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Ensuring Benevolent Neutrality: The British Government's Appeasement of General Franco during the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939

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Abstract

This article examines the development of British non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). Previous studies have focused heavily on pro-rebel or anti-Republican sentiments among British officials in London and abroad, and often apply the term 'malevolent neutrality' to the motives behind the policy. However, utilising records from the National Archives as well as private papers, this article evaluates British non-intervention within the context of appeasement and demonstrates a clear link between the two policies. By examining British neutrality through the lens of appeasement, this study will enhance our understanding of British diplomacy in the 1930s and the links between non-intervention in Spain and the growing threat of fascism in Europe. It argues that the British Government adopted and maintained a policy of strict neutrality in order to avoid an escalation of the conflict and to place itself in a better position from which it could establish a good relationship with whichever side emerged victorious. As it became increasingly clear that the rebels were going to overthrow the Republic, the British Government began to tacitly appease General Franco in an attempt to avoid a hostile Spain in the build up to the Second World War.

Keywords: Appeasement; Non-Intervention; Neville Chamberlain; Franco; Anglo-Spanish Relations

Introduction

The 1930s in Spain were stained by political upheaval and violence. The downfall of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship in 1930, followed soon after by the abdication of Alfonso XIII and the proclamation of the Spanish Second Republic on 14 April 1931, set in motion the political polarisation that would ultimately lead to civil war in 1936. After six years of political instability, with the reforms of the Republic drilling fear into the Right and not going far enough for many of those on the Left, a military rebellion was launched on 17 July 1936 that aimed to quickly overthrow the Republican Government and put in its place a conservative government that looked after the interests of the Army, the Church and the landowners at the expense of the poorer sectors within Spanish society.[1] What was supposed to be a rapid military insurrection became three years of civil war entangling Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, the Soviet Union and thousands of international volunteers.

In the first few days of the conflict, it was not entirely clear what would become of the rebellion. The Republican Government managed to supress it in many major towns and cities, including Madrid, Valencia and Barcelona, and maintained control of major lines of communication and industry.[2] The British Government adopted a wait-and-see approach, but decided within a matter of days that it would not become involved in the conflict.[3] The French Government, on the other hand, initially planned to aid the Republic. However, after Leon Blum, the French Prime Minister, visited London between 23 and 25 July, French policy was altered to one of neutrality.[4] Stanley Baldwin, the British Prime Minister, reportedly told Blum

[1] Paul Preston, The Coming of the Spanish Civil War: Reform, Reaction and Revolution, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 1994) 74-160, 211-75; Julio Gil Pecharromán, Historia de la Segunda Republica Española, 1931-1936 (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2002), 161-196, 208-220.

[2] Anthony Beevor, The Battle for Spain: The Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939, revised edn. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006), 55-70.

[3] Cabinet Conclusions, 22 July 1936 [Kew, United Kingdom National Archives, Public Record Office] CAB 23/85/7; Michael Alpert, A New International History of the Spanish Civil War, 2nd edn. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 19.

[4] This change in policy was due partly to British pressure and to internal political problems in France, see Enrique Moradiellos, Neutralidad benévola: El Gobierno británico y la insurrección militar española de 1936 (Oviedo: Pentalfa, 1990) 211-13; David Carlton, 'Eden, Blum and the Origins of Non-Intervention', Journal of Contemporary History, 6, 3 (1971) 40-55; Glyn Stone, 'Britain, Non-Intervention and the Spanish Civil War', European Studies Review, 9 (1979) 129-149.

during the visit that if French intervention in Spain provoked a conflict with Italy, Britain would remain neutral.[5]

