroccan frontiers would recurrently take place for the purpose of annoying the French, and forcing them to detach troops from their main theatre', see TNA.FO371/24129, W6724/8/41, Report by Mahoney 19/4/1939. On French strategic preoccupations, see Aviles Farré, 'Francia y la guerra civil española', pp. 165-167; Peter Jackson, 'French Strategy and the Spanish Civil War', in Christian Leitz and David Dunthorn (eds.), *Spain in an International Context, 1936-1959* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999), pp. 55-79; Jaime Martínez Parrilla, *Las fuerzas armadas francesas ante la guerra civil española (1936-1939)* (Madrid: Servicio de Publicaciones del Estado Mayor del Ejército, 1987).

the Chiefs of Staff, it considered 'whether a full-blown undertaking with the Soviet would have a more unfavourable influence on General Franco's attitude than a somewhat similar undertaking in a less definite form'.⁵⁰⁷ Moreover, on 22 May Lord Halifax gave the Cabinet a memorandum he had prepared with the Foreign Office which considered the attitudes of Hitler, Mussolini and Franco in succession and anticipated a similar reaction from each:

In view of the attitude which Herr Hitler has adopted in the past in regard to the Soviet Union, it might be assumed that our association with the Soviet Government would still further infuriate him and impel him to aggressive action.

In the light of many of Signor Mussolini's speeches on the subject of Communism in Spain, it might be expected that Italy would be finally alienated.

Similarly, in Spain, the Government of General Franco, which represents itself as having conducted a successful crusade against Communism, might be driven still further into the anti-Comintern party.⁵⁰⁸

As we can see, Franco had definitively become a part of Britain's appeasement strategy in the Mediterranean alongside Mussolini. Unlike the aim of avoiding Hitler's aggression, however, this branch of appeasement sought to neutralise the Mediterranean in order to create better conditions in which to wage war against Germany.⁵⁰⁹

Although the attitudes of Mussolini and Franco restricted its ability to negotiate with the Soviet Union, the British government could use their anti-communism as a tool to further its aim of dividing them from Hitler. When delays in establishing an alliance led to Germany and the Soviet Union signing the Nazi-Soviet Pact in August, for instance, the British government could retain some optimism because of the negative response this pact received in Spain and Italy.⁵¹⁰ As Chamberlain wrote to his sister Hilda on 27 August, 'thanks to the policy we have pursued [with the Soviet Union] Italy will not come in if Hitler goes to war over Poland' and that 'Spain has had a shock too'.⁵¹¹ Officials in the Foreign Office noted how they were hopeful of the impact it would

⁵⁰⁷ TNA.CAB24/286/13, CP 116(39), 17/5/1939.

⁵⁰⁸ TNA.CAB24/287/7, CP 124(39), 22/5/1939.

⁵⁰⁹ It is worth pointing out, however, that the British government later decided an alliance with the Soviet Union was worth the political risks, see Moradiellos, *Franco frente a Churchill*, p. 81.

⁵¹⁰ Even though Anglo-Soviet negotiations had reached a stalemate by mid-August, British policymakers were surprised by the Nazi-Soviet Pact, as were many of the Soviet government's diplomats abroad, see Maisky, *Diaries*, 22, 23 & 24/8/1939, pp. 217-219.

⁵¹¹ CRL.NC18/1/1115, Chamberlain to Hilda, 27/8/1939.

have on Spaniards and asked Peterson to find out exactly what Franco's government thought of the Nazi-Soviet Pact.⁵¹² Juan Beigbeder, who replaced Jordana as Foreign Minister in August, told Peterson a few days after the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Agreement that the Anti-Comintern Pact no longer existed.⁵¹³ As we will see in the next chapter, the British government would attempt to use this resentment to weaken Franco's relations with the Axis Powers.

Throughout the period between the recognition of Franco in February and the outbreak of the Second World War in September, a complex policy towards Spain accompanied the British government's policy of anticipating Franco's response to Anglo-Soviet rapprochement. The British government stuck to the principle of non-intervention in Spain's internal affairs in order to avoid arousing Franco's resentment. Alongside this, however, the British government interfered in Franco-Spanish relations to ease the resentment Franco felt for the policy of British non-intervention during the Civil War. In this sense, the British government combined passive and active policies which had the same objectives: to demonstrate British friendliness, drive a wedge between Franco and the Axis Powers, and ensure Spain's neutrality in a future European war.

A Passive Policy: Abandoning Humanitarianism to Maintain Non-Intervention

In the last phase of the Civil War, maintaining non-intervention became a way of appeasing Franco because while the British government had come to accept some degree of intimate relations between Spain and the Axis Powers, it hoped at least to weaken his commitment to them by establishing cordial relations with his regime. A manifestation of this was the British government becoming an enabler of the post-Civil War repression. As the Republican war effort began to collapse in early 1939 and Negrín refused to end the resistance, internal political divisions emerged. Colonel Segismundo Casado, Commander of the Republican Army of the Centre, formed a National Defence Council and on 5 March launched a coup to oust Negrín and the Communists before attempting to negotiate a surrender with Franco. While this reduced one problem for the British government – that of the Republic continuing its resistance in the hope it could hold out

⁵¹² TNA.FO371/24132, Peterson to Foreign Office, 23/8/1939.

⁵¹³ TNA.FO371/24160, W12816/5056/41, Peterson to Halifax, 30/8/1939.

until the outbreak of war in Europe – it exacerbated one that was on the horizon. When Franco refused to negotiate a surrender of military forces in central Spain, Casado told tens of thousands to leave Madrid and head for the ports of Alicante and Valencia where he promised ships would be waiting to evacuate them.⁵¹⁴ In fact, although British ships evacuated some 5,000 refugees, including Casado and other leaders of the National Defence Council, thousands more waited in vain when the British government decided to cut its humanitarian assistance at the end of March. Rather than face the Francoist repression, many committed suicide.⁵¹⁵

In the weeks leading up to the recognition, the British government brushed aside humanitarian concerns so as not to delay its attempts to establish friendly relations with the Franco regime. As early as 8 February, the Foreign Office had acknowledged that at least 50,000 Spaniards were in danger of their lives because of their past political or military activities.⁵¹⁶ A day later, Franco issued the Law of Political Responsibilities which classified anyone who had not supported the ‘National Movement’ in the Civil War or who had supported the Republic since October 1934 as a criminal guilty of military rebellion.⁵¹⁷ On 15 February, the Cabinet discussed the potential scale of the repression but acknowledged it was impossible to quantify because ‘Franco himself was to be the arbitrator’.⁵¹⁸ With this in mind, the British government proceeded to recognise Franco’s government and accepted from him a mere statement that his authorities would prosecute Spaniards fairly and according to Spanish law. Franco’s statement, which Chamberlain read in the House of Commons on 28 February, however, contained an important caveat: ‘Spain is not disposed to accept any foreign intervention which may impair her dignity or infringe her

⁵¹⁴ On Casado’s coup, see Magro & Gil, *Así terminó la guerra*, pp. 350-438; Preston, *Last Days of the Spanish Republic*, pp. 211-236. Exiled in Britain, Casado wrote his own account of the final weeks of the Civil War, see *The Last Days of Madrid: The End of the Spanish Second Republic* (London: Peter Davies, 1939).

⁵¹⁵ Eduardo de Guzmán, *La muerte de la esperanza* (Madrid: G. del Toro, 1973). Some 2,638 of these refugees were on the *Stanbrook*, see Juan Martínez Leal, ‘El Stanbrook: un barco mítico en la memoria de los exiliados españoles’, *Pasado y Memoria. Revista de Historia Contemporánea*, 4 (2005), 65-81 (pp.67-71). It is not clear exactly how many refugees went to Britain as the ships took many to other countries. Isabel de Palencia, the Republic’s Ambassador at Sweden during the Civil War, estimated that ‘several hundred’ went to Britain, see *Smouldering Freedom: The Story of the Spanish Republicans in Exile* (London: Victor Gallancz, 1946), pp. 55-56. According to Luis Monferrer Catalán, in May 1939 there were only around 500 Spanish refugees in England, see *Odisea en Albión. Los republicanos españoles en Gran Bretaña (1936-1977)* (Madrid: Ediciones de la Torre, 2007), pp. 60-61.

⁵¹⁶ TNA.CAB23/97, 15/2/1939

⁵¹⁷ For the full text of the law, see ‘Texto íntegro de la ley de responsabilidades políticas’, *ABC Sevilla*, 17/2/1939.

⁵¹⁸ TNA.CAB23/97, 15/2/1939

sovereignty'.⁵¹⁹ By considering Franco's statement as a sufficient assurance, the British government demonstrated it would not be a voice of opposition.

Because of the power dynamic in Anglo-Spanish relations created by Britain's appeasement policy, Franco's attitude towards humanitarian action reinforced this reluctance to become involved. At the end of the Civil War, the official line concerning evacuations was that British ships could evacuate refugees whose lives were in danger as long as there was no arrangement to evacuate them in advance. The reason for this was that 'the expectation of being able to get away on a British warship at the last moment' might encourage some to continue fighting and appear as though the British government was trying deliberately to prolong the war or at least being indifferent as to how Franco might perceive a policy which delayed his victory. This was certainly in line with Chamberlain's view of the issue. When the Republican government requested British assistance in evacuating between 5,000 and 10,000 refugees after the recognition of Franco, for instance, the Foreign Office and the Cabinet thought back to Franco's reaction to naval evacuations from the Basque Country in 1937 and how he had considered it a 'form of intervention'.⁵²⁰ Indeed, on 8 March, Chamberlain told his colleagues in the Cabinet that evacuating such large numbers of refugees 'would amount to intervention'.⁵²¹

These attitudes towards the humanitarian crisis in Spain highlights the sway Franco held over British policy and in the pursuit of appeasement Chamberlain was willing to allow Franco to dictate the terms of any action the British government might take. In the House of Commons on 8 March, for instance, Chamberlain defined Britain's attitude publicly by stating

His Majesty's Government are not prepared to act without the concurrence of the Spanish Government, but in the event of an agreement being reached between the latter and some responsible authority on the Republican side for the safeguarding and the evacuation of refugees, prisoners and others, they would be prepared to consider assisting in the execution of the agreement, if asked to do so, and if satisfied that their assistance was required for humanitarian reasons.⁵²²

⁵¹⁹ HC Debate, 28/2/1939, vol. 344, c1118.

⁵²⁰ TNA.FO371/24153, W3571/2082/41, Goodden to Halifax, 28/2/1939.

⁵²¹ TNA.CAB23/97/10, CC 10(39), 8/3/1939.

⁵²² HC Debate, 8/3/1939, vol. 344, cc2115-2116.

George Mounsey also met Alba to discuss refugees and said that, although the British government ‘did not expect Franco to ask for our assistance in evacuations’, it would ‘be useful for us to know whether general Franco was likely to allow evacuation to take place and if so in what circumstances and to what extent’.⁵²³

The British government’s unwillingness to stand up to Franco on the issue of humanitarian action was a manifestation of appeasement. Although this policy sought to demonstrate friendliness, to the Franco regime it reinforced perceptions of British weakness. On 12 April, for instance, the Marquis de los Arcos, Chargé d’Affaires during Alba’s absence, told Jordana that the British government was taking a cautious approach to its relations with Spain ‘so as not to hurt in the slightest our sensitivities’. The proof of this, he claimed, was ‘the absence of British ships to assist in the evacuation of red refugees in the recently-conquered Levante ports’.⁵²⁴

Appeasement continued to guide British attitudes towards the Francoist repression over the summer.⁵²⁵ In June, for instance, a compilation of local reports from British consular officials in Spain left no doubt about the severity of the repression. In Valencia, a prison said to have 800 cells held more than 8,000 prisoners. In Málaga, 12,000 prisoners were in concentration camps and the authorities had executed at least 150 people, including a civil governor and his secretary.⁵²⁶ The Foreign Office acknowledged that the Franco regime was probably persecuting people not for any criminal offence, as Franco had suggested earlier in the year, but merely for what the regime considered subversive political views.⁵²⁷ However, it feared the consequences of protesting to Franco. Indeed, when a group of Spanish Republicans exiled in London asked the Foreign Office to appeal to Franco to reduce the number of reprisals, their request fell on deaf ears. As one official noted, ‘such an appeal, I am sure, would be badly received. I suggest that no action be taken’.

⁵²³ TNA.FO371/24153, W4400/2082/41, Mounsey minute, 11/3/1939.

⁵²⁴ AGA.54/6706, Marquis de los Arcos to Jordana, 12/4/1939.

⁵²⁵ On the post-war Francoist repression, see Preston, *Spanish Holocaust*, pp. 471-517; Mónica Lanero Táboas, *Una milicia de la justicia. La política judicial del franquismo (1939-1945)* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Constitucionales, 1996); Peter Anderson, *The Francoist Military Trials: Terror and Complicity, 1939-1945* (London: Routledge, 2010).

⁵²⁶ According to Carlos Hernández de Miguel, there were approximately 300 concentration camps in post-civil war Spain, see *Los campos de concentración de Franco. Sometimiento, torturas y muerte tras las alambradas* (Madrid: S.A. Ediciones B, 2019). The camps served as holding facilities until the Francoist authorities could determine whether the prisoners could be of use to the regime, such as by serving in the army or in labour battalions, see Javier Rodrigo, *Cautivos: Campos de concentración en la España franquista, 1936-1947* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2005), pp. 26-30.

⁵²⁷ TNA.FO371/24160, W9033/3921/41, Peterson to Halifax, 10/6/1939.

Another noted that as there were 'indications of an improvement in Anglo-Spanish relations it would be a pity to jeopardise our chances' by appealing to Franco.⁵²⁸

As tensions between Germany and Poland escalated in the late summer and the goal of appeasing Hitler stood on the brink of failure, the British government became more determined to make its appeasement of Franco a success. Arthur Yencken, acting Counsellor at the British Embassy, for instance, warned the Foreign Office that Britain's passive attitude might have been a source of encouragement to Franco to persecute his adversaries and said a stronger stance might help to ease the situation. George Mounsey, however, argued not only that protests would be useless but that they 'would do definite harm if we were in any way to associate ourselves with criticisms of death sentences'.⁵²⁹ Peterson helped to reinforce this attitude after touching on the issue in his interactions with the Franco regime. Indeed, when reports emerged that large numbers of Basques would face the death penalty, Peterson suggested that the time might be approaching for an amnesty but Franco's government gave him an 'unfavourable reception' and led him to conclude that 'more harm than good might be done' if he pursued the issue any further.⁵³⁰ Accordingly, by the end of the summer, the British government and Foreign Office had effectively abandoned any humanitarian efforts in the hope that they could continue their efforts to build an amicable relationship with the Franco regime and ensure its neutrality in the impending war.

An Active Policy: Making Amends for Non-Intervention

Although the Non-Intervention Agreement ultimately benefited Franco, he resented that the British government had denied his regime legitimacy throughout the Civil War and Chamberlain and Halifax spent this period trying to make amends for this policy. On 27 April, for instance, an apologetic Halifax met Alba and informed him that the British government's policy of non-intervention had emerged from the 'circumstances of the time' but that Britain was now ready to make an effort to restore Anglo-Spanish friendship. However, not only did the British government

⁵²⁸ TNA.FO371/24160, W9606/3921/41, 22/6/1939.

⁵²⁹ TNA.FO371/24160, W11381/3921/41, Yencken to Halifax, 1/8/1939; Mounsey minute, 2/8/1939. On Yencken's time at the Embassy in Spain, see Lara Anderson & David Yencken, 'Arthur Ferdinand Yencken: A British Diplomat in Wartime Spain', *International Journal of Iberian Studies*, 30.2 (2017), 129-139.

⁵³⁰ TNA.FO371/24160, W12764/3921/41, Peterson to Foreign Office, 28/8/1939.

seek to demonstrate friendliness towards Franco, it also allowed him to determine how it did so. As Alba reported to Jordana after his conversation with Halifax:

At any rate, as it is the desire of this government to rebuild the level of friendship which existed between our countries before the war, he asked me to specify exactly what could lead my government to forget the bad memory [of British non-intervention], which in his opinion should be through some act that did not hurt our sensitivities nor one which one could interpret as Britain's interference in Spain's affairs, nor of aid, which could offend our pride. Whatever it is, he said, it will have to be an agreement between gentlemen.⁵³¹

The British government therefore used its admission of guilt as a foundation on which to improve Anglo-Spanish relations and, as part of the process of appeasement, conceded more influence to Franco which gave him more agency in diplomacy.