First and foremost, neutrality was perceived as the best means of preventing the conflict from escalating into a wider European war. Secondly, the British Government recognised the strategic importance of the Iberian Peninsula and the dangers of this being utilised by the fascist powers in the future. Utilising the peninsula would have been rendered easier if a government hostile to the British and friendly towards these fascist states came to power in Spain. A report issued by the British Chiefs of Staff in August 1936 stated that Britain's interests in the civil war were the maintenance of 'the territorial integrity of Spain and her possessions' and 'of such relations with any Spanish Government which may emerge from this conflict as will ensure benevolent neutrality in the event of our being engaged in a European war.'[6] To achieve this, an official Non-Intervention Agreement was readily accepted by the British when it was proposed by the French Government earlier in August, a week after Leon Blum's visit to London.[7] Anthony Eden, the British Foreign secretary, welcomed the proposal as the best means of avoiding 'any risk of the complications which might arise were assistance to be afforded from outside Spain to any of the parties engaged in the present conflict.'[8] This concept of ensuring benevolent neutrality became the central theme in Britain's developing programme of appeasement towards the Spanish rebels.

Despite being signatories of the Non-Intervention Agreement, the German and Italian Governments supplied aid to the rebels (who styled themselves as the Spanish Nationalists) throughout the conflict and helped to secure in early 1939 the victory of General Francisco Franco, who in October 1936 had become the leader of rebel Spain.[9] In the aforementioned

[5] Jill Edwards, The British Government & The Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939 (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1979), 16.

[6] Committee of Imperial Defence report, 26 Aug.1936, F[oreign] O[ffice Records] 371/20535, W 9708/62/41; Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee, 24 Aug. 1936, CAB 53/28.

[7] Alpert, 40-56; Before visiting London, the French Government had planned on aiding the Republic but subsequently decided against doing so.

[8] Eden to Cambon, 4 Aug. 1936, FO 371/20527, W 7504/62/41.

[9] On Italian intervention, see Paul Preston, 'Italy and Spain in Civil War and World War, 1936-1943', in Sebastian Balfour and Paul Preston (eds), Spain and the Great Powers in the Twentieth Century, (New York: Routledge, 1999) 151-184; John Coverdale, Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); on German intervention, see Christian Leitz, 'Nazi Germany and Francoist Spain, 1936-1945', in Sebastian Balfour and Paul Preston (eds), Spain and the Great Powers in the Twentieth Century, (New York: Routledge, 1999) 185-207; Stanley Payne, Franco and Hitler: Spain, Germany and World War Two (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 2008).

report issued by the Chiefs of Staff, any kind of alliance between Spain and Italy was considered to be detrimental to British interests and it stated that Italian intervention in support of the rebels 'would precipitate a major international crisis'.[10]

The literature on British policy in Spain has overwhelmingly argued that neutrality was adopted because of pro-rebel sympathies and fears that a victory for the Republican Government would result in a communist regime on the Iberian Peninsula. Thus starving the Republican Government of military aid would pave the way for a victory for the rebels and ensure the establishment of a regime in Spain that was more in line with British interests.[11] There were certainly many Conservatives that saw this as one benefit of the non-intervention policy, and it is true that since 1917 the potential spread of communism had been a constant source of anxiety for successive British Governments.[12] The evidence of a link between a more general fear of the spread of communism and a fear of a communist regime in Spain, and thus its influence on British policy, however, is somewhat limited.[13]

[10] CAB 53/28, 24 Aug. 1936.

[11] This is the most prominent interpretation among historians who have written on Britain and the Spanish Civil War, for examples, see Edwards, British Government; Maria Thomas, 'The Front Line of Albion's Perfidy. Inputs into the Making of Policy Towards Spain: The Racism and Snobbery of Norman King', International Journal of Iberian Studies, 20, 2 (2007) 105-127 (105-108); Angel Viñas, La Soledad de la Republica: El abandono de las democracias y el viraje hacia la Unión Soviética (Barceolna: Critica, 2006), 64-70; Enrique Moradiellos, La perfidia de Albión: el gobierno británico y la guerra civil española (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1996). Others have focused on the idea of 'perfidious Albion', but have not necessarily argued in favour of the 'malevolent neutrality' interpretation, see Anderson, Peter, 'Scandal and Diplomacy: The Use of Military Tribunals to Keep the Francoist Repression Afloat During the Civil War', in Mass Killings and Violence in Spain, 1936-1952, ed. by Peter Anderson and Miguel Angel del Arco Blanco (New York: Routledge, 2015) 72-89; Glyn Stone, 'Britain, France and the Spanish Problem', in Decisions and Diplomacy: Essays in Twentieth Century International History, ed. by Dick Richardson and Glyn Stone (London: Routledge, 1994) 96-120. For good overviews of non-intervention in appeasement studies, see R.A.C Parker, Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1993); Paul Doerr, British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

[12] N.J. Crowson, Facing Fascism: The Conservative Party and the European Dictators, 1935-1940 (London: Routledge, 1997) pp. 36-27, 78-80; Lawrence R Pratt, East of Malta, *West of Suez: Britain's Mediterranean* Crisis, 1936-1939 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 74.

[13] It is true that both Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain possessed such fears. However, British policy in Spain was determined more by the Foreign Office than by Baldwin himself. See Anthony Eden, The Eden Memoirs: Facing the Dictators (London: Cassell, 1962), 401-3; Kenneth Young, Stanley Baldwin (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), 140-41. Neville Chamberlain took a much more active role in foreign policy, but his anti-communist sentiments were driven largely by his doubts of Russia's reliability and the loss of sympathy among smaller states such as Poland and Finland that might have resulted from an alliance with the Soviet Union. See Keith Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain (London: Macmillan, 1946), 325; Robert Self, Neville Chamberlain: A Biography (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 366-67.

Enrique Moradiellos and Douglas Little have written on this idea of 'malevolent neutrality' in detail but in doing so have overly neglected wider British strategic concerns, particularly the policy of general appeasement.[14] While many British officials both in London and those present in Spain during the conflict were vehemently anti-Republican or held pro-rebel sympathies, these attitudes should not be assumed to have been the determining factor in British decision making. Indeed, in the build up to the February 1936 election in Spain which saw the victory of the Popular Front, the British Government had dismissed right wing fears of communism and maintained that British policy was 'not to involve ourselves in internal Spanish politics'.[15]

This article demonstrates that British neutrality in Spain ought to be seen as a strand of the wider policy of general appeasement rather than as a policy put in place to indirectly aid a rebel victory or as an attempt to thwart the spread of communism. By examining British neutrality through the lens of appeasement, this study will enhance our understanding of British diplomacy in the 1930s and the links between non-intervention in Spain and the growing threat from Hitler and Mussolini. Indeed, historians who have focused on Anglo-Spanish relations during the Second World War have shown how a policy of non-intervention continued in Spain after the civil war as a means of appeasing Franco because of wider strategic concerns.[16] But the existing literature does not make clear that this programme of appeasement was not a new reaction to Franco's victory but rather a continuation of previous policies. In this regard, the appeasement of Franco comes into focus not as a purely tactical concern during Europe's

[14] 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); Enrique Moradiellos, 'British Political Strategy in the face of the Military Rising of 1936 in Spain', Contemporary European History, 1, 2 (1992) 123-137 (136-137); also see Enrique Moradiellos, 'The Origins of British Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War: Anglo-Spanish Relations in Early 1936', European History Quarterly, 21:339 (1991) 339-364 (340-345, 359-361).

[15] Doc. 174, W 11051/18/41 in British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print, Part II: From the First to the Second World War, Vol. 26: Spain, June 1931-June 1936, Anthony Adamthwaite (ed), 221-222; Helen Graham, The Spanish Republic at War, 1936-1939 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 61-71.