The British government identified the tensions between the French and Spanish governments as providing the best opportunity to improve relations with Franco. Once the French government attached the repatriation of Spanish refugees to the Berard-Jordana Agreement, Chamberlain and Halifax hoped to pressure it into a more compromising attitude in order to appease Franco.⁵³² During their meeting on 27 April, Halifax reassured Alba that he and Chamberlain intended to pressure the French government as a demonstration of Britain's friendly intentions towards the Franco regime. Although this would reduce the possibility of France facing a hostile neighbour to its south, the British government also realised that Franco would apportion some of the blame to it for the French government's attitude as he had on occasions during the Civil War. Indeed, in April Peterson cautioned the Foreign Office that 'We are carrying a heavy burden of unpopularity in this country on account of the French'.⁵³³

Franco understood the benefits which Britain's policy accorded to him and initially remained silent so that Chamberlain had to continue to reach out to him. In early June, for instance, Alba attended a dinner at the Foreign Office held to celebrate George VI's birthday and spoke with both Chamberlain and Halifax. The latter reminded Alba that he still had not advised the British government what it could do to improve relations with Spain and make up for the policy of non-

⁵³¹ AGA.82/3103/17, Alba to Jordana, 27/4/1939.

⁵³² Juan Avilés Farré, 'Un país enemigo: Franco frente a Francia, 1939-1944', *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, V (1994), 109-134 (pp. 110-113).

⁵³³ TNA.FO371/24129, W6926/8/41, Peterson to Halifax, 27/4/1939.

intervention. For his part, Chamberlain involved himself directly in the issue of Franco-Spanish relations and, according to Alba, made an unprofessional yet clear demonstration of his attitude towards the issue. As he was criticising the French government's attitude towards the Berard-Jordana Agreement in his conversation with Alba, Chamberlain deliberately raised his voice so that Charles Corbin, the French Ambassador at London who was standing nearby, could hear.⁵³⁴ The following week Chamberlain told both his sisters that the French government 'continue to keep up a quarrel with everyone whom they should be making friends ... and inevitably we get tarred with their brush' and that he was going to exert 'strong personal pressure' on the French Premier Daladier.⁵³⁵

As a result of British policy, the Franco regime emerged into an environment in which its attitude towards foreign affairs carried a lot of weight despite its economic and military weakness. Shortly after withdrawing Spain from the League of Nations in May, for instance, Franco threatened to withdraw all staff from the Spanish Embassy in Paris unless there was some progress in the fulfilment of the Berard-Jordana Agreement. The Foreign Office hastened to ask Eric Phipps to use his influence with policymakers in Paris while Halifax planned to raise the issue directly with Bonnet and Daladier in Geneva. According to José Félix de Lequerica, Franco's Ambassador at Paris, Phipps was 'actively helping us' throughout May.⁵³⁶ With the confidence that the British government was determined to help repair Franco-Spanish relations, Jordana instructed Lequerica in early June to maintain a firm attitude with the French government and ensure it remained aware that 'in these critical moments a mistaken policy of France and England could force us to adopt an unfavourable attitude towards them'.⁵³⁷

The Franco regime deliberately exhibited its friendly relations with the German and Italian governments in order to ensure Britain's attitude remained benevolent and malleable. In June, for example, Franco's Minister of the Interior, Ramón Serrano Suñer, visited Rome and Galeazzo Ciano reciprocated by visiting Spain the following month. As Franco knew, Serrano Suñer's trip

⁵³⁴ AGA.82/2671/13, Alba to Jordana, 9/6/1939.

⁵³⁵ CRL.NC18/1/1103, Chamberlain to Hilda, 10/6/1939; NC18/1/1102, Chamberlain to Ida, 10/6/1939. Chamberlain made a similar comment to Halifax in late April regarding Italy after its invasion of Albania: 'the French were not doing their share in smoothing out their difficulties with the Italians' so he urged Halifax 'do your utmost to induce them [the French] to re-establish contact with the Italians', cited in Salerno, *Vital Crossroads*, p. 119.

⁵³⁶ AGA.82/3648/20, Lequerica to Jordana, 2/6/1939; TNA.FO371/24159, W7992/3719/41, Mounsey & Halifax minutes, 16 & 17/5/1939 & W8195/3719/41, U.K. delegation (Geneva) to Foreign Office, 22/5/1939.

⁵³⁷ AGA.82/3103/7, Jordana to Lequerica, 12/6/1939.

to Rome concerned the British because he was renowned for his openly pro-Axis attitude and the Foreign Office believed he might soon replace Jordana as Foreign Minister.⁵³⁸ While in Rome, Serrano Suñer told Ciano that Spain needed ‘two or preferably three years’ of peace but would ‘be at the side of the Axis because she will be guided by feeling and reason’. Regarding Britain, he said he hoped to kick ‘the English to the sea’ and take back Gibraltar.⁵³⁹ Even though Jordana was less committed to the Axis than Serrano Suñer, he still used the visit’s symbolic significance to influence British policy. Indeed, as he told Alba on 25 June, Serrano Suñer’s Rome trip did not mean there would be any change in Spanish foreign policy nor had it resulted in more intimate Italo-Spanish relations, but this was subject to change as a result of ‘the incomprehension of France and England, who now more than ever must coddle us in order to restrain the natural indignation felt by the Spanish people, who if not properly conducted ... would bend unconditionally and with full enthusiasm to the side of the Axis’.⁵⁴⁰

The ongoing tensions between the French and Spanish governments were vulnerable to exploitation in Italian and German propaganda, which made Britain’s efforts to prevent Franco’s incorporation into the Axis more difficult. After several delays in returning Spain’s gold and other possessions as well as further threats from Franco to break off diplomatic relations, the French government promised to return them by 18 July. This date was significant because it would coincide with Ciano’s visit to Spain and therefore ensure Italian propaganda could not contrast Italo-Spanish rapprochement with Anglo-French intransigence. Peterson had warned just before Ciano’s arrival that the gold issue would not only ‘poison Franco-Spanish relations for the next decade’ but would ‘place a powerful weapon in the hands of those who may be expected, in the event of war, to call for a “benevolent” neutrality on the part of Spain towards the Axis Powers’.⁵⁴¹

⁵³⁸ Serrano Suñer said explicitly while in Rome that he wanted to take over Jordana at the Foreign Ministry and asked Ciano and Mussolini to use their influence with Franco to make this happen. Ciano wrote a letter personally to Franco, see Ciano, *Diary*, 9 & 10/6/1939, pp. 241-242 & *Ciano’s Diplomatic Papers*, p. 295. In his memoirs, Serrano Suñer admitted that his time in Italy ‘helped to consolidate my already well-known inclination towards that country’, see *Entre Hendaya y Gibraltar*, p. 184. Jordana was not necessarily an anglophile, as some historians have pointed out, but a conservative and military man who came to prefer closer relations with Britain and France than with the Axis Powers, see Tusell, ‘Los cuatro ministros de asuntos exteriores’, pp. 338-339. Hermann Göring, Hitler’s number two and founder of the Condor Legion, had wanted to visit Spain in May and it was only after Jordana’s advice that Franco agreed to postpone this meeting until Ciano had visited Spain so as not to offend the Italian government, see Ros Agudo, *La guerra secreta de Franco*, pp. 51-52.

⁵³⁹ Ciano, *Diary*, 5-7/6/1939, pp. 239-240. For Suñer’s own comments on his visit to Rome, see Heleno Saña, *El franquismo sin mitos. Conversaciones con Serrano* (Madrid: Grijalbo, 1982), pp. 135-139.

⁵⁴⁰ AGA.82/3104/21, Jordana to Alba, 25/6/1939.

⁵⁴¹ TNA.FO371/24159, W10599/3719/41, Peterson to Halifax, 9/7/1939.

However, there was another delay in transporting the gold from France which ruined any chances of diverting attention away from Ciano's visit. As Arthur Yencken pointed out to the Foreign Office:

Even if the gold is now returned on July 21st, it is clear that all the good effect has already been lost. It will no longer be even the semblance of a gesture. The gold will have been wrung from France under the threat of a rupture of relations. I should be failing in my duty if I did not make it clear that these considerations must be taken into account in endeavouring to assess the effects now and in the future of Count Ciano's visit to Spain.⁵⁴²

This delay was particularly significant because the Franco regime was gradually acquiring more confidence as a result of these displays of solidarity with the Axis. Jordana told Lequerica, for example

You must, firmly and without any ambiguity, make it clear to Bonnet that if this matter is not completely resolved by the end of next week, all of the personnel of that embassy will return to Spain, leaving only a Chargé d'Affaires of low rank, and we will consider ourselves free to act as we please in our relations with France.⁵⁴³

As the Berard-Jordana Agreement stipulated that Spain would not only maintain friendly relations with France but also an independent foreign policy, this was a clear threat to align its foreign policy more closely with the Axis Powers. When the Foreign Office discovered that during Ciano's visit Franco had arranged to go to Italy in September, it decided that it was 'time that His Majesty's Government spoke very frankly indeed to the French government'.⁵⁴⁴

Moving towards Economic Appeasement

The tensions between the French and Spanish governments were also an irritation to the British government because they prevented London from trying to use its economic power to establish more cordial relations with Franco. In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, the British government hoped to use the possibility of a loan to Spain as a tool to weaken Franco's relations with the Axis Powers. The British government's initial goal was to demand from Franco guarantees

⁵⁴² TNA.FO371/24121, W10925/5/41, Yencken to Halifax, 19/7/1939.

⁵⁴³ AGA.82/3648/20, Jordana to Lequerica, 15/7/1939.

⁵⁴⁴ TNA.FO371/24159, W10725/3719/41, Peterson to Halifax, 17/7/1939; Roberts minute, 18/7/1939.

regarding the orientation of his foreign policy and ensure that he did not receive foreign loans until he did so. Shortly after the end of the Civil War, for instance, the Swiss and Dutch governments proposed cooperation between European states to furnish a loan of £20 million to Spain. When Eric Phipps, the British Ambassador at Paris, heard of this, he told the Foreign Office that it would 'be criminal to let Spain have this money now and it is vital that this loan should be stopped' until General Franco provides 'satisfactory guarantees' that his government 'has not, and did not in the future intend to throw, themselves into the arms of Hitler or Mussolini'.⁵⁴⁵ This opinion was broadly in line with that of the Foreign Office, the government and Maurice Peterson, who was 'decidedly opposed' to a loan to Spain unless the Franco regime met two conditions: 'that such action should be in response to a definitely official Spanish request' and 'that this request should be accompanied by full assurances of Spain's complete independence of foreign control and of her neutrality in the event of a European war'.⁵⁴⁶

As Franco continued to demonstrate his affiliation with the Axis during this period and refused to allow the possibility of a loan to shape his regime or foreign policy, the British government had to reassess its policy. As Spain's economic situation continued to deteriorate and other attempts at improving Anglo-Spanish relations had so far had little success, this became an attractive possibility to separate Franco from the Axis. David Eccles, a businessman with experience of working in Spain whom the Foreign Office recruited in early 1939 to what became the Ministry of Economic Warfare, initially opposed assisting Spain economically but by June had begun to change his mind. On 20 May, Franco had given a speech in Madrid in which he warned 'certain nations' against using 'economic encirclement' to control Spanish policy.⁵⁴⁷ Then, in a speech before the National Council of the Falange in Burgos on 5 June, Franco mentioned Britain and France specifically before lamenting the 'robbery and export by our enemies of the gold' and the 'withholding of raw materials from abroad'. Eccles, in a memorandum that became the foundation for the Anglo-Spanish War Trade Agreement signed in March 1940, warned the Foreign Office that because Axis influence in Spain was not diminishing, the British government ran the risk of

⁵⁴⁵ TNA.FO371/24133, W6096/20/41, Phipps to Halifax, 17/4/1939

⁵⁴⁶ TNA.FO371/24129, W7287/8/41, Peterson to Halifax, 2/5/1939.

⁵⁴⁷ *Palabras del Caudillo*, pp. 117-122.

being 'saddled with the blame' for shortages of raw materials and food.⁵⁴⁸ Peterson corroborated this on 8 July when reporting on the ongoing tensions between Franco and the French government:

Many people in Spain honestly believe that most of the troubles of the country come from the withholding of their gold by France. A member of my staff, straying recently along the banks of the Bidassoa fell into conversation with a typical Spanish peasant. The talk turned upon Spain's internal difficulties of food shortage and rising prices. "Yes", said the peasant, "but if those people across there would only give us back our gold."⁵⁴⁹

Hostility was becoming so prevalent in Spanish society and in the press because of this issue that in early July Spanish officers dragged Jacques Pigeonneau, the French consul at Madrid, into an alley after he left a restaurant and severely beat him.⁵⁵⁰

As the goal of separating Franco and the Axis Powers was by this stage the driving force in British policy, Italian opposition to closer economic relations between Britain and Spain provided another incentive to reassess policy on this issue. For instance, when Percy Loraine, the British Ambassador at Rome, told the Foreign Office that Italian propaganda was focused on this issue, Foreign Office clerk M.S. Williams noted that the 'influence of Italian propaganda against any democratic measures for the economic rehabilitation of Spain seems to betray a certain nervousness lest such measures might in fact succeed in drawing Spain away from the Axis for Italy well knows that the Axis cannot supply Spain's essential needs'.⁵⁵¹ Moreover, as Franco had planned to go to Rome after Ciano's visit, the Foreign Office agreed that the British government needed to do something to 'cultivate the Spaniards'.⁵⁵²

By early August, the British government had realised that its appeasement policy had conceded significant influence to Franco even on an issue it had hoped since the start of the Civil War would work in its favour. On 2 August, for example, Alba was able to boast that in recent days he had hosted 'various elements' of the British government for lunch at the Spanish Embassy. According to Alba, both Lord Halifax and Rab Butler emphasised that the British government was

⁵⁴⁸ TNA.FO371/24144, W9574/290/41, Eccles to Mounsey, 16/6/1939 & Eccles to Jebb, 21/6/1939.

⁵⁴⁹ TNA.FO371/24159, W10599/3719/41, Peterson to Halifax, 9/7/1939.

⁵⁵⁰ 'News in Brief', *The Times*, 11/7/1939; David Wingate Pike, *Franco and the Axis Stigma* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 5.

⁵⁵¹ TNA.FO371/24119, W10691/5/41, Lorraine to Halifax, 17/7/1939; Williams minute, 18/7/1939.

⁵⁵² TNA.FO371/24121, W10925/5/41, Farquhar minute, 25/7/1939.

ready 'to help us financially as soon as we want'.⁵⁵³ This marked a significant shift in British policy towards Spain. Not only had it removed its requirement that Franco publicly distance himself from Axis foreign policy, but it also demonstrated to him that his continued affiliation with those states would encourage the British government to maintain its passive attitude towards his regime.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that British government's fear of Franco's incorporation into the Rome-Berlin Axis was the driving force behind British policy towards Spain in the aftermath of the Civil War. The aim of driving a wedge between Franco and his German and Italian allies had been at the centre of British non-intervention since the summer of 1936. In this sense, British policy towards Spain during and after the Civil War comes into focus as a sustained strategic programme shaped by fears of war and an alliance between fascist leaders. This is not to say that ideological prejudices played no role during the Civil War. However, the problems the British government encountered in its relations with Franco's Spain in the spring and summer of 1939 are exactly what British policymakers and advisors had anticipated when they were formulating the policy of non-intervention in July and August 1936. After maintaining the policy of non-intervention throughout the Spanish Civil War, the British government accepted in its dealing with Franco that the policy had been erroneous and attempted to make amends.