[16] See Denis Smyth, Diplomacy and *Strategy of Survival: British Policy and Franco's* Spain, 1940-1941 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986),10-25; Richard Wigg, Churchill and Spain: The Survival of the Franco Regime, 1940-1945 (London: Routledge, 2005); Paul Preston, Franco: A Biography (London: Harper Collins, 1993), 461. On bribes made to Franco's generals during the Second World War, see Angel Viñas, Sobornos. De cómo Churchill y March Compraron a los generales de Franco (Madrid: Critica, 2016); also see Peter Day's study of British intelligence during and after the Spanish Civil War, Franco*'s Friends: How British* Intelligence helped bring Franco to Power in Spain (London: Biteback Publishing Ltd., 2011)

critical years of 1939-1945 but instead as a sustained strategic programme. This suggests that British non-intervention in Spain was not so much a policy of 'malevolent neutrality' towards the Spanish Left, but rather, as the Chiefs of Staff suggested, one of ensuring the 'benevolent neutrality' of Franco in light of the growing fascist threat in Europe. Therefore, this interpretation shifts the focus of official British perceptions from the Republic to the rebels within the context of appeasement, demonstrating that non-intervention in Spain was a significant facet of wider British foreign policy. When Neville Chamberlain replaced Baldwin as British Prime Minister in May 1937, courting Franco's benevolence through a policy of tacit appeasement became the core of Anglo-Spanish relations.

A more comprehensive treatment of the British Government's appeasement of Franco during the civil war is needed to fully appreciate the complexities of British diplomacy in Spain during this period. Given the limited space available in a journal article, this article limits itself primarily to the last six months of the conflict in Spain, although earlier examples of appeasing Franco are provided to demonstrate that this policy was an ongoing development provoked by the perceived need to ensure cordial relations with whichever side emerged victorious from the conflict.

Appeasement and Spain

The concept of appeasement continues to be debated among historians.[17] Critics in the 1930s and 1940s argued that the policy was naïve in its attempts to secure lasting peace in Europe through granting concessions to German expansionism.[18] This idea was articulated in the late 1940s by Winston Churchill who wrote that 'the appeasers' failed to recognise Hitler's real intentions and, as a result of 'miscalculations and misjudgements of men and facts', pursued a cowardly policy which ultimately condemned Britain to fight a war against Germany in unfavourable circumstances.[19] This generalisation took on a prominence among early historians of appeasement who argued with the supposed benefit of hindsight.[20] Revisionists in

[17] Andrew Barros, Talbot Imlay, Evan Resnick, Norrin Ripsman and Jack Levy, 'Debating British Decision Making Toward Nazi Germany in the 1930s', International Security, 34, 1 (2009) 173-193.
[18] See, for example, "Cato", Guilty Men (London: Victor Gollancz, 1940).
[19] Winston Churchill, The Second World War (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 244.
[20] See Arnold Wolfers, Britain and France Between Two World Wars: Conflicting Strategies of Peace Since Versailles (New York : Harcourt, Brace and Co, 1940), 221; Correlli Barnett, The Collapse of British Power

the 1960s counter-argued that appeasement was a rational policy and arguably the most realistic one that could have been pursued.[21] Despite this central disagreement, orthodox and revisionist scholars of appeasement are united in their overwhelming focus on Anglo-German and Anglo-Italian relations, with little focus on how appeasement worked with regards to countries of secondary strategic importance such as Spain.[22] The example of British policy in Spain shows that non-intervention shared its aims with wider British foreign policy and was therefore consistent with the objectives of appeasement: avoiding war altogether or, if necessary, fighting a war under more favourable circumstances.

Norrin Ripsman and Jack Levy have argued that appeasement was not just a policy of granting concessions to avoid war, but has been used for a number of purposes. They identify three types of general appeasement: (1) resolving grievances; (2) diffusing secondary threats; and (3) buying time. In 'diffusing secondary threats' Ripsman and Levy identify three subtypes:

i. 'Conserving resources' by granting concessions to a secondary adversary to free up resources for use against a primary adversary;
ii. 'Denying allies' through appeasing a secondary adversary to keep it from forming an alliance with a primary adversary or giving it military support;
iii. '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.[23]

(Gloucester: Sutton, 1984), 514; J.L. Richardson, 'New Perspectives on Appeasement: Some Implications for International Relations', World Politics, 40, 3 (1988) 289-316 (291).