We have seen in previous chapters how the policy of non-intervention evolved into a policy of appeasing Franco as his military successes and relations with the Axis Powers gave him a considerable degree of agency in his relations with the British government. This chapter, however, has shown how the British government incorporated Franco more firmly within the policy of general appeasement. The British government turned its back on hundreds of thousands of Spaniards who it knew would suffer as Franco consolidated his regime specifically because it feared how he would react. When Franco's government refused to take any responsibility for maintaining the hundreds of thousands of refugees in France or accepting them back into Spain, the British government favoured the appeasement of Franco over backing its French ally. Moreover, from the Spanish perspective we have seen how Franco incorporated British concerns

⁵⁵³ AGA.82/3102/43/3, Alba to Jordana, 2/8/1939.

about Spain's neutrality in a European war into his diplomacy and statesmanship and deliberately exacerbated these fears. In that regard, he built on the foreign policy he had developed during the Civil War and used Britain's attachment to appeasement to assert himself and his regime on the international stage.

VI

INVESTING IN FRANCO'S NEUTRALITY

The Triumph of Non-Intervention?

September 1939-June 1940

Introduction

As Europe drifted into war in 1939, the British government could rest assured that it had gone to exhaustive efforts to prevent the catastrophe. Appeasing Hitler had failed, but the British government still considered some of the aims of the broader policy of general appeasement as realistic. Indeed, while appeasement's primary goal was to prevent the Second World War, it also sought to create better conditions in which to wage war. Central to this policy was the aim of reducing the number of potential adversaries which Britain would face in a war. As we have noted already, the appeasement of Mussolini aimed primarily to ensure he did not fight alongside Hitler and force the British government to extend its resources to the Mediterranean. Accordingly, as a dictator who alone posed no real military danger to the British government, Mussolini enjoyed the benefits of being a target of appeasement because of the potential problems he could cause if he supported Hitler in a European war.⁵⁵⁴ Similarly, since the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, the British government had in mind the possibility that Spain, especially in the event of a rebel victory, might form part of this hostile fascist alliance. The British government could

⁵⁵⁴ If the Mediterranean became another theatre of war, in addition to the stretching of British resources there was also the risk that the concentration of French military resources would make it easier for Germany to take western Europe from where it would be in a better position to threaten the British Isles, see Salerno, *Vital Crossroads*, pp. 143-154.

therefore take some comfort from Franco's announcement on 3 September that Spain would abide by the 'strictest neutrality' (*'la más estricta neutralidad'*).⁵⁵⁵ While Franco's attitude was not the kind of 'benevolent neutrality' that the British government had been hoping for during the previous three years, it was, nevertheless, the second time in the space of a year that Franco had declared his intention to remain neutral.⁵⁵⁶

There is no shortage of literature on Spanish foreign policy and diplomacy during the Second World War.⁵⁵⁷ While some earlier histories of wartime Spain propagated Francoist myths by suggesting Franco cunningly outsmarted Hitler and kept Spain out of the conflict, more recent works have shown this to be false. Indeed, Franco wanted a new Spanish empire and, if the circumstances had permitted it, he would have taken Spain into the war against Britain.⁵⁵⁸ We know, for instance, that Franco allowed German submarines and ships to use Spanish ports for refuelling and restocking supplies until at least 1942.⁵⁵⁹ Moreover, thanks to historians such as Manuel Ros Agudo, we can now also be certain that Franco hoped not just to share the spoils of

⁵⁵⁵ *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, 5/9/1939; for the official message sent to all Spanish ambassadors abroad, see AGA.82/3443/36, 'Llamamiento del Caudillo', 3/9/1939.

⁵⁵⁶ Franco even showed some interest in taking on the role of mediator between Germany and the Allies to avert the Second World War, although this was because of the timing of the conflict rather than a representation of where his loyalties were, until Mussolini decided that the role of mediator was appropriate only for himself, see AGA.82/4643/3, Beigbeder to García Conde, 30/8/1939 & García Conde to Beigbeder, 31/8/1940; Lamb, *Mussolini and the British*, pp. 258-265; Ciano, *Diary*, 2/9/1939, p. 271.

⁵⁵⁷ For comprehensive overviews, see Javier Tusell, *Franco, España y la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Entre el Eje y la neutralidad* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 1995) and, for an interpretation sympathetic to the Franco regime, see Luis Suárez Fernández, *España, Franco y la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Desde 1939 hasta 1945* (Madrid: Actas, 1997). For an overview of the evolution of the earlier historiography on Franco's foreign policy during the Second World War, see Antonio Marquina Barrio, 'La neutralidad o la pérdida de la neutralidad en la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Cuestiones pendientes de un debate todavía inconcluso', *Espacio Tiempo y Forma*, (1994), 313-322 (pp. 313-316); Rafael García Pérez, 'España en el Eje: la beligerancia y la opinión de los historiadores', in Stanley Payne and Delia Contreras (eds.), *España y la Segunda Guerra Mundial* (Madrid: Editorial Complutense, 1996), pp. 11-36.

⁵⁵⁸ In the 1950s, the Franco regime began to make an effort to play down its relations with the Axis in favour of propagating the myth of friendship with the Allies, see Luis de Galinsoga and Francisco Franco Salgado-Araujo, *Centinela de Occidente. Semblanza biográfica de Francisco Franco* (Barcelona: Editorial AHR, 1956). Some historians carried on the tradition, such as Brian Crozier, *Franco: A Biographical History* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967). For the dismantling of Francoist myths, see Paul Preston, 'Franco and Hitler: The Myth of Hendaye 1940', *Contemporary European History*, 1.1(1992), 1-16; Denis Smyth, *Diplomacy and Strategy of Survival*, pp. 100-102; Ros Agudo, *La gran tentación*; Morten Heiberg, *Emperadores del Mediterráneo*.

⁵⁵⁹ Charles Burdick, "'Moro': The Resupply of German Submarines in Spain, 1939-1942", *Central European History*, 3.3 (1970), 256-284. Spain played an important role in German strategic planning for the Second World War, see Norman Goda, 'Germany's Conception of Spain's Strategic Importance, 1940-1941', in Christian Leitz and David Dunthorn (eds.), *Spain in an International Context* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999), pp. 129-147.

victory with the Axis but also made definite plans and preparations to engage in the war against the British government.⁵⁶⁰

Although historians have conducted a substantial amount of research into Spain's role in the Second World War, the focus has been overwhelmingly on Franco's Axis connexion and historians have paid relatively less attention to Anglo-Spanish relations. This is especially the case for the first phase of the Second World War known as the 'Phoney War'. It is perhaps the fact that little happened in terms of military developments during this period that historians have not considered it as important as what came later. Moreover, as historians tend to associate Chamberlain with the policy of appeasement which failed to prevent the Second World War and tend to view Churchill as a break from this failure, it is perhaps understandable that studies of Anglo-Spanish relations have confined themselves either to the Civil War or the Second World War once Churchill became Prime Minister. Enrique Moradiellos serves as a good example of this. His book on Anglo-Spanish relations during the Second World War, for instance, offers useful context on relations before Churchill became Prime Minister, but as a work of over five hundred pages it devotes only twenty-nine of them to the period between September and May 1940. Moreover, these pages serve to provide context for the situation Churchill inherited once he replaced Chamberlain as Prime Minister in May 1940 rather than offering any detailed discussion of the foreign policies of Britain and Spain during this period and how they affected one another.⁵⁶¹ This is also true for Richard Wigg, whose study of Anglo-Spanish relations not only focuses primarily on the period after May 1940, but offers very little context on British and Spanish foreign policy before then.⁵⁶² In any case, historians have considered Anglo-Spanish relations during the Civil War and Second World War in isolation, rather than the continuity between the two.

This chapter argues that we ought to consider Britain's policy of non-intervention in Spain and specifically the policy of appeasing Franco as a sustained strategic programme which went back to the outbreak of the Civil War in the summer of 1936 and remained in place throughout the Second World War. In this regard, despite the failure to appease Hitler, when it came to Franco

⁵⁶⁰ Ros Agudo has labelled Anglo-Spanish relations during this period as one of 'mutual suspicion and mistrust', see *La guerra secreta*, p. 136.

⁵⁶¹ Moradiellos, *Franco frente a Churchill*, pp. 99-127.

⁵⁶² Wigg focuses briefly on the War Trade Agreement, see *Churchill and Spain*, pp. 9-10. See also Smyth, *Diplomacy and Strategy of Survival*, pp. 26-51. This is also the case with Emilio Grandío Seoane, whose study of British intelligence in Spain says little about the period before Churchill became Prime Minister, see *A Balancing Act: British Intelligence in Spain during the Second World War* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2018).

even Churchill embraced appeasement.⁵⁶³ The chapter shows that the British government was unable to establish itself as the dominant partner in Anglo-Spanish relations because of the way in which its policy towards Spain since 1936 had altered the power dynamics of the relationship in Franco's favour. Indeed, while the Foreign Office and British government knew Spain was militarily and economically too weak to enter the Second World War, the strategic importance of the Iberian Peninsula ensured Franco remained a looming threat depending on how strictly he adhered to his policy of neutrality. Accordingly, the British government focused its efforts on avoiding actions that would provoke Franco's hostility while trying to formulate a policy that would drive a wedge between him and the Axis. Franco's resentment for Britain's policy during the Civil War and his genuine commitment to Hitler and Mussolini, however, ensured that Britain would maintain its policy of appeasement primarily because it failed to achieve its aim of ensuring Spain's benevolent neutrality.

The first part of the chapter focuses on Franco's attitude towards the British government and how the Spanish press portrayed the Allied war effort. It goes beyond examining the well-documented pro-German bias of the press and instead focuses on how the Franco regime incorporated this bias into its diplomacy to ensure it continued to benefit from British policy towards Spain.⁵⁶⁴ Indeed, this tactic pushed the British government to maintain a friendly attitude towards the Franco regime as it continuously attempted to improve its reputation in the Spanish press. The second section shows that one of the ways the British government sought to do this was by incorporating its attitude towards the Soviet invasion of Finland in November into its diplomacy to show that Britain, rather than Germany, was the real barrier against communism and thereby curry favour with Franco, especially in light of the Nazi-Soviet Pact.

The chapter then moves on to discuss the Anglo-Spanish War Trade Agreement signed in March 1940. While there has been a handful of studies on the negotiations for this agreement, they have tended to focus on the factual details of the agreement rather than the political motivations

⁵⁶³ To draw again upon Crawford's concepts of wedge strategies and their potential outcomes, the Second World War marked a development of Britain's policy towards Spain from 'pre-alignment' to 'dis-alignment', which sought to weaken Franco's cooperation with the Axis Powers once it was clear that his 'neutrality' was a policy of benevolent neutrality towards the Axis Powers, see 'Preventing Enemy Coalitions', pp. 156-158.

⁵⁶⁴ For example, see Ingrid Schulze Schneider, 'La propaganda alemana en España, 1942-1944', *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, V.7 (1994), 371-386; Carlos Velasco Murviedro, 'Propaganda y publicidad nazis en España durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial: algunas características', *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, V.7 (1994), 85-107; Mercedes Peñalba-Sotorrío, 'Beyond the War: Nazi Propaganda Aims in Spain during the Second World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 54.4(2019), 902-926.

and outcomes.⁵⁶⁵ This chapter concerns itself less with the technical details of the negotiations and more with the political expediencies behind them and what they reveal about power dynamics in Anglo-Spanish relations. As Oscar Calvo-Gonzalez has shown in his study of U.S.-Spanish relations in the 1950s, the U.S. government failed to pressure Spain into liberalising its economic policies using financial aid as an incentive because withholding this aid resulted in social, political and economic instability. When this occurred, Spain's strategic value in the context of the Cold War decreased. Accordingly, Spain enjoyed the benefits of U.S. economic assistance without yielding to many U.S. demands and was the third largest recipient in Europe of U.S. aid during the 1950s, despite not being a part of the Marshall Plan.⁵⁶⁶ Christian Leitz has used this 'carrot or stick' concept when writing on Anglo-Spanish economic relations between 1941 and 1944. As he points out, the British government faced a dilemma when deciding on its economic policy towards Spain in the context of the Second World War: while economic aid might have strengthened the Spanish economy and bolstered Franco's ability to enter the war on the side of the Axis Powers, depriving Spain of vital resources such as wheat or oil could have forced Franco to join the war out of pure desperation or caused internal chaos which the German and Italian governments could take advantage of.⁵⁶⁷ Ultimately, the British government chose the carrot over the stick because this offered the best means of incentivising Franco to keep Spain neutral.⁵⁶⁸

In this sense, the British recognised the limited success of its appeasement policy so far in preserving Franco's neutrality and shifted to attempting to weaken his level of cooperation with the Axis Powers with economic incentives. This provides an example of how appeasement policies, for as long as they fail to achieve their ultimate objective, evolve into an increasingly beneficial

⁵⁶⁵ Michael Alpert, 'Las relaciones hispano-británicas en el primer año de la posguerra. Los acuerdos comerciales y financieros de marzo de 1940', *Revista de Política Internacional*, 147 (1976), 13-30; Leonardo Caruana de las Cagigas, 'Las implicaciones políticas de las relaciones comerciales entre España y Gran Bretaña durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial: comentarios al acuerdo de 18 de marzo de 1940', *Hispania*, 51.79 (1991), 1043-1073; Moradiellos, *Franco frente a Churchill*, pp. 115-127.

⁵⁶⁶ Oscar Calvo-Gonzalez, 'Neither a Carrot Nor a Stick: American Foreign Aid and Economic Policymaking in Spain during the 1950s', *Diplomatic History*, 30.3 (2006), 409-438

⁵⁶⁷ Hitler had a plan for the invasion of the Iberian Peninsula named Operation Felix. Before launching an attack on Gibraltar, the Luftwaffe would attack its port so that German ships could position themselves there. German troops would cross over the Pyrenees border from France. Attention would then turn to Portugal. After the conquest of Gibraltar, Germany could close the Straits and allow the passage of troops to North Africa, see Goda, 'Riddle of the Rock', p. 297; Christian Leitz, *Nazi Germany and Neutral Europe during the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 125-126, 140; Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (ed.), *Germany and the Second World War*, pp. 185-197.

⁵⁶⁸ Christian Leitz, 'More Carrot than Stick: British Economic Warfare in Spain, 1941-1944', *Twentieth Century British History*, 9.2 (1998), 246-273 (p. 271).

situation for the target state. Interestingly, similar logic guided the U.S. government's thinking towards its economic relationship with Spain during this period. As Andrew Buchanan has pointed out, for instance, U.S policy towards Spain during the Second World War amounted to what he refers to as appeasement comparable to British policy. As he noted, U.S. efforts 'to keep Italy out of the war by offering Rome preferential trade deals and recognition of its conquests in Ethiopia came to nothing when Mussolini invaded France in June 1940. It then became imperative to dissuade Spain from following suit. In following this course, Washington marched in step with British policy'.⁵⁶⁹ As we have noted above and as we will see in the present chapter, there was a deliberate effort on Franco's part to flaunt his Axis ties because doing so fostered this type of thinking in states such as Britain and the U.S. who feared Spanish belligerency. Even after negotiating trade agreements with Allied nations during the first three years of the Second World War, Franco remained confident in an Axis victory.⁵⁷⁰

By focusing on the origins of this approach to Anglo-Spanish economic relations, this chapter highlights the links between the commercial negotiations and British strategy towards Spain, not only within the context of the Second World War but also the ways in which they were consistent with the British government's aim of ensuring Spain's benevolent neutrality as recommended by the Chiefs of Staff in the summer of 1936. In doing so, the chapter shows how Franco, as the weaker party in need of some form of economic assistance, retained his agency when it came to dealing with the British. The final section focuses on Chamberlain's resignation in May 1940 to show that even with such a notorious opponent of appeasement as his replacement as Prime Minister, even Churchill decided to maintain the policy of his predecessor.

⁵⁶⁹ Buchanan, *American Grand Strategy*, p. 55.

⁵⁷⁰ The U.S. government, while encouraging private trade with Spain, was more restrained than the British by American public opinion's negative attitude towards a generous trade deal as a result of its opposition to the ideology and nature of the Franco regime. However, by 1941, particularly as Roosevelt grew keen on a U.S. invasion of North Africa, practical considerations regarding maintaining Spain's neutrality, combined with the Franco regime's increasing dependency on western economic aid once it was clear Germany could not meet Spain's needs, triumphed and rekindled negotiations for an agreement eventually signed in the spring of 1942. See Buchanan, *American Grand Strategy*, pp. 53-67; Pike, *Franco and the Axis Stigma*, pp. 73-75.

'La más estricta neutralidad'

During August 1939 Franco had deliberately maintained an ambiguous attitude towards the prospect of a European conflict. In the middle of the month, for instance, he announced the formation of a new government which seemed to reflect his attitude towards this impending war.⁵⁷¹ Jordana, whom both Franco and Serrano Suñer considered too much of an anglophile, took on the symbolic role of President of the *Consejo del Estado* while Colonel Juan Beigbeder y Atienza, formerly High Commissioner of Spanish Morocco and Military Attaché in Berlin, replaced him as Foreign Minister.⁵⁷² Although Beigbeder's sympathy for Germany later receded and he developed a close relationship with Samuel Hoare, at this stage he was an enthusiastic supporter of the Axis Powers.⁵⁷³ The message which these changes in Franco's Cabinet sent to the British are more confusing if we consider Spanish troops movements around the Pyrenees, Gibraltar and in Morocco. Over the previous few months, Franco had been fortifying these areas with the excuse that the measures were purely defensive and continued to do so after his declaration of neutrality on 3 September. Even if they were defensive, they forced the Allies to doubt Franco's sincerity and inconveniently deploy their own forces on the Spanish border as a precautionary measure.⁵⁷⁴ Nevertheless, while Franco downplayed the significance of these redeployments, there is no doubt that incorporating Gibraltar into the Spanish state remained one of his objectives. Indeed, in August, Franco also ordered a photographic study of Gibraltar to identify how best to attack the British fortress. On 9 August, he told members of an Italian military mission in Spain that he was studying the possibility of closing the Straits and destroying the British base at Gibraltar with artillery fire.⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷¹ According to Franco's cousin, Serrano Suñer's advice was responsible for the ministerial appointments, see Salgado-Araujo, *Mi vida junto a Franco*, p. 281.

⁵⁷² Before Beigbeder replaced him, the Foreign Office had hoped to invite Jordana to London, see TNA.FO371/24131, W11211/8/41, Roberts minute, 1/8/1939.

⁵⁷³ Tusell, 'Los cuatro ministros de asuntos exteriores', pp. 324-325; Ros Agudo, *La guerra secreta*, p. 137. According to Eccles, Beigbeder was an advocate of 'Spain for the Spaniards' appointed due to his personal loyalty to Franco. Peterson, however, believed Beigbeder was pro-German but anti-Italian, see TNA.FO371/24132, W12067/8/41, Eccles to Mounsey, 16/8/1939 & TNA.FO371/24160, W12557/4270/41, Peterson to Halifax, 28/8/1939.

⁵⁷⁴ As Ros Agudo has argued, in this was Franco provided Germany with a 'priceless service', see *La guerra secreta*, pp. 136-137.

⁵⁷⁵ A year later, in September 1940, after Hitler had raised the issue of a joint attack on Gibraltar, Franco told the him that 'we have been planning the operation secretly for a long time', see Ros Agudo, *La guerra secreta de Franco*, pp. 55-56. Franco never abandoned the idea of making Gibraltar Spanish and in the 1950s even tried to win U.S. support his claim to the Rock, see Stockey, *Gibraltar*, pp. 229-230.

Franco's attitude was partly a result of his affiliation with the Axis Powers, but he also still harboured resentment for the policy Britain had pursued during the Civil War. In late August, for instance, Beigbeder confirmed to Philippe Pétain, the French Ambassador at Madrid and future leader of Vichy France, that Spain would remain neutral in a European conflict but did not give a similar assurance to Peterson. Understandably, the Foreign Office was disappointed that Peterson had not been able to develop as cordial a relationship with the Franco regime as Pétain. However, whether it was Franco's intention or not, the issue pushed the Foreign Office to think about what this said about the state of Anglo-Spanish relations and what it could change to ensure improvements. Walter Roberts, head of the Western Department, for instance, noted that the most likely explanation was that 'our failure last September to respond to General Franco's declaration of neutrality, which, we know, annoyed him, still rankles'.⁵⁷⁶ Accordingly, when Franco did make his public declaration of neutrality, the Foreign Office instructed Peterson officially to express the British government satisfaction and reminded him of 'the importance of avoiding any action which might cause offence to the Spanish Government in present circumstances'.⁵⁷⁷ In this sense, the British government still faced the difficulty of formulating its policy towards Spain according to what it hoped would appease Franco and not push him further towards the Axis.

The Franco regime's ideological sympathies for the Axis were clearest in the Spanish press, which maintained a pro-German and anti-Allied line towards the war. Even in Franco's declaration of neutrality shortly after the German invasion of Poland the Foreign Office detected some bias towards Germany. When Franco warned other nations against 'the suffering which war will bring' and urged them to take measures to prevent it spreading, for instance, the Foreign Office felt Franco was placing the blame for the conflict on Britain for declaring war on Germany, rather than on Germany for invading Poland.⁵⁷⁸ At times the press proved more explicit. In October, the Madrid

⁵⁷⁶ TNA.FO371/24160, W12533/5056/41, Phipps to Halifax, 27/8/1939 & Roberts minute 28/8/1939. In fact, as we saw in chapter four, Chamberlain, Halifax and Lord Hailsham all expressed their appreciation to the Duke of Alba but they did so while continuing to recognise the 'Reds' as the only legitimate Spanish government. Lord Hailsham, a close friend of both the Duke of Alba and the Marquis del Moral, even became vice president of the Friends of National Spain after the Civil War, see CAC.HAIL1/4/52, Hailsham to Phillimore, 7/7/1939. Hailsham privately admitted to being a supporter of the rebels and referred to the Spanish government as the Reds. However, he did not become more involved with the Friends of National Spain earlier because he did not want to embarrass the British government.

⁵⁷⁷ TNA.FO371/24160, W13118/5056/41, Acheon to Roberts, 5/9/1939.

⁵⁷⁸ TNA.FO371/24160, W13124/5056/41, Peterson to Halifax, 5/9/1939.

daily *ABC*'s front cover carried a full-page image of Churchill with the caption 'Instigators of war'.⁵⁷⁹

The pro-German stance of the Spanish press represented a problem for the British government primarily because of the danger that it would rally popular support for Spain's eventual entry into the conflict. This was particularly important for the way the Spanish press reported on military developments. For example, When the Luftwaffe attacked the British naval base at Scapa Flow and a German U-boat was able to attack the HMS *Royal Oak* anchored there, the newspaper *ABC*, which even Peterson considered as one of the more objective press organs when it came to reporting factual details about the war, wrote of how Britain had lost 'control of the sea' and attached significant importance to the event:

The British Isles, like a battleship anchored on the high seas, have until now been accustomed to observing conflicts on the continent with the coldness and temperance of nerves that is easy to maintain when one is in a safe place. Now this is all over. Hitler, in his last speech, stated that there were no longer islands in Europe, and now he has proved it. The German planes, without any great effort, have been able to cross the Scottish sky and attack directly, for the first time in history, [British] soil.⁵⁸⁰

As Williams minuted in response to examples such as this, 'In the editorials every report of a German success is given full credence while the British denials are ignored and the conclusion is arrived at that the British are being rapidly driven from the seas'.⁵⁸¹

The attitude of the Spanish press was a genuine display of the Franco regime's ideological sympathy for Germany but it also used concerns in London about this to ensure the British government and press maintained a friendly attitude towards Spain. This formed part of the Franco regime's attempts to construct its history and challenge interpretations and criticisms that did not fit its own narrative.⁵⁸² Indeed, after the outbreak of the Second World War, Alba used the anti-British tone of the Spanish press in an attempt to improve representations of Spain in the British

⁵⁷⁹ 'Los animadores de la guerra', *ABC Madrid*, 17/10/1939.

⁵⁸⁰ 'Chamberlain y Churchill explican el hundimiento del "Royal Oak" y los ataques aéreos contra bases navales de Escocia', *ABC Madrid*, 18/10/1939.

⁵⁸¹ TNA.FO371/23170, C17679/13530/41, Williams minute, 24/10/1939.

⁵⁸² There are similarities between Franco's attitude towards negative press reports in Britain and the attitudes of Hitler and Mussolini in the 1930s. Hitler, for instance, often said he did not want ever to go to war with Britain but that the British press strained Anglo-German relations, see Joachim Fest, *Hitler* (London: Penguin, 1982), p. 507.

press. As early as 15 September, for instance, Alba complained to Halifax that the *Daily Express* had printed an article claiming that Francoist forces bombed Guernica in 1937. If the British government wanted to demonstrate its friendliness towards the Franco regime, Alba insisted, surely Halifax could prohibit the publication of such articles in the future.⁵⁸³ Although the Foreign Office took measures to improve the attitude towards Spain in the press, it was difficult to impose on a free press, even with some level of censorship, the kinds of restrictions Alba wanted.⁵⁸⁴ In early December Alba again complained to the Foreign Office when articles appeared in the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Daily Herald* and *Morning Post* with what he interpreted as an anti-Spanish – in reality anti-Francoist – tone. Rather than simply bringing these to the attention of the Foreign Office, however, Alba drew comparisons with the unfriendly policy of non-intervention during the Civil War and warned that the press in Spain could maintain its anti-British stance if British newspapers did not modify their own attitudes:

If, to the ill-feeling created by the unfair attitude of the British press towards the Nationalist Cause during the civil war, are now to be added absolutely unfounded statements regarding my country, I do not see how England can expect a friendly press in Spain.⁵⁸⁵

As we have seen in previous chapters, the Franco regime used its attitude towards Britain and the international situation as a negotiating tool to ensure the British government maintained a friendly policy towards Spain.

The Franco regime maintained this resentment and could even use it to influence the appointment of British diplomatic staff. In early 1940, for example, Denis Cowan, an official at the Ministry of Information, called on Tom Burns, a baron of the British Catholic press and soon-to-be Press Attaché at the British Embassy at Madrid, to join him on a trip to Spain. The aim of the trip was to help reorganise British propaganda in Spain and thereby improve relations between the British government and the Franco regime. Cowan had formed part of a prisoner exchange commission in Spain led by Philip Chetwode and was in contact with Segismundo Casado around

⁵⁸³ TNA.FO371/23170, C13827/13530/41, Halifax to Peterson, 14/9/1939. Alba continued to deny that the rebels had any responsibility for the destruction of Guernica and wrote to correct journalists who said anything to the contrary. This formed part of his efforts to perpetuate the Franco regime's version of the Civil War. During the Second World War, for example, Alba supplied information from the Spanish press and figures of atrocities in the Republican zone to Arthur Bryant in the hope he would use them for a future book, see PL.Correspondence/B, Bryant to Alba, 16/9/1939.

⁵⁸⁴ Example in TNA.FO371/23170, C18574/13530/41, Cowan memorandum, 14/11/1939.

⁵⁸⁵ AGA.54/6704/A-9-3, Alba to Butler, 1/12/1939.

the time he launched his coup in Madrid.⁵⁸⁶ Once the news that Cowan would be going to Spain reached Alba at the Spanish Embassy, he protested to the Foreign Office about Cowan's 'pro-Republican sympathies'. Despite the complaints, Cowan still departed with Burns as planned. In the meantime, Peterson received word that Cowan would be coming to Madrid and that Alba had complained about this. Peterson then objected and after an inquiry in London the Foreign Office decided not to risk upsetting Spanish sensitivities. When Burns and Cowan stopped by the British consulate at Hendaye on their way, there was an envelope marked 'urgent' for Cowan with orders to return to London.⁵⁸⁷ This was a victory, albeit a small one, for the Franco regime in shaping British policy.

The British government fought back by attempting to exchange favourable attitudes in the British press for an improvement in how the Spanish press presented the British government and the Allied war effort. In the early months of 1940, for instance, Rab Butler, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, frequently raised his concerns with Alba about the pro-German bias of the Spanish press and the latter eventually agreed to pass on the Foreign Office's concerns to Madrid. Ten days later, however, Alba tried to call in the favour he felt the Foreign Office owed him when he saw that *The Times* had published a letter from Manuel de Irujo, former Republican Minister of Justice who fled to Britain after the Civil War, on conditions for political prisoners in Spain.⁵⁸⁸ 'The fact that Sr. Irujo's letter is preposterous' was not Alba's reason for writing to Butler, but rather 'the partiality shown by the 'Times' in allowing the letter to be published'. Alba complained that in recent weeks the newspaper had refused twice to print letters by Arthur Loveday, one of the most enthusiastic British supporters of Franco during the Civil War, which simply set out to correct any recent 'false statements' in the British press regarding the Civil War. For Alba, this attitude begged the question:

Is the 'Times' still ignorant of the atrocities and hundreds of thousands of murders committed in Spain with the connivance of the authorities while Sr. Irujo occupied the post of Minister of

⁵⁸⁶ As Preston has pointed out, it is unlikely that Casado was working for the British, although Cowan was among those who at least encouraged Casado in his attempts to bring about an earlier end to the Civil War, *Last Days*, p. 4, 121-122.

⁵⁸⁷ Tom Burns, *The Use of Memory: Publishing and Further Pursuits* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), pp. 85-86. When Alba heard Cowan would be going to Spain, he complained to the Foreign Office about his 'pro-Republican sympathies', see Mark Simmons, *Ian Fleming and Operation Golden Eye: Keeping Spain out of World War II* (Oxford: Casemate, 2018), pp. 32-33; Jimmy Burns, *Papa Spy: A True Story of Love, Wartime Espionage in Madrid, and the Treachery of the Cambridge Spies* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), pp. 68-70, 81.

⁵⁸⁸ 'Prisoners in Spain', *The Times*, 20/2/1940.

Justice in the Republican Government? If so, they should look up their references before printing in their columns statements which will be very much resented in Spain.⁵⁸⁹

Alba was essentially attempting to manoeuvre the Foreign Office into prohibiting the publication in the British press of articles about the Civil War which did not fit the official Francoist narrative and, in return, promising to use his influence to alter the pro-German attitude of the Spanish press.

The attitude of the Spanish press was a symptom of the influence which Serrano Suñer had on the ideological leanings of the Franco regime. Peterson had clashed with him on this issue shortly after the end of the Civil War in April. Serrano Suñer, a 'man of diminutive stature and puny physique with tiny hands and feet, and features which are almost those of a girl', according to Peterson, had responded to the British Ambassador's complaints about German and Italian influence over the press with a 'lengthy tirade' against the British press and its anti-Spanish tone.⁵⁹⁰ In November, Peterson was still certain that Serrano Suñer was 'responsible for preserving the ideological relationship between the New Spain and Nazi Germany'.⁵⁹¹ According to the Press Attaché at the British Embassy in Spain, individual journalists were willing to be objective and adhere to their government's decree of strict neutrality but whenever they tried, Serrano Suñer 'drops on any such manifestations of individuality and instructs them to continue their previous anti-British policy'.⁵⁹² Accordingly, British policy towards Spain sought ways of exploiting the Franco's regimes weaknesses to erode the ties between Francoist Spain and Nazi Germany.

Making the Most of the Nazi-Soviet Pact

The Nazi-Soviet Pact was a diplomatic and strategic victory for the Third Reich against Britain but it also provided the British government with the opportunity to drive a wedge between Hitler and Franco. Both Franco and Mussolini, after three years of increasingly intimate relations with the Führer, found it difficult to reconcile their common objective to resist and eliminate communism

⁵⁸⁹ AGA.82.3977/5, Alba to Beigbeder, 10/2/1940; Alba to Butler, 20/2/1940. Similar examples exist in Anglo-German relations. In January 1939, for instance, the author H.G. Wells wrote two articles for the *New Chronicle* in which he referred to Hitler and Goebbels as 'certifiable lunatics'. The German Embassy then made a complaint to the Foreign Office and Halifax promised to prevent any such articles appearing in the future. See '1939 – What Does it Hold?', *New Chronicle*, 2/1/1939; *DGFP*, D.IV, pp. 377-379.

⁵⁹⁰ TNA.FO371/24160, W7086/5985/41, Peterson to Halifax, 26/4/1939

⁵⁹¹ TNA.FO371/23170, C17862/13530/41, Peterson to Halifax, 6/11/1939.