[21] See Martin Gilbert and Richard Gott, The Appeasers, 2nd edn. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967); A.J.P. Taylor, The Origins of the Second World War (London: Penguin, 1964); Keith Middlemas, The Strategy of Appeasement: The British Government and Germany, 1937-1939 (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1972); Gustav Schmidt, The Politics and Economics of Appeasement: British Foreign Policy in the 1930s, trans. by Jackie Bennett-Ruete (Leamington Spa, Berg, 1986); Peter Neville, Hitler and Appeasement: The British Attempt to Prevent the Second World War (London : Hambledon Continuum, 2006); Jack Levy, Appeasement and Rearmament, Britain 1936-1939 (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006); Frank McDonough, Neville Chamberlain, Appeasement and the British Road to War (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); R.A.C. Parker, Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1993), 81-113.

[22] Similarly, studies of Chamberlain have neglected his policy in Spain. See Feiling, 297-99, 330-31; Self, 274-75; Nick Smart, Neville Chamberlain (London: Routledge, 2010), 227-28; for a more focused study on Chamberlain and Spain, see Glyn Stone, 'Neville Chamberlain and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939', The International History Review, 35:2 (2013) 377-395.

[23] 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 (155-156).

The 'denying allies' strategy was utilised in Anglo-Italian relations after the Abyssinian crisis to keep Mussolini out of the German orbit.[24] This strategy is perhaps more relevant when it comes to Spain. Indeed, in an important strategic location, there existed the potential for a right-wing dictatorship to be established that would have close relations with the fascist powers which the British Government was appeasing. As the civil war progressed and Franco's forces captured more and more ground while the German and Italian governments poured more assistance into the Iberian Peninsula, it became increasingly evident that this would be the case.

There are numerous examples of British appeasement of Franco during the civil war. British policy developed from trying to appear completely neutral at the beginning of the conflict towards directly appeasing Franco when his victory grew more certain. When the fall of Málaga to the rebels was imminent in February 1937, for instance, George Ogilvie-Forbes, the British Chargé d'Affaires, asked the Foreign Office for an increase in British naval strength around the city's waters to 'dissuade the [Nationalist] insurgents from taking unduly drastic action against the city and its population'.[25] Two days later he reported that many of the 150,000 who had fled due to fear of reprisals had been subjected to horrific shell fire and bombing.[26] There was much discussion within the Foreign Office about how the British Government could help the Republican refugees fleeing Málaga. However, the decision not to intervene on a humanitarian basis was ultimately determined by 'political and practical' considerations as Franco's ships were blockading the coast and the Foreign Office feared both the possibility of coming into conflict with them and appearing to favour the Spanish Government.[27] This would appear to indicate a position of appeasing the rebels towards the beginning of the conflict, dominated by local concerns and the risk of direct conflict with Franco's forces.

The British Government was put in a more difficult position after the notorious destruction of Guernica two months later. In the afternoon of 26 April 1937, German aircraft in liaison with Francoist officers destroyed the town of Guernica.[28] The exact number of deaths that occurred as a result of the bombing is difficult to gauge, but Ralph Stevenson, the British

[24] Crowson, 69-74; for an excellent study of the theoretical concept of 'denying-allies', see Timothy Crawford, 'Preventing Enemy Coalitions: How Wedge Strategies Shape Power Politics', International Security, 35, 4 (2011) 155-189

[25] Ogilvie-Forbes to Halifax, 12 Feb. 1937, FO 371/21284, W 3062/1/41.

[26] 'The Flight From Malaga', The Times, 17 Feb. 1937, 14.

[27] Ogilvie-Forbes to Foreign Office, Halifax's reply attached, FO 371/21367, W 3070/37/41.

[28] Preston, Franco, 243-47

consul in Bilbao, estimated that Guernica at the time had a population of around 10,000. It was also the town's weekly market day which attracted visitors from outside Guernica.[29] After visiting the town within twenty-four hours of its destruction, Stevenson provided Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden with a harrowing report which described 'many men and women erring through the streets searching in the wreckage of their houses for their dear ones' and of the subsequent ruthless machine-gunning of those fleeing from the town to safety.[30]

Although Eden was disturbed by the deaths at Guernica, the greater concern for the British Government was that it presented a clear demonstration of Germany's air power which might one day befall Britain.[31] The potential destruction that could be caused by aerial attacks in a future was a prevalent fear among British policy-makers in the 1930s. As Stanley Baldwin had famously said in 1932, 'the bomber will always get through'.[32] In the House of Commons on 6 May 1937, while he remained reluctant to cause any risk to Anglo-German relations by launching accusations, Eden expressed the view that the indignant response to the bombing was due to the knowledge that 'if that kind of thing is repeated and intensifies on a larger scale, it is going to mean a terrible future for Europe to face'.[33] Indeed, he maintained in his memoirs that the destruction of Guernica had been 'the first blitz of the Second World War'.[34] Thus Guernica can be interpreted as the start of a shift in British policy towards Spain, driven less by concerns of a local escalation of the conflict than the broader European strategic significance. The fact that stronger protest was not made indicates that the Foreign Office was already tacitly appeasing Franco's coalition, and the direct involvement of the Germans complicated matters further.

On 29 April 1937 the rebels reached the burning remnants of Guernica and by June it became clear that Bilbao was going to fall into their hands.[35] The Foreign Office was put in a difficult position by the possibility that the Basque Government (a regional government which had been granted autonomous rights in 1936) might request British naval help for an

[29] On Stevenson's efforts to help the Basques, see James Cable, The Royal Navy and the Siege of Bilbao (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979),107-12
[30] Stevenson to Eden, 28 April 1937, FO 371/21291, W8661/1/41.
[31] Martin Gilbert and Richard Gott, The Appeasers (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1963), 23.
[32] HC Deb (5th Series) 10 Nov. 1932, vol. 270, c632.
[33] HC Deb (5th Series) 6 May 1937, vol. 323, c1379.
[34] Eden, 443.
[35] Preston, The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain (London: Harper Press, 2013), 403.

evacuation.[36] Stevenson told the Foreign Office of the likelihood that, in the event of Bilbao falling to the rebels, all prominent members of the Basque Government would be shot. Back in Whitehall, Foreign Office analyst William Montagu-Pollock noted that this was in fact likely to happen due to 'our previous experience of the insurgents' attitude towards the Basques and towards humanitarian considerations in general'. However, a list of both the practical difficulties and possible consequences of evacuating the Basques were drawn up. It was thought likely that should the Royal Navy offer assistance in evacuating members of the Basque Government, it would be difficult to justify leaving many others to their fate. The Foreign Office was also concerned that such a heavy reliance on British ships carried the risk of coming into direct conflict with Francoist ships that were endeavouring to blockade the coast.[37] In the event, the Royal Navy escorted some ships evacuating refugees but the Francoists lamented that this 'intervention' was an attack on the prestige of their navy and the sovereignty of Spain. This diplomatic crisis would drastically affect the thinking of British officials when the question of evacuating Republicans arose in the future.[38]

British neutrality was put under further strain throughout 1938. In particular, the continuous bombing of civilian areas in and around Republican Barcelona by Italian planes throughout March 1938 evoked indignation among British public opinion which Chamberlain felt was a threat to his efforts to find a settlement with Mussolini.[39] The Times published detailed, almost daily reports on the air raids.[40] Some verbal protests were made over the targeting of civilian areas but Franco insisted that his forces selected only military targets and that in Barcelona, where most of the Republic's remaining war industry lay, armaments were stored in civilian areas.[41] He also bemoaned that similar attacks carried out by Republican planes had not aroused such a response from Britain. Robert Hodgson, who had been appointed as the British representative to rebel Spain in November 1937, warned the Foreign Office that