⁵⁹² TNA.FO371/23170, C17679/13530/41, Williams minute, 24/10/1939.

with Germany's alignment with the Soviet Union.⁵⁹³ To counteract Serrano Suñer's influence, Peterson sought to take advantage of Beigbeder's increasing hostility towards Germany which the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the invasion of Poland set in motion. When Peterson met him on 17 October, for instance, Beigbeder opened the conversation by talking of 'the Soviet danger and of all that General Franco had done to avert it'. In response, Peterson claimed he could not understand Spain's 'failure to lay the blame [for the war] where it belonged'.⁵⁹⁴ This was somewhat ironic, given how Franco frequently complained during the Civil War that the British government had been blind to the threat of communism and the Soviet Union.

The Foreign Office complemented this approach to Spain by recommending that the British government give as little public attention as possible to any interactions with the Soviet Union. In November, for instance, the Portuguese Ambassador at Madrid, Pedro Teotónio Pereira, met Peterson and recommended that the British government issue some kind of declaration against the spread of communism. As Italy and Spain had been the most consistent in opposing communism, Pereira argued such a declaration would win over sections of public opinion in those countries and in Portugal. Peterson could not endorse Pereira's suggestion of something along the lines of a new Anti-Comintern Pact led by Britain because it would have severed Anglo-Soviet relations and made impossible future military collaboration, but he did advise the British government to use 'reticence' in any contact it did have with the Soviet Union so as to avoid arousing Spanish hostility. The Foreign Office concurred and recalled that Anglo-Soviet negotiations earlier in the year had a 'bad effect' on Spanish opinion and prevented 'as marked a swing of opinion in our favour following upon the Russo-German Pact as might have been expected'. Accordingly, as Peterson had suggested, the Foreign Office agreed that the British government should give as little publicity as possible to any negotiations with the Soviet Union in order to make the most of the negative impact which the agreement between Hitler and Stalin had on Spanish attitudes towards the war.⁵⁹⁵

The British government also incorporated the negative response to the Soviet Union's invasion of Finland in November into its approach to Spain to weaken the links between Franco and Hitler.

⁵⁹³ Lamb, *Mussolini and the British*, pp. 262-263; Salgado-Araujo, *Mi vida junto a Franco*, p. 287.

⁵⁹⁴ TNA.FO371/23170, C16905/13530/41, Peterson to Halifax, 17/10/1939.

⁵⁹⁵ TNA.FO371/23170, C18786/13530/41, Peterson to Halifax, 14/11/1939; Williams minute, 22/11/1939. On British policy towards the Soviet Union during this period, see Paul Doerr, 'Frigid but Unprovocative: British Policy towards the USSR from the Nazi-Soviet Pact to the Winter War, 1939', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 36. 3(2001), 423-439.

Indeed, a week after the invasion Peterson told the Foreign Office that it had ‘produced a more profound repercussion in Spain than any event which has occurred since the close of the Civil War’. More importantly, the invasion was the culmination of a series of incidents which had already begun to damage Spanish admiration for Germany:

The change began with the signature of the Russo-German Pact and developed – although in a much less degree than might have been expected – in consequence of the German invasion of Catholic Poland and the sovietisation of Polish territory. The Soviet invasion of Finland is greatly accelerating this change of sentiment. Although Germany’s responsibility for Soviet aggression is not openly admitted, her guilt in this respect is fully appreciated by the vast majority of Spaniards. Among these, indeed, should be included the Falangists themselves, whose admiration for Hitler’s policy and methods is diminishing.⁵⁹⁶

This helped to reinforce opinions within the Foreign Office and government that British policy towards the Soviet Union had at least produced a positive outcome with Spain because it contrasted sharply with Hitler’s relations with Stalin.

The British government exploited the Soviet invasion of Finland to show that it stood against communism and thereby improve its reputation in Spain. According to one of the Ministry of Information’s weekly Spanish press report in January 1940, for example, the press was still overwhelmingly pro-German but

The fact that Britain supports Finland morally and materially, British condemnation of Russia, the growing realization that Britain is in deadly earnest and the misfiring of the long-vaunted German Blitz-Krieg are all items which, little known as they are, contribute to keep pro-British feeling alive and growing.⁵⁹⁷

The Foreign Office and Peterson frequently made this clear in their meetings with their Spanish interlocutors. For instance, on 7 February Halifax met Alba and tried to use Britain’s attitude towards the Finland issue to make amends for the hostility towards the British government that still existed in Spain as a result of its policy of non-intervention during the Civil War:

The Spanish people, or those of them for whom [Alba] spoke, could still not understand why what they regarded as a gentlemen’s Government in England had pursued the policy of non-

⁵⁹⁶ TNA.FO371/23170, C20156/13530/41, Peterson to Halifax, 7/12/1939.

⁵⁹⁷ TNA.FO371/24510, C1355/75/41, MOI: ‘Weekly Press Report’, 18/1/1940.

intervention, thereby prolonging the civil war, nor could they understand, if we claimed to be fighting against aggression, why we hesitated to declare war against Russia. This gave me the opportunity of telling the Ambassador something of what we were, in fact, doing for Finland, which seemed to be new to him, and of explaining why we had not hitherto thought it desirable to give greater publicity to the assistance that we had been giving.⁵⁹⁸

Alba enthusiastically reported his conversation with Halifax to Beigbeder, informing him that the British government had inspired a press campaign to recruit volunteers to go and fight with the Finnish forces and was facilitating the passage of foreign volunteers to pass through British territory on their way.⁵⁹⁹

Despite the impact of the Soviet attack on Finland, the major obstacles that the British government faced at this stage were the low opinion which the Franco regime had of it and the lack of any major military successes that could convince Franco and Serrano Suñer that a German victory was not inevitable. Peterson, for instance, tried to take advantage of Beigbeder's hostility towards Germany and met him to discuss the situation in Finland. In their meeting, Beigbeder admitted that, for him at least, the line between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union was becoming increasingly blurry. Peterson asked if Beigbeder could use his influence with other ministers to make them realise this. Beigbeder, however, said he could do little in this regard because Serrano Suñer's influence was too strong.⁶⁰⁰

The value of the Soviet invasion wore off as a result of military developments which strengthened Serrano Suñer's position within the Franco regime. After the German invasion of Denmark and Norway in April, for instance, the British government maintained an outwardly optimistic attitude towards the war. When Rab Butler met Alba on 15 April, he conveyed this optimism by informing him that the German invasion of Scandinavia was in fact good for Britain because it would mean the government could finally make full use of the Royal Navy.⁶⁰¹ This echoed Winston Churchill's famous speech of 11 April in which he said 'In my view, which is

⁵⁹⁸ TNA.FO371/24510, C1989/75/41, Halifax to Peterson, 7/2/1940. For an international overview of the Winter War, see Max Jakobson, *The Diplomacy of the Winter War: An Account of the Russo-Finnish War, 1939-1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961); for an account dealing with the British assessments, see Bernard Kelly, 'Drifting Towards War: The British Chiefs of Staff, the USSR and the Winter War, November 1939-March 1940', *Contemporary British History*, 23.3 (2009), 267-291.

⁵⁹⁹ AGA.82/3977/1, Alba to Beigbeder, 17/2/1940.

⁶⁰⁰ TNA.FO371/24514, C2657/113/41, Peterson to Halifax, 15/2/1940.

⁶⁰¹ AGA.54/6707, Alba to Beigbeder, 15/4/1940.

shared by my skilled advisers, Herr Hitler has committed a grave strategic error in spreading the war so far to the North and in forcing the Scandinavian people, or peoples, out of their attitude of neutrality'. Churchill even went on to compare this apparent strategic error with 'that which was committed by Napoleon in 1807 or 1808, when he invaded Spain'.⁶⁰² Despite this optimism, however, Peterson noted on 19 April that since the German invasion of Denmark and Norway,

There has been a marked change for the worse in the Spanish press and it is evident that orders have been given that news is to be presented in a light unfavourable to the Allies, with the apparent intention to create an attitude of hostility to them throughout the country.⁶⁰³

The Foreign Office believed this was largely because of Serrano Suñer, who maintained his pro-German outlook, although he later recalled in his memoirs that Franco 'considered the war practically won' after German successes in Scandinavia.⁶⁰⁴ It was to counteract such perceptions of the war that the British government sought to negotiate a War-Trade Agreement with Spain.

The War Trade Agreement

The neutrality of Mussolini and Franco gave the British government the opportunity to use economic appeasement to ensure the war did not spread to the Mediterranean. Just one week after Britain declared war on Germany, the Cabinet considered the policy it would pursue towards Italy:

There remains however what is perhaps a most vital point. The whole of our plan of blockade or economic warfare against Germany rests on being able to reach agreement with neutrals, or, by our own naval measures, to force neutrals not to obtain supplies which they will subsequently pass on to Germany. Italy occupies a key position in this respect. Unless we can somehow avoid Italy acting as a channel by which other neutrals can send supplies to Germany, it is really not much use our taking infinite pains to prevent other countries, such as Sweden and Norway, from acting as channels for these supplies to reach Germany. It follows that any instrument which we might use as a lever to secure Italy's good behaviour is of special value, and it is a matter for

⁶⁰² HC Debate, 11/4/1940, vol. 359, cc746-747.

⁶⁰³ TNA.FO371/24514, C5908/113/41, Peterson to Halifax, 19/4/1940.

⁶⁰⁴ Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Entre el silencio y la propaganda, la historia como fue. Memorias* (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1977), pp. 327-328.

consideration whether we ought to give this instrument away or weaken its force by concessions which in another connection may be politic as tending to keep Italy on good terms with us.⁶⁰⁵

Ultimately, the commercial negotiations with Italy failed because Mussolini was too committed to his role within the Axis and too determined to eradicate what he considered Anglo-French imperial subjugation of the Mediterranean. Indeed, this economic appeasement undermined both of these pillars of Mussolini's foreign policy because British government sought to use Allied contraband control to prevent German coal reaching Italy and thereby force Mussolini to trade war matériel for British coal. By doing so, Mussolini would become dependent upon British coal imports while damaging his relations with Hitler by supplying weapons to his adversary.⁶⁰⁶ In February, once it became clear that the British would not budge on this issue, Mussolini decided that he would prefer Italy be short of coal rather than supply arms to Britain. As he told Ciano, 'governments, like individuals, must follow a line of morality and honour'.⁶⁰⁷

The logic behind the economic appeasement of Franco was the same but, because of Spain's economic and military weakness, the British government could be more ambitious and assertive in its negotiations with him. For instance, within days of the outbreak of the Second World War, David Eccles, now at the Ministry of Economic Warfare, warned the Foreign Office against showing any signs of goodwill towards Spain. Instead, as it would be several weeks before the draft trade agreement he was preparing would be ready for discussion, Eccles advised that 'during that period it was desirable that the Spaniards should learn by experience how difficult their economic situation would become now that they were deprived of practically all external sources of supply'.⁶⁰⁸ Moreover, Eccles wanted to take advantage of other factors that would influence the Franco regime's attitude towards a trade agreement with Britain. Not only did he want Spain to feel the effects of the Royal Navy's blockade, such as difficulties in securing essential imports and

⁶⁰⁵ TNA.CAB66/1/20, WP (39)20, 10/9/1939.

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⁶⁰⁷ On these negotiations, see Salerno, *Vital Crossroads*, pp. 159-168 and Robert Mallett, 'The Anglo-Italian War Trade Negotiations, Contraband Control and the Failure to Appease Mussolini, 1939-40', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 8.1 (1997), 137-167. Alba kept Beigbender informed of the developments of the Anglo-Italian war trade negotiations, see AGA.82/3972/1. On Britain's strategic conception of the Mediterranean, the Italian threat and the subsequent shipping campaign after the Italian declaration of belligerency, see Richard Hammond, *Strangling the Axis: The Fight for Control of the Mediterranean during the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

⁶⁰⁸ TNA.FO371/23165, C13378/13378/41, FO memorandum, 8/9/1939.

losing Germany as an export market, but he also wanted to give Franco time to readjust his views in light of the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the neutrality of Italy.⁶⁰⁹

The onset of negotiations for the War Trade Agreement also represented an important development in Anglo-Spanish relations because the British government sought to use them as a tool not only to divide Spain from the Axis Powers, but also to remove Serrano Suñer. This was a significant development because British policymakers had always defined their policy as one of non-interference in Spain's internal affairs but they now moved to cause a rupture between Franco and Serrano Suñer. In a memorandum Eccles wrote in September, for instance, he said

The consideration by the Spanish Government of such an offer from H. M. government will inevitably cause a first-class crisis in Spanish policy, and it is quite improbable that it can be solved in our favour without the elimination of Señor Suñer. If we ask a Government in which Señor Suñer and the pro-Germans are in power, to restrict exports with niggardly compensations, our proposals will be thrown out and the large anti-Suñer party will have been deprived of a first-class opportunity of taking over control. If, on the other hand, we can make it clear to General Franco, and to the numerous but unorganised opposition to Señor Suñer, that our proposals are without a doubt in the interests of Spain and Señor Suñer will not readjust his policy, he will go.⁶¹⁰

Accordingly, the British government hoped to create tensions both between the Franco regime and the Axis Powers and within the regime itself between pro-Axis and pro-Ally elements.⁶¹¹

This assertiveness in the British government's approach to Spain had its limitations, however, as it still had to avoid adopting a policy which prevented a genuine improvement in Anglo-Spanish relations.⁶¹² In October, for instance, Alba approached the Foreign Office regarding a loan the rebel government had received from the London-based Kleinwort's bank in 1937 amounting to £1,860,000. Juan March, the extremely wealthy Spanish businessman and a corrupt enemy of the Republic who had helped to finance the Dragon Rapide flight in July 1936, provided the loan and

⁶⁰⁹ TNA.FO371/23165, C13958/13378/41, Eccles to Williams, 15/9/1939.

⁶¹⁰ TNA.FO371/23165, C15867/13378/41, Eccles memorandum, 1/10/1939.

⁶¹¹ British attempts to oust Serrano Suñer had some success later in the war, when Franco replaced him with Jordana in 1943, see Miguel Fernández-Longoria, 'La diplomacia británica y la caída de Serrano Suñer', *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, V.16 (2004), 253-268.

⁶¹² Indeed, those within the Suñer camp were not afraid of causing a rupture in relations with states that could be of enormous economic benefit to Spain. In the spring of 1941, for instance, Alexander Weddell, the U.S. Ambassador at Madrid, was effectively shunned by senior Spanish officials for six months because he received instructions from Washington to inform the Franco regime of the U.S. government's renewed 'struggle against totalitarian world aggression', see Buchanan, *American Grand Strategy*, p. 61.

several members of the Spanish aristocracy donated gilt-edged securities, such as jewellery and gold, amounting to over £2,000,000 as collateral.⁶¹³ In 1939, the bank called in the loan and as the Spanish government was unable to repay it immediately, the bank would have to sell these and never return them to the donors.⁶¹⁴ Accordingly, Alba asked if the British government could transfer the loan to the Bank of England, effectively amounting to a British loan to the Franco regime. The Foreign Office realised the importance of doing something about the issue. As Rab Butler minuted,

From the point of view of our diplomatic relations with Spain, it is important that every effort should be made to satisfy the Spanish Ambassador, since his government have instructed him to press this question and, as he said to me on the telephone, the British Government had always intimated to him that they desired to improve their relations with Spain. The Ambassador assured me that this question was one which, if effectively settled, would contribute largely towards the improvement of relations which we desired.

Alba became strangely fixated on the issue and ‘could not have talked with more passionate vehemence’ when he met Butler again to discuss it on 24 October and told him the issue was ‘a test case of the relations between our two countries’.⁶¹⁵ In this sense, Alba sought to negotiate the level of Spanish friendliness to ensure the Franco regime continued to benefit from a policy of British passivity. Nevertheless, the British government was able to reject Alba’s request because it believed this would only ensure the maintenance of Spanish neutrality in the short term. By withholding a loan, the British government strengthened its position in the negotiations that were about to begin for the War Trade Agreement. As Williams minuted,

⁶¹³ Day, *Franco’s Friends*, pp. 41-53.

⁶¹⁴ The Kleinwort bank facilitated several loans to the rebels before and during the Civil War, including one which paid for the initial Italian aircraft sent to Spanish Morocco in late July 1936, three of which crash landed in French Morocco, see Jehanne Wake, *Kleinwort, Benson: The History of Two Families in Banking* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 253-254. The issue surrounding this loan is somewhat confusing. According to Mercedes Cabrera in her biography of him, Juan March informed Spanish Finance Minister José Larraz that Kleinwort had called in the loan, see *Juan March (1880-1962)* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2011), p. 323 & José Larraz, *Memorias* (Madrid: Real Academia de Ciencias Morales y Políticas, 2006), p. 330. According to what the Foreign Office understood, however, the money loaned to the rebels belonged to Juan March and it was he who asked Kleinworts to call in the loan, see TNA.FO371/23169, C16975/13523/41, Williams minute, 21/10/1939. If this is true, it is not clear why March would have put the Spanish government in this position and increase tensions between it and the British government. Eventually, Kleinwort was able to transfer the loan to Barings Bank, see Tom Buchanan, ‘The Republic Besieged? British Banks and the Spanish Civil War: 1936-39’, in Edwin Green & John Lampe (eds.), *Crisis and Renewal in Twentieth Century Banking: Exploring the History and Archives of Banking at Times of Political and Social Stress* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 87-103.

⁶¹⁵ TNA.FO371.23169, C17243/13523/41, Butler minute, 24/10/1939.

In view of the commercial negotiations which we are about to initiate with the Spanish Government, it is possible that it would be undesirable to start by giving the Spanish Government a loan at once, of which they are in very great need, without obtaining some *quid pro quo*, which we shall almost certainly be able to do if we delay it longer.⁶¹⁶

Accordingly, the British government wanted to use the possibility of a loan to ensure it could dictate the terms of the agreement and thereby use it to drive a wedge between Franco and the Axis.

Even though Franco needed a loan from Britain to facilitate Spain's economic reconstruction, his resentment for the policy of non-intervention remained an integral part of his attitude towards Anglo-Spanish relations and this created difficulties once the negotiations for the agreement began in November. Aside from the principal difficulty caused by the Franco regime's refusal to devalue the peseta, the British delegation struggled to persuade Franco to remove several British ships from a 'blacklist' of all those that had traded with the Republican government during the Civil War and were therefore no longer worthy of trading with the 'New Spain'. Although this might seem illogical, it in fact provided a valuable bargaining tool to the Spanish delegation in the negotiations. Indeed, the British government was in desperate need of iron ore and pyrites – not only for arms production in Britain, but also to reduce the amount that could go to Germany – but the Franco regime refused to sell these to the British government unless it purchased large quantities of fruit, such as grapes and especially oranges. However, the over-valuation of the peseta made Spanish fruit considerably more expensive than that from other countries. Britain, for example, could purchase oranges from Palestine that were not only of a better quality, but also half the price.⁶¹⁷ Nevertheless, almost immediately after the negotiations began, the British government was willing to purchase some quantities of Spanish fruit at higher prices to facilitate progress.

In a similar way to Mussolini, as we saw above, Franco's ideological loyalty and gratitude to the Axis Powers also created difficulties in the negotiations. Franco understood that the British government was trying to weaken his ties to the German and Italian governments and knew that an Anglo-Spanish War Trade Agreement might provoke some resentment in Rome and especially in Berlin. Accordingly, he refused to allow Spanish merchant ships to transport goods between Britain and Spain and demanded that the British government simply make more ships available for this

⁶¹⁶ TNA.FO371/23169, C16664/13523/41, Butler and Williams minutes, 13 & 14/10/1939.

⁶¹⁷ TNA.FO371/23166, C19143/13378/41, FO to Peterson, 24/11/1939.

purpose. In this way, Franco was able to counteract not only the British government's wedge strategy, but also its efforts to use economic power to assert itself in Anglo-Spanish relations. Peterson did not think Franco was bluffing and, reporting on the progress of the negotiations on 22 November, told the Foreign Office that 'If the fruit is to move at all, we shall have to provide shipping, and if fruit does not move we shall get no agreement'. Ultimately, in return for the British government's agreeing to purchase significant quantities of unneeded fruit at high prices, Franco made the minor concession of removing some British ships from the blacklist if the British government would use them for Anglo-Spanish trade.⁶¹⁸

This concession which the British government made early on in the negotiations is important for understanding Anglo-Spanish economic relations later on in the Second World War. As we can see, from the earliest days of the negotiations for the War-Trade Agreement, Franco's obstinate attitude forced the British delegation and the British government to adjust their intended hard-line policy to one which now incorporated the economic appeasement of Spain by purchasing expensive and unneeded fruit. Of course, it is worth noting that Spain was in a weak economic position from which to assert itself too forcefully and soon made concessions on the value of the peseta and prices of fruit. However, this early concession on the part of the British government laid the foundations for what would become an important part of Britain's economic relations with Spain. As Richard Wigg has pointed out, later in the Second World War 'There was "appeasement" by the MEW [Ministry of Economic Warfare] and the Foreign Office even for Spanish oranges'. Indeed, as the German export market became increasingly inaccessible to Spanish fruit and vegetable growers, Britain offered a prosperous market, particularly as the economic plight of much of the Spanish population destroyed any potential for a flourishing internal market. Moreover, when the British government concluded a deal worth £2,000,000 for the purchase of oranges and onions in late 1943, the Franco regime then increased prices, which were already more expensive than oranges from South Africa or Palestine, and the British government accepted this without opposition.⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁸ TNA.FO371/23166, C19151/13378/41, Peterson to FO, 22/11/1939.

⁶¹⁹ Wigg, *Churchill and Spain*, p. 109. Interestingly, the Spanish translation of Wigg's book had a slightly different title: *Churchill y Franco. La política británica de apaciguamiento y la supervivencia del régimen, 1940-1945* (Barcelona: Debate, 2005) [Churchill and Franco: The British Policy of Appeasement and the Survival of the Regime, 1940-1945].

Although Spain was, in economic terms, comparatively the weaker party in Anglo-Spanish negotiations for a trade agreement, the Franco regime in fact benefited in some ways from its position of weakness because the British government realised that instability in Spain would only benefit the Axis. Food shortages in particular remained a potential cause of unrest. According to a report on the food situation in Madrid and surrounding areas from December 1939, Spain was suffering extreme food shortages. Eggs, oil, butter and sugar were ‘as scarce as ever’ and, when obtainable, unaffordable for all except the wealthier classes and those who had supported the military rebellion.⁶²⁰ As the report noted, ‘Suffice it to say that the new regime has brought into power large numbers of officials whose main desire is to reap the material reward of their allegiance to the Nationalist cause’.⁶²¹ To account for food shortages, the Franco regime asked the French government, with whom it was also negotiating a trade agreement, to provide Spain with 250,000 tons of wheat on credit. According to Eccles, the French government’s reluctance to do so, on account of its lack of sympathy for a regime it considered pro-German, brought Franco-Spanish trade negotiations almost to breaking point. Peterson, however, took a different line. As he told the Foreign Office, ‘Whatever may be the defects of the present regime neither the French nor we can have anything to gain from throwing Spain again into chaos. Germans on the other hand are believed to have precisely this object in view’.⁶²² The Foreign Office was in broad agreement and, when considering the situation, Williams pointed out that any outbreak of disorder in Spain brought with it ‘the possibility of renewed Italian intervention’ and recommended that the British government pressure France to be more forthcoming in their negotiations with Spain.⁶²³ In this sense, preventing Spain’s economic situation from plunging the country into social and political chaos was as much a threat to the Allied war effort as a Spain that threw in its lot with Nazi Germany. Indeed, the proposal to give a loan to Spain to assist the reconstruction of the country would avoid causing a chaotic situation which Germany and Italy could use as a pretext to invade the Iberian Peninsula and force the Allies to extend the theatre of war to the Mediterranean.⁶²⁴

⁶²⁰ For coverage of hunger in Spain after the Civil War, see the edited collection of chapters in Miguel Ángel del Arco Blanco (ed.), *Los «años del hambre». Historia y memoria de la posguerra franquista* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2020).

⁶²¹ TNA.FO371/24507, C42/40/41, Peterson to Halifax, 28/12/1939.

⁶²² TNA.FO371/23167, C20446/13378/41, Peterson to Halifax, 17/12/1939.

⁶²³ TNA.FO371/23167, C20510/13378/41, Williams minute, 18/12/1939.

⁶²⁴ Leitz, *Nazi Germany and Neutral Europe* pp. 125-126, 140; Nicholas Rankin, *Defending the Rock: How Gibraltar Defeated Hitler* (London: Faber and Faber, 2018), pp. 236-241; Payne, *Franco and Hitler*, pp. 100-107.

Perhaps more importantly, a loan allowed the British government to sustain its aim to divide neutral Spain from the Axis Powers. To adapt the loan to this objective, the British government attached a number of conditions to the £2,000,000 it proposed to give to the Franco regime. Firstly, Spain would use the money to purchase goods only from the sterling area, thereby not only strengthening Anglo-Spanish trade links but, because of the Allied blockade, also ensuring Spain's dependence on this trade. Secondly, the conditions of the loan stipulated that Spain limit its exports to Germany to goods which did not aid its war effort, such as minerals and metals, and prohibited the re-exportation of imported goods to any destination, regardless of their origin. Thirdly, the British government required Spain to disclose statistics of all imports and exports.⁶²⁵ With these requirements, which the Franco regime accepted when it concluded the War-Trade Agreement in March 1940, the British government sought not only to divide Franco from Hitler but to exert some control over Spain's economy and therefore ensure the continued neutrality of the Iberian Peninsula.⁶²⁶

If we are to appraise the War-Trade Agreement based on the extent to which it succeeded in its strategic aim of dividing Franco from the Axis, we can consider it as at least a partial success because it is clear that the agreement irritated the German government. On 1 June, after the German government had found time fully to consider the implications of the agreement for its relations with the Franco regime, for instance, the German Embassy sent the Spanish Foreign Ministry a firm note summarising its thoughts. Spain's agreement to prohibit the exportation to Germany of imported goods amounted to an

indirect assistance to the military action of Britain against Germany This benevolence, demonstrated by the Spanish government to the English government, is in contradiction with Articles 6 and 9 of the Hispano-German Treaty of Friendship, which stipulates that the German and Spanish governments confirm their desire that Spain and Germany assist and help each other economically in all respects and that if one of the parties finds itself compromised in

⁶²⁵ TNA.FO371/23167, C20650/13378/41, FO to Peterson, 23/12/1939.

⁶²⁶ As Leonardo Caruana de las Cagigas has argued, for Britain political interests came before economic ones, while for the Franco regime it was the reverse. Exactly how much influence the War Trade Agreement had on Franco's attitude towards neutrality is difficult to judge, but it is clear it was an important factor, see 'Las implicaciones políticas de las relaciones comerciales entre España y Gran Bretaña durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial: comentarios al acuerdo de 18 de marzo de 1940', *Hispania*, 51.79 (1991), 1043-1073.

complications of war with a third power, the other party will avoid all action in political, military and economic terrain that could prejudice the other party of favour its adversary.⁶²⁷

In regards to the Franco regime's promise to provide the British government with figures detailing its imports and exports, the German Embassy asked that figures relating to trade between Spain and Germany remain off this list.⁶²⁸

Although the conclusion of the War-Trade Agreement demonstrated Franco's desire to benefit from his position of neutrality, it fell short of achieving a tangible change in Spain's public manifestations of support for the Axis. Indeed, the day after the conclusion of the agreement, the *ABC Madrid* dedicated its cover story to the meeting between Hitler and Mussolini at the Brenner Pass and the rekindling of the Axis alliance accompanied by a full-page image of the two dictators standing side by side. The newspaper provided only a short, factual overview of the conclusion of the agreement hidden away on page twelve.⁶²⁹ On 2 April, Peterson reflected on the celebrations taking place in Spain to commemorate Franco's victory in the Civil War and noted how such events still served as public demonstrations of identification with the Axis Powers. 'One of the features of the numerous ceremonies which have marked the anniversaries of the entry into Madrid and the official end of the war', he said, 'has been renewed division of diplomatic representatives on certain occasions into sheep and goats'⁶³⁰ This was partly because the Franco regime knew its present policy would enable it to continue benefiting from Britain's policy. The Marquis de los Arcos, for example, wrote a report on discussions of Spain and the War Trade Agreement in the House of Commons in late April. Some Opposition MPs had raised the issue of the ongoing political reprisals in Spain but Rab Butler commented that there was nothing the British government could do. De los Arcos interpreted the government's attitude as satisfactory because 'it shows the interest which this government has in continuing to be friendly towards us'.⁶³¹

⁶²⁷ AGA.82/3973/15, Germany Embassy (Madrid) to Beigbeder, 1/6/1940.

⁶²⁸ Britain's negotiations with Italy in late 1939 and early 1940 provoked a similar reaction. In response to reports that Italy was going to sell aircraft engines to the French air force, for instance, the German government complained that Rome was engaging in negotiations with Germany's enemies. Amadeo Giannini, Director of Italy's Commercial Affairs Department, had earlier warned that negotiations with Britain would complicate relations with Berlin, especially because of the Pact of Steel signed in May 1939 which prohibited either party from engaging in such negotiations with the other's adversary, see Mallett, 'The Anglo-Italian War Trade Negotiations', pp. 153-154.

⁶²⁹ 'Una entrevista histórica' & 'Acuerdo sobre el régimen de pagos con Inglaterra', *ABC Madrid*, 19/3/1940. This was simply a repetition of the official note which the regime gave to the press, see AGA.82/5692/1, 'Nota para la prensa', 18/3/1940.

⁶³⁰ TNA.FO371/24508, C4948/40/41, Peterson to Halifax, 2/4/1940

⁶³¹ AGA.54/6707, Marquis de los Arcos to Beigbeder, 26/4/1940.

The shortcomings of the War-Trade Agreement ensured the British government would keep the goal of ensuring Spain's neutrality central to its approach to the Franco regime, particularly as reports began to emerge of Mussolini's intention to declare war against the Allies. Although the Foreign Office was not aware of it, after the German invasion of Scandinavia Mussolini informed Franco that Italy would soon declare war against the Allies.⁶³² By late April, the Foreign Office was frequently receiving reports that Italy would soon join the war and this naturally raised concerns about how Franco might respond to a declaration of Italian belligerency. Roger Makins, Head of the Foreign Office's Central Department, considered the situation in a minute on 18 April and noted that although relations with Spain were not yet satisfactory, there was hope that Britain could make further progress. He went on to observe that even though Spain neither wanted to join the war nor was in a political, military or economic position to do so, the British government could not afford to ignore the fact that Franco might follow Mussolini:

But if Italy comes in there will be strong pressure on Spain that her lead should be followed. The Spanish Government may be forced to enter the war. This would be most serious for us. It is only necessary to point out that the whole of our European supplies of iron ore and mercury would be cut off. The effect on Portugal would be disastrous. It is therefore absolutely vital to the successful prosecution of the war that everything possible should be done to prevent Spain becoming a belligerent.⁶³³

Accordingly, the limits of appeasement did not lead the Foreign Office to consider abandoning the policy but rather to maintain it and make it more effective.

The uncertainty surrounding Franco's potential response to Italian belligerency highlights how the British government possessed little room for manoeuvre once it exhausted the limits of its economic power unless it was willing to abandon its goal of maintaining cordial relations with Spain. Indeed, if Spain were to join the war against Britain, the Foreign Office would have to consider whether to continue to use the War-Trade Agreement to induce Franco to remain neutral or apply economic pressure to force him to realise the dangers of abandoning his neutral position. Although both had the potential for success, they also risked either alienating Franco and pushing him into belligerency or bolstering Spain's economy only for Franco later to declare war against

⁶³² Ros Agudo, *La guerra secreta*, p. 139.