[36] The regional Basque Government, led by the Partido Nacionalista Vasco, evoked high admiration in Britain. Despite its conservative and Catholic identity, it sided with the Republican Government after the rebel uprising of 1936 due to its desire for Basque autonomous rights to which the nationalists were opposed.
[37] Minute by Pollock, 10 July 1937, FO 371/21403, W 12732/1/41.
[38] See Peter Anderson, 'British Maritime Evacuations in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939', War in History, (2017) 1-21.
[39] Earl of Perth to Halifax, 30 May 1936, FO 371/22412, R 5205/23/22.
[40] 'Insurgent Air Raids'. The Times, 5 March 1938, 12; '500 Killed in Barcelona', The Times, 18 March 1938, 16; 'The Agony of Barcelona', The Times, 19 March 1938, 12.
[41] Hodgson to Halifax, 26 March 1938, FO 371/22606, W 3972/9/41. For an earlier example, see Chilton to Eden, 23 March 1937 1937, FO 371/21288, W 5768/1/41/41.

in rebel territory there was growing ill-feeling towards the British Government due to this perceived media bias.[42]

Even when British ships were being bombed by rebel aircraft, Chamberlain refused to do any more than issue a banal protest which he never intended, or at any rate hoped he would never have to, carry further. For instance, in the House of Commons in June 1938, Chamberlain admitted that some attacks on British ships had been deliberate. After being bombarded with questions as to why he did not do more in response, he simply said that he was 'afraid that while war continues we must expect a succession of these incidents and of the horrors against which we have protested. The one satisfactory solution of the Spanish question would be a termination of the war'.[43] In July, he said in the Cabinet that if Franco must continue to bomb ships, he 'must use discretion' or he might 'arouse a feeling [in this country] that would force the government to take action'.[44]

Chamberlain's personal feelings were expressed in his private letters. He wrote to his sister Ida on 18 June that 'if only we could get an armistice all this bombing of civilians and ships would cease and what suffering and misery would be saved.'[45] Later in the month he wrote to his other sister Hilda that he had gone over 'every form of retaliation' but it was clear that none could be effective '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.'[46] Thus Chamberlain was always thinking about how policy in Spain affected his wider foreign policy aims. By 1938, the British Government's approach to the Spanish conflict had evolved into a policy of tacitly appeasing Franco. Initially in order to avoid local escalation that would drag Britain into a European war, this was increasingly motivated by a desire to avoid entangling the thorny problem of Anglo-German and Anglo-Italian relations with the situation in Spain and became more pronounced under Chamberlain.

Searching for a solution

In 1938 the British Government set up a prisoner exchange commission in Spain headed by Field Marshall Sir Phillip Chetwode. By negotiating prisoner exchanges and mediating

[42] Hodgson to Halifax, 29 Aug. 1938, FO 371/22629, W 11582/29/41.
[43] HC Deb (5th Series) 21 June 1938, vol. 337, c943; on the bombing of British ships, see Preston, Franco, p. 308.
[44] CAB 23/94/4, 6 July 1938.
[45] Neville Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 18 June 1938, [Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham], N[eville] C[hamberlain Papers] 18/1/1056.
[46] Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 25 June 1938, NC 18/1/1057.

between the two parties, Chamberlain hoped to find a peaceful solution to the Spanish conflict.[47] He also sought an international solution that would facilitate this and ensure peace in Europe. In late August he decided to go and meet Hitler personally in an attempt to improve Anglo-German relations. Despite the fact that Spain featured less in talks with Germany in the build up to the Munich Conference of September 1938, Chamberlain was still determined to bring about an armistice. Although more famous for settling the question of the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia, Spain was a secondary issue at Munich, showing that the civil war was inherently linked to the general approach of conflict in Europe. When they met in September, Hitler assured Chamberlain that he had no territorial ambitions in Spain and that his reason for intervening on behalf of Franco was due to fears of Bolshevism and its potential to spread in Western Europe.[48] Chamberlain informed Hitler of a conversation he had had the night before with Mussolini regarding Spain and a joint proposal to both sides for an armistice which Hitler said, as Mussolini had, he would consider.[49]

Since July 1938, Franco had been engaged in the Battle of the Ebro where he demonstrated his complete disregard for how many lives were lost even on his own side.[50] This angered Mussolini who told his Foreign Minister, Galeazzo Ciano, on 29 August to mark in his diary 'today … 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'.[51] Mussolini did not hide his frustration at the conference in Munich. He told Chamberlain that he was 'fed up' with Spain where he had 'lost 50,000 men dead and wounded' and that he was 'annoyed with Franco' who 'continually threw away all chances of victory'.[52]