⁶³³ TNA.FO371/24510, C5924/75/41, Makins minute, 18/4/1940.

the Allies once he no longer required British economic assistance. A minute Williams wrote on 26 April about these concerns is worth quoting at length:

Up to the present we have endeavoured, through the generous commercial agreements we have made with Spain, to give every assistance towards Spanish reconstruction, in the hope of showing the Spanish Government that their true interests lie in co-operation with the Allies and so to encourage them to maintain their policy of neutrality. This policy assumes that, having once seen the benefits of co-operation with the Allies, Spain would be both willing and able to maintain her neutrality. Developments in Norway, however, have shown how much the Germans are able to undermine the internal position in neutral countries, and the presence in Spain of many Germans and Italians in key positions as well as known anti-Ally elements in the government itself raises the question whether General Franco will be able to maintain his neutrality against the wishes of the Italians and Germans, and so whether a strengthening of the Spanish economy may not redound to our own disadvantage at a moment to be chosen by our enemy. On the other hand, to withhold economic assistance might only precipitate the overthrow of the Government or even convert the Government itself to a belief in the inevitability of war.⁶³⁴

This was typical of British attitudes towards Spain and it is representative of how both the Foreign Office and government believed that, while their approach to the Franco regime had its limitations, it at least made maintaining neutrality beneficial. Ironically, it was the shortcomings of the policy pursued towards Spain during the last few years that convinced the British government of its continued viability.

Franco Abandons Neutrality

Despite the willingness of the British government to accept that there was no viable alternative to its policy towards Spain, the ascension of Winston Churchill to the role of Prime Minister in May 1940 naturally caused concern for the Franco regime. During the 1930s Churchill had shone out as a vocal critic of the appeasement of Hitler and Mussolini, and Alba also mistakenly considered him to have been a supporter of the Republic during the Civil War.⁶³⁵ For instance, when Alba met with

⁶³⁴ TNA.FO371/24508, C6121/40/41, Williams minute, 26/4/1940.

⁶³⁵ Parker, *Churchill and Appeasement*, pp. 116-137. Churchill was initially influenced by the reports of the atrocities committed in the Republican zone early on in the Civil War but he believed non-intervention was the only realistic policy from a strategic point of view for the British government. When he first met Pablo de Azcárate, he refused to shake hands with the Spanish ambassador, instead turning away and ‘mumbling between his teeth, “blood, blood...”’

him on 1 April, he said Churchill suggested that it might now be time for a political amnesty in Spain. Alba retorted that this was not yet possible because many Republican supporters still needed to repent for the murder of '400,000' people during the Civil War.⁶³⁶ Interestingly, when Alba was assessing the changes to the Cabinet in May, he referred to this conversation when trying to give Beigbeder an idea of what to expect from the new Prime Minister in terms of his attitude towards Spain.

Alba assessed how negative or positive the changes within the Cabinet were through the lens of whether ministers had a favourable or unfavourable attitude towards Franco during the Civil War. On 14 May, for example, Halifax and Butler assured Alba that the political changes in London might even lead to an improvement in Anglo-Spanish relations but Alba was not convinced. As he told Beigbeder,

It is difficult to know if the supposition of the leaders of the Foreign Office will be correct, because both Halifax and Butler were sympathisers with our cause and this perhaps influences their judgement. Personally, I would prefer to abstain from giving my opinion until the new ministers show their true attitudes with their actions, as the past of some of them, such as Eden and Sinclair, not even to mention the socialists, cannot inspire in us much confidence. It both disgusts and concerns me to see the return to the government the representatives of the Judeo-Masonic influences, so prominent in Baldwin's government and after some difficulty eventually eliminated from Chamberlain's.⁶³⁷

Accordingly, the Franco regime remained suspicious of the British government because of the resentment it felt for the policy it had pursued during the Civil War, and the latter felt forced into continuing to make amends for non-intervention. It is perhaps worth pointing out at this stage that Alba seemed to view past British attitudes in light of the displays of sympathy he saw in the present. As we noted in chapter four, for instance, Alba judged Halifax to be hostile towards the rebels in the summer of 1937. However, as Halifax adjusted his attitude towards the Civil War as Foreign

see Azcárate, *Mi embajada en Londres*, p. 35. Later in the conflict he became more critical of the rebels because of their relations with Germany and Italy, see Dorothy Boyd Rush, 'Winston Churchill and the Spanish Civil War', *Social Science*, 54.2 (1979), 86-92; Emilio Sáenz-Francés San Baldomero, 'Chimerical Thoughts? Winston Churchill and Spain', in Raanan Rein and Joan Maria Thomàs (eds.), *Spain 1936: Year Zero* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2018), pp. 217-231. Churchill wrote about Spain in the first volume of the *Second World War*, see *The Gathering Storm*, p. 190-204.

⁶³⁶ AGA.54/6707, Alba to Beigbeder, 1/4/1940.

⁶³⁷ AGA.82/3103/17, Alba to Beigbeder, 14/5/1940.

Secretary under Chamberlain and in light of the fact that Franco's victory appeared increasingly inevitable, Alba appears to have interpreted this as sympathy because of the passive attitude Halifax later adopted when dealing with the Franco regime.

Despite finding some signs for optimism, Alba also exacerbated any anxiety that the Franco regime felt as a result of Churchill's appointment. In fact, Alba even went as far to suggest that Churchill could have been part of a political conspiracy which ousted Chamberlain because of the policy he had pursued towards issues such as the Spanish Civil War:

The substitution of Chamberlain for Churchill is the result of a political intrigue prepared by the Opposition with the help of dissident Conservative elements to which Churchill may not be a stranger. The excuse has been the failure in Norway, and to consummate this manoeuvre there has been a debate in the House during which all the blots and political passions so common in assemblies elected by universal suffrage came to the fore Citizens in all countries attribute their failings to their governments, but the latest crisis shows an unusual incongruity in England. Labour members, Liberals and some Conservatives have censured Chamberlain for refusing openly to help the Reds during the Spanish war, for the Munich agreements, and for not intervening with sufficient forces in Norway.⁶³⁸

The way in which Alba presented what became known as the 'Norway debate' of 7-9 May to his government is interesting. Few Members of Parliament actually mentioned Spain during these debates, and the one occasion Alba referred to was in Liberal MP Lloyd George's vicious attack on Chamberlain's policy of appeasement. This was a tentative link between the political changes that occurred in London and British attitudes towards Spain, but for some reason Alba fanned the flames of any paranoia that may have existed in Madrid regarding these changes.⁶³⁹

In spite of his criticisms of appeasement during the 1930s, the importance of Spanish neutrality led even to Churchill becoming an appeaser. This is another demonstration not only of the continuity in British policy towards Spain during these years, but also the extent to which even the most vehement of anti-appeasers saw little room for manoeuvre due to Spain's geostrategic

⁶³⁸ AGA.82/3103/17, Alba to Beigbeder, 14/5/1940.

⁶³⁹ See HC debates, vol. 360, 7, 8 & 9/5/1940. It is possible that Alba was aware that Azcárate remained in contact with Lloyd George during the Second World War and asked him to use his influence with the British government to bring about changes in British policy towards Spain, U.K. Parliamentary Archives, London [UKPA], Lloyd George Papers, Correspondence, G/1/13: Azcárate. Lloyd George also stayed in contact with José Ignacio de Lizaso, the Basque government's delegate in London, who frequently passed on information about political developments in post-civil war Spain, UKPA.LG/G/9/12/1-2.

importance. Among Churchill's first acts of appeasing Franco was the appointment of Sir Samuel Hoare as the new Ambassador to Spain. The impact of this appointment is clear in Alba's assessment:

The decision of this government to appoint to appoint as ambassador at Madrid a person of such prestige and social and political character of Sir Samuel Hoare is indisputable proof of the importance given by Great Britain to our government and its position in the game of European politics, as well as a symbol of the desire to pay maximum tribute to National Spain. If England wants to erase the past and return to more friendly relations with our *patria*, when Labour ministers form an important part of the government, it proves further that these ministers have been defeated in the positions they maintained until recently by those who were sympathetic towards the regime that saved Spain.⁶⁴⁰

The Spanish press also welcomed the appointment of a new ambassador. The Barcelona newspaper *La Vanguardia Española*, for instance, noted that 'Never, not even in the age of our Empire, has a person of such prestige represented England in Madrid, for Sir Samuel is one of the eminent figures of British politics, having been mentioned many times as a potential prime minister'.⁶⁴¹

Historians have noted that Churchill sent Hoare to Spain 'to get rid of him' but this view overlooks why the British government withdrew Maurice Peterson from Madrid.⁶⁴² Hoare's support for Chamberlain's appeasement policy during the 1930s meant that the Labour ministers who entered Churchill's government wanted him out of the Cabinet. Furthermore, Hoare and Churchill had had disagreements in the past. However, as we have seen, Spain's neutrality was not a minor issue for the British government and the role of Ambassador at Madrid was not one which it took lightly, let alone one from which it would remove an effective ambassador merely for political convenience. The fact that the British government withdrew Peterson suggests it believed he had exhausted any diplomatic currency he had with the Franco regime and was therefore less effective in ensuring Spain's continued neutrality in the event that Italy joined the war. There is certainly reason to believe this. According to a letter Eccles had written to his wife Sybil in January

⁶⁴⁰ AGA.54/6707, Alba to Beigbeder, 20/5/1940.

⁶⁴¹ 'El nuevo embajador inglés en Madrid', *La Vanguardia Española*, 29/5/1940. British newspapers also noted the satisfaction expressed in the Spanish press at Hoare's appointment. See, for example, 'Spain and Sir S. Hoare', *Daily Telegraph*, 27/5/1940. On Alba's comments on the reaction in the British press to Hoare's appointment, see AGA.54/6707, Alba to Beigbeder, 27/5/1940.

⁶⁴² Examples in Wigg, *Churchill and Spain*, pp. 7-8; Burns, *Papa Spy*, pp. 83-85.

1940, Peterson had ‘a bad temper, and is outrageously sardonic’. Moreover, Eccles claimed Peterson ‘loathes the Spaniards’.⁶⁴³ The Duke of Alba was aware as early as 15 April that the Foreign Office would replace Peterson, although he did not know who would take his place.⁶⁴⁴

Exactly how the Franco regime felt about Peterson is unclear, although, as we have seen, he failed to penetrate the diplomatic inner circle and Franco at least never warmed to him. It is possible, however, that the Marquis del Moral, who had been largely responsible for the shift in Franco’s foreign policy in the spring and summer of 1937, had something to do with Peterson’s withdrawal. In October 1940, for instance, he wrote a report on British propaganda in Spain which eventually made its way to Churchill’s desk.⁶⁴⁵ Peterson, apparently, was ‘the most disastrous thing’ the British government did in its attempts to weaken German influence in Spain and ‘incompetence and stupidity’ defined his time as ambassador. According to the report, Moral ‘made repeated representations to political friends’ in Britain to have Peterson dismissed, although exactly whom he approached is unclear.⁶⁴⁶ Moral was in contact with both Halifax and Churchill during the Civil War so it is possible that he was able to persuade one of them to make this change. Indeed, Halifax noted in his diary that Peterson’s withdrawal was due to the fact that the Spanish government did not like him and Hoare was therefore better suited to improve Anglo-Spanish relations at such a crucial moment.⁶⁴⁷

Although the appointment of Hoare demonstrated friendly intentions on Britain’s part, it also ran the risk of reaffirming the belief in Spain that Britain was verging towards desperation against the unstoppable German *Wehrmacht*. Hoare was, after all, a notorious appeaser who had been a fervent supporter of the rebels during the Civil War.⁶⁴⁸ Captain Alan Hillgarth, now British Naval Attaché at Madrid and a good friend of Churchill’s, recognised this danger. When Hoare arrived

⁶⁴³ David to Sybil, 6/1/1940, *By Safe Hand: Letters of Sybil and David Eccles, 1939-1942* (London: Bodley Head, 1983), pp. 51-52.

⁶⁴⁴ AGA.54/6707, Alba to Beigbeder, 15/4/1940. Alba predicted that sir Horace Rumbold, the retired former Ambassador at Berlin, would take Peterson’s place. Hoare turned out to be the better choice and certainly much more flattering to the Franco regime, not least because Rumbold died a year later in May 1941.

⁶⁴⁵ At this stage Moral was receiving money from the Ministry of Information as an informant, although this was short-lived as the information he was able to gather from Spain was disappointing, see TNA.FO371/24526.

⁶⁴⁶ WDA.Hi2/217, Moral’s report entitled ‘Notes on Propaganda in Spain’, dated October 1940. Peterson claimed in his memoirs that his withdrawal was due to the entry of Labour ministers into the Cabinet who demanded Hoare’s dismissal and therefore the government simply had to find a new role for him, see Peterson, *Both Sides of the Curtain*, pp. 228-229.

⁶⁴⁷ BIA.Hickleton/A 7/8/4, Halifax diary entry, 12/5/1940; A 7/8/4 & 17/5/1940.

⁶⁴⁸ Smyth, *Diplomacy and Strategy of Survival*, pp. 26-28.

in Spain, he asked Hillgarth to write a report advising how the British government should conduct its relations with the Franco regime in light of recent developments in Europe. Although he did not criticise Peterson specifically, Hillgarth's detailed description of the Embassy's inefficiency and disorganisation made it clear that Hoare would radically have to change the way it worked. Hillgarth's criticism also extended to the Foreign Office, whose policy he claimed was 'to hand out anything in return for neutrality'. This, he said, was 'the behaviour of a beaten child. We should get neither respect nor neutrality'. Hillgarth wanted to depoliticise economic relations with Spain and treat trade 'as if it were a purely commercial matter'. Aside from this and reforming the Embassy, Hillgarth recommended a new way of dealing with the Franco regime:

[We must] present to the Spanish Government a decided policy, not a vague or hesitant one. The only thing the Spaniard respects is power, though he prefers it politely expressed. For some time we have treated Spain very stupidly. We are hated here – not as individuals but as a nation – by the majority of the people, and we are distrusted.⁶⁴⁹

In this sense, Hillgarth recognised that Britain's policy towards Spain during the last four years had conceded too much influence to Franco and he wanted to devise an approach that would recover some of this power for the British government.

A demonstration of strength was particularly important to counteract the shifts in Spanish attitudes towards the war in Europe. As the Spanish press widely reported German military successes, many Spaniards became much more vocal in their anti-British attitudes and began to envision a future in which Spain would not only have an empire, but in which it would also take back Gibraltar.⁶⁵⁰ When Hoare arrived in Madrid, for instance, he noted how crowds had been patrolling the streets in the neighbourhood of the British embassy shouting '*Gibraltar español!*'⁶⁵¹ Even Lord Phillimore, President of the Friends of National Spain, wrote to Alba to protest against the tone of the Spanish press and its attitude towards Gibraltar.⁶⁵² Accordingly, Hoare took Hillgarth's advice and said he would have to 'start from scratch'. When Hoare met Franco for the

⁶⁴⁹ CUL.Templewood/XIII.2, Hillgarth to Hoare, 2/6/1940.

⁶⁵⁰ Stockey, *Gibraltar*, pp. 137-158

⁶⁵¹ Samuel Hoare, *Ambassador on Special Mission* (London: Collins, 1946), p. 21; A Falangist newspaper, for instance, published an article on 16 July asserting that 'Spain needs an Empire' and called on readers to endure the sacrifices that would be necessary to obtain one, see 'El Imperio retórico', *Arriba*, 16/7/1940.

⁶⁵² AGA.54/6707, Phillimore to Alba, 15/6/1940.

first time, he realised that a demonstration of British confidence in victory was one of the few options left for the British government:

As to the course of the war, it was clear from almost everything that [Franco] said, that he regarded an Allied victory as entirely impossible. ‘Why’, he asked, ‘do you not end the war now? You can never win it. All that will happen if the war is allowed to continue, will be the destruction of European civilisation’. For my part, I left him in no doubt as to our determination to go on to the end, and as to our certainty of ultimate victory; and I reminded him that there were moments in the Spanish Civil War when his fortunes were at the lowest ebb, and when none the less he would have repudiated any suggestion of peace or surrender. We parted, he, completely blind to the moral and material strength of the British Empire; I, astonished at his unshakable complacency and at his evident conviction that he had been marked out by Providence to save his country and to take a leading part in the reconstruction of a new world.⁶⁵³

As we can see, despite his reputation as an appeaser and rebel sympathiser during the Civil War, Hoare immediately adopted a firm attitude in his dealings with the Franco regime in attempt to remedy the overly passive attitude which the British government had maintained towards Spain.

Although Hoare brought with him a reinvigorated approach to dealing with the Franco regime, the British government did not discard its policy of appeasement. The British government ensured, for instance, that the War Trade Agreement remained financially generous enough to keep Spain neutral. However, the British government did continue to break its own rule of non-intervention in Spanish affairs in an attempt to restrain Serrano Suñer’s enthusiasm for the Axis Powers. Indeed, to complement the benevolent but firm attitude of his diplomatic mission, Hoare, along with Hillgarth and Churchill and in collaboration with the millionaire Juan March, began to identify Spanish generals within the regime whom they could bribe. The British government made millions of pounds of public funds available for this covert operation of targeting generals whom it considered determined to maintain Spanish neutrality.⁶⁵⁴ Accordingly, by the summer of 1940, the British government had not only institutionalised the economic appeasement of the Franco

⁶⁵³ Hoare, *Ambassador on Special Mission*, p. 48.

⁶⁵⁴ Approximately \$10 million of public money was made available for this bribery operation. Among the recipients were Franco’s brother, Nicolás Franco, Minister of War General Varela, General Aranda, recently appointed as director of the Escuela Superior del Ejército, and former Air Force chief General Kindelán. See Ángel Viñas, *Sobornos. De cómo Churchill y March compraron a los generales de Franco* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2016); Michael Alpert, ‘Operaciones secretas inglesas en España durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial’, *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma* (2002), 455-472; Ros Agudo, *La guerra secreta de Franco*, pp. 146-152; Wigg, *Churchill and Spain*, pp. 9-15.

regime, but it had also begun to commit vast sums of money to undermine Axis influence by strengthening the resolve of those who recognised the potentially disastrous consequences of taking Spain into the Second World War.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the initial aim of non-intervention to encourage Spain's benevolent neutrality in a future European conflict failed and left the British government with few alternative options in the context of the Second World War. Indeed, by the summer of 1940, British policy had set the power dynamics in Anglo-Spanish relations in Franco's favour to such an extent that Churchill, who had spent much of the 1930s criticising the British government's policy of general appeasement, maintained the policy of appeasing Franco once he replaced Chamberlain as Prime Minister.

The geostrategic importance of the Iberian Peninsula and Franco's ideological affiliation with the Axis Powers pushed the British government to maintain a benevolent policy towards Franco in exchange for his position in the Second World War going no further than benevolent neutrality towards the Axis. To ensure Franco did not enter the war on the side of the Axis, the British government avoided actions that would provoke his hostility, induced the British press to adopt a more favourable attitude towards Spain, negotiated a generous War Trade Agreement, and maintained all of this for the remainder of the conflict. In the meantime, Franco, despite being economically and militarily weak after three years of destructive civil war and in desperate need of economic assistance from abroad, was able to get all of this from the British government while maintaining an openly pro-Axis foreign policy and obstinate attitude in his relations with Britain. Indeed, Franco's transition from neutrality to non-belligerency in June 1940 did not suggest to the British government that it should no longer appease Franco, but rather convinced it that it needed to maintain this policy. Despite its obvious shortcomings, British policy had at least not pushed Franco into throwing in his lot with the Axis completely.

We can also consider British policy towards Spain during the Second World War as a direct continuation of that established in response to the outbreak of Civil War in 1936 in the sense that it sought to drive a wedge between Franco and the Axis Powers. Although, like the aim of ensuring

benevolent neutrality, this was not as successful as the British government would have hoped, the policy of non-intervention at least did not push Spain over the brink into joining the Second World War. As we have seen, this allowed the British government to contrast its attitude towards issues such as the Nazi-Soviet Pact and Soviet invasion of Finland with German policy and try to curry favour with Franco. Moreover, as the Franco regime seems genuinely to have resented the British government for the policy of non-intervention, the fact that it was not a policy that supported the Republic left room to make amends. As we have seen in the case of the War Trade Agreement, the British government was able to entice Franco with a market for trade and a loan, and use material incentives to pursue the aim of dividing Spain and Germany.

Ultimately, the British government tried to exchange its neutrality during the Civil War for Franco's neutrality during the Second World War. The logic of non-intervention, and the policy of appeasement into which it evolved, was to convince Franco that he had options other than becoming a minor partner of the Axis. This policy empowered Franco because not only was he able to pressure the British government into adopting an increasingly friendly attitude towards Spain, but he was able to do so while continuing to maintain an open preference for the Axis Powers. Of course, any British policy had to contend with Franco's desire to create a new Spanish empire. German military successes in the spring and summer of 1940 seemed to bring this within reach and, on 19 June, the Spanish Ambassador at Berlin, Antonio Magaz, gave the German Foreign Ministry a memorandum communicating the Franco regime's willingness to declare war against Britain if it received several African territories and military supplies.⁶⁵⁵ With this in mind, it is worth pondering whether a different policy during and after the Civil War would have convinced Franco to throw in his lot with the Axis when their victory seemed inevitable. It is perhaps also worth considering whether supporting the Republic in its attempts to suppress the military rebellion in the first place would have produced a more favourable outcome for Britain. However, viewed strictly from the British perspective and the constraints under which it formulated its response to the Civil War, this was not a realistic policy.

⁶⁵⁵ Viñas, *Franco, Hitler y el estallido de la guerra*, p. 469. These were the same demands Franco made when he met Hitler at Hendaye in October 1940, see Ros Agudo, *La gran tentación*, pp. 243-247.

CONCLUSION

Perfidious or Timorous Albion?

By December 1944, Franco had no choice but to accept that the war had definitively turned in favour of the Allies and that Germany's defeat was only a matter of time. Naturally, he wondered how his own sympathy for the Axis Powers throughout the Second World War might now affect Spain's future relations with the British government. Franco wrote to his Ambassador at London, the Duke of Alba, and instructed him to ask Churchill what the future held for Anglo-Spanish relations. Churchill decided to write Franco personally and clarify his attitude towards Spain. He began by noting that Spain had of course not entered the war, and for this he was grateful. However, he pointed out occasions on which Franco had supported the Axis Powers and given speeches which 'disparaged this country ... and spoke of their defeat as being both desirable and inevitable'.⁶⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Churchill made it clear to Franco that he desired friendly relations in the future but warned that Spain would be a pariah state in the post-war world.⁶⁵⁷ This contradictory message was representative of the dichotomy in British policy towards Spain: the geostrategic importance of the Iberian Peninsula demanded a degree of tolerance on Britain's part, regardless of whether it liked the regime that was in power in Spain.

Once German defeat was inevitable, the policy of appeasing Franco ended because he was no longer a threat to Britain or of any use to Germany. The tables had turned in Anglo-Spanish relations. During the Civil War, Franco's military successes bolstered his position in this diplomatic relationship, but now the military successes of the Allies removed that advantage. After

⁶⁵⁶ CAC.CHAR/20/138b, Churchill to Franco, 20/12/1944.

⁶⁵⁷ On Franco's exclusion from the peace settlements and the formation of the United Nations, see Preston, *Franco*, pp. 506-561.

his victory, Franco made clear his resentment for the policy of non-intervention during the Civil War and induced the British government to make amends for it, but now it was the British government that could vent its resentment for a policy of supposed Spanish neutrality. The power dynamics in Anglo-Spanish relations, which had benefited Franco since 1936, shifted and allowed the British government to re-assert itself as the dominant state.

Historians have written much about the policy of general appeasement but carried out substantially less work on how this policy trickled down and affected the thinking of British policymakers towards relations with other states and how, in doing so, it altered power dynamics within these bilateral relationships. The case of Spain provides useful insights into appeasement more broadly, particularly when it comes to a state handing over power and influence to a weaker subsidiary which, if inclined, can then incorporate this power and influence into its foreign policy for its own ends. This thesis has focused on Spain to show how the policy of non-intervention represented an *ad hoc* but predictable response to what was supposed to be a temporary crisis and gave way to a policy of appeasement which gradually conceded influence to Franco in order to drive a wedge between him and the Axis Powers and sought to ensure his neutrality in a future war in Europe. Franco's military successes, his close diplomatic relations with the German and Italian governments, the geostrategic importance of the Iberian Peninsula and, most importantly, his own style of foreign policy ensured this remained in place not only for the entirety of the Civil War but during the Second World War too. Indeed, throughout this period, power dynamics in Anglo-Spanish relations allowed Franco to push his luck with the British government on several occasions without any real fear of retaliation. While the British government and Foreign Office concluded that their policy towards Spain was not ideal, they could, and did, take comfort in the belief that it at least prevented or made less likely Spain's entry into the Second World War.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁸ Britain's policy also had some unintended benefits. For instance, Operation Mincemeat, the deception operation which involved creating a fake identity for a homeless man found dead in London whose corpse, disguised as an intelligence officer, was eventually discovered by a Spanish sardine fisherman on a beach in 1943, arguably changed the course of the Second World War. The corpse possessed fake Allied invasion plans which tricked Hitler into diverting troops away from Sicily, making the actual Allied invasions plans to invade there easier to carry out and re-take Western Europe from German domination. The operation depended on a pro-Axis Spain so that Spanish authorities would pass on the information to the Germans. On Operation Mincemeat, see Denis Smyth, *Deathly Deception: The Real Story of Operation Mincemeat* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Ewen Montagu, one of the masterminds of the operation, later wrote an account of it: *The Man Who Never Was: World War II's Boldest Counter-Intelligence Operation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Not all historians have been convinced of the importance of Mincemeat. Klaus-Jürgen Müller, for example, argued documents possessed no information that was not already considered in German military planning and Mincemeat therefore had 'only a temporary and

Rather than simply a policy at the heart of Anglo-Italian or Anglo-German relations, this thesis has presented appeasement as a framework within which the British government formulated its foreign policy in the 1930s. Appeasement was a policy of a government that hoped for the best and prepared for the worst and, as we have seen, both the government and Foreign Office sought ways of reducing the number of potential enemies if the appeasement of Germany ultimately failed. This was the primary motivation for appeasing Mussolini. While Fascist Italy alone was only a minor threat to Britain's position in the Mediterranean, Mussolini's hostility at a time when Britain was at war with Germany and possibly Japan would overstretch British military and naval resources. This is important to bear in mind when considering whether appeasement policies can be successful. The failure to appease Hitler did not deter the British government from maintaining that policy towards Mussolini until he entered the war in the summer of 1940. Similarly, the failure to prevent Italian belligerency did not deter the British government from maintaining a similar policy towards Spain. In fact, Mussolini's declaration of war reinforced the need to keep Spain neutral.

It was with the importance of restricting the theatre of a future war in mind that the British government formulated its policy towards Spain in the interwar period. As the thesis has shown, between 1931 and 1936, the Foreign Office viewed the social and political polarisation in Spain within the broader context of Europe's ideological polarisation. By the outbreak of war in July 1936, non-intervention was a natural extension to Britain's goal of general appeasement. With knowledge that Mussolini was considering getting involved in the Spanish conflict within days of the rebellion, a policy of non-intervention offered the best means of avoiding diplomatic or even military confrontations with Italy. As early as August, the Foreign Office argued that Britain's primary aim in its Spanish policy should be to reduce the number of potential enemies and aim to ensure that whatever regime emerged from the conflict did not adopt an anti-British foreign policy. Later that month, the Chiefs of Staff reinforced this idea and told the British government that its policy towards the Civil War should be one that would ensure Spain's benevolent neutrality in a future European war.

complementary effect, if any, on the German High Command', see 'A German Perspective on Allied Deception Operations in the Second World War', *Diplomacy & National Security*, 2.3 (1987), 301-326 (p. 308).

By viewing British non-intervention in this way, ideological prejudices against the Spanish Republic are not only unnecessary to explain the policy but also fall short of offering a satisfactory explanation. That is not to say that such prejudices did not exist in the Foreign Office or within the British government in some form or other. As the thesis acknowledged, these perceptions of the Spanish government did exist to some extent but we also need to consider British perceptions of Spain within the broader context of ideological polarisation in Europe and, more specifically, within the context of the growing threat of fascism. Indeed, as the Civil War progressed, the British government said little about the potential for a communist regime to take root in Spain but grew increasingly concerned about a rebel victory and the type of foreign policy Franco would adopt in the event of his victory. Accordingly, the policy of non-intervention evolved into a policy of appeasement because of British weakness in confronting the European dictator states of the 1930s. The British government abandoned the Spanish Republic to its fate not because of its ideological outlook or ability to govern but because it was a small price to pay to preserve peace and maintain friendly relations with the Franco regime.

Examining Anglo-Spanish relations within this framework also shows how the target state of an appeasement policy can utilise it to extract benefits from the appeasing state. The thesis sheds light on the early conception of Franco regime's foreign policy and the learning curve Franco had to climb to establish himself as a statesman on the international stage. As we have seen, during the first year of the conflict Franco made little effort to maintain any kind of diplomatic relationship with the British government, even to the point of denying British consuls diplomatic privileges and denying the British government the opportunity to appoint new representatives in territory under rebel control. By the summer of 1937, Franco had come to acknowledge that Britain was not a state he could afford to shun completely and acquiesced to pressure and appointed the Duke of Alba as a diplomatic agent through which he could maintain informal diplomatic links with the British government. However, Franco did not fail to notice the passivity of the British government and exploited these diplomatic links to assert himself within that diplomatic relationship. Indeed, it became increasingly clear to Franco that the British government remained committed to the policy of non-intervention because it feared the possibility of Spain's incorporation into the Rome-Berlin Axis. This enabled Franco to make veiled threats about Spain's future foreign policy under his rule, bomb British merchant ships in the summer of 1938, have Chamberlain ask the Duke of Alba to 'approve' a statement he made on the issue in the House of Commons, and, by 1939, still find

himself in a position to dictate the terms of Britain's recognition. In this sense, the final step in the abandonment of the Republic in February 1939 was to Franco what Abyssinia was to Mussolini and what Austria and Czechoslovakia were to Hitler.

The thesis has also argued that it is more helpful to view British policy towards Spain during the 1930s and Second World War as a sustained strategic programme. The geostrategic importance of the Iberian Peninsula – particularly British control of Gibraltar – meant that it was in Britain's interests that a friendly government was in power in Spain. Accordingly, non-intervention became a means of ensuring this within the context of an uncertain Civil War. However, because the Civil War had the potential to produce a completely new type of regime in Spain, the 'Spanish problem' did not disappear with Franco's victory. In fact, the Spanish problem which the British government faced after his victory was exactly that which it had anticipated when it opted for a policy of non-intervention: a regime that might form part of an anti-British alliance with the fascist states. Accordingly, rather than viewing Anglo-Spanish relations in the Civil War and Second World War as isolated periods, the thesis has bridged the two. By doing so, it has shown how Franco continued to take advantage of the benefits which being a target of an appeasement policy gave him. After the Civil War and during the Second World War, he was able to maintain an openly pro-Axis foreign policy and construct his regime along semi-fascist lines while still enjoying the friendliness of the British government. Indeed, even as Spain suffered food shortages and was in desperate need of financial assistance from abroad for its economic reconstruction, Franco was able to resist British efforts to assert itself as the dominant partner in Anglo-Spanish relations and maintain an obstinate attitude.

Before concluding, it is worth assessing whether non-intervention was a failure or success. On the one hand, the aim of the policy was to ensure Spain's 'benevolent neutrality' in a future European conflict. As we have seen, the policy did not achieve this, although Spain technically remained out of the war even if it pushed the boundaries of neutrality. However, Franco seriously considered entering the war on the side of the Axis, made definite plans for how Spain would attack Gibraltar, and even provided Hitler with a list of conditions that would make Spanish belligerency worthwhile. Although we cannot definitively assess the impact British policy had on Spain, we can at least say that it created a context in which Franco could remain neutral for as long as was necessary before the Allies could turn the war in their favour and take the choice away from him.

Indeed, Franco had to show his gratitude to the Axis Powers for their help in securing his victory in the Civil War but an Allied policy of hostility towards his regime would have made it much more difficult to justify to Hitler and Mussolini Spain's continued neutrality. For the British government at least, from Stanley Baldwin to Neville Chamberlain to Winston Churchill, it could and frequently did reassure itself that the policy of non-intervention was a successful form of appeasement.

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