Chamberlain left Munich feeling optimistic about the future of Britain's diplomatic relations with the fascist powers, although little real progress was made on the Spanish conflict. Meanwhile the Munich Agreement effectively ended any hopes the Republican Government had of eventually being aided by the British. Juan Negrín, the Republican Premier since May 1937, had hoped that an escalation of the Czechoslovakian crisis would bring the western democracies into Spain on the side of the Republic and was therefore dismayed when an

[47] 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

[48] Chamberlain's notes from his conversations with Hitler, September 1938, NC 8/26/3.

[49] Extracts from Chamberlain's conversation with Hitler, 2 October 1938, FO 371/22661, W 13353/86/41.

[50] Paul Preston, The Spanish Civil War: Reaction, Revolution and Revenge (London: Harper Perennial, 2006), 289.

[51] Galeazzo Ciano, *Ciano's Diary 1*937-1943 (London: Phoenix, 2002), 119.

[52] Chamberlain to Hilda, 2 Oct.1938, NC 18/1/1070.

agreement was reached. Franco too realised that an escalation of the Czechoslovakian crisis might have resulted in him losing the civil war as, in such an event, Russian and French aid for the Republic might have cut off rebel Spain from German and Italian supplies. Accordingly, when the British and French Governments enquired in September 1938 what Franco would do in the event of a general European war, he responded that he would remain neutral and his Foreign Minister, General Francisco Gómez-Jordana y Sousa, told Robert Hodgson of Franco's 'warmest feelings of sympathy for England'. After the signing of the Munich Agreement, a relieved Franco sent his 'warmest congratulations' to Chamberlain for his preservation of peace in Europe. Franco was playing a duplicitous game and his loyalties still lay with the fascist regimes, but his attitude at this point must have evoked at least some optimism in British officials for the future of Anglo-Spanish relations. The policy of appeasing Franco to ensure his benevolent neutrality in a future conflict with fascism appeared to be achieving early success. However, his unwillingness to accept anything less than total victory over the Republic would remain a spanner in the works.[53]

In the aftermath of Munich, Mussolini was still anxious for the ratification of the Anglo-Italian Agreement under which he assured Chamberlain that he would begin withdrawing Italian troops from Spain and in return the British Government would use its influence in the League of Nations to bring about international recognition of the Italian conquest of Abyssinia.[54] Ciano wrote in his diary on 2 October that he intended to call the British Ambassador at Rome, the Earl of Perth, the next day and officially tell him that Italy would withdraw 10,000 troops from Spain.[55] By doing so, it was hoped that the agreement could be ratified and also that the British Government would grant Franco belligerent rights. While the agreement was ratified in November, Chamberlain wanted to use belligerent rights as a bargaining tool both with Franco and Mussolini to secure the withdrawal of all foreign troops and find a settlement, ideally in the form of an armistice.[56] Thus, when 10,000 Italians were withdrawn from Spain, Chamberlain regarded the amount as 'not good enough' and in the Cabinet it was decided to still withhold belligerent rights.[57]

[53] Preston, Franco, 312-13, 323-43.
[54] Paul Stafford, 'The Chamberlain-Halifax visit to Rome: A Reappraisal', English Historical Review, 98 (1983) 61-100 (63).
[55] Ciano, diary entry 2 Oct. 1938, 137.
[56] Chamberlain's notebook, entitled 'a few political notes', no date, NC 2/25.
[57] Cabinet Memorandam, 21 Oct. 1938, CAB 24/279/31. The British War Office estimated that in September 1938 there were 41,000 Italians in Spain, see Edwards, 177-79.

Nevertheless, bearing in mind Mussolini's dissatisfaction with Franco's progress in the war as well as this step forward, it seemed like an opportune time for trying to work more closely with the Italians. Accordingly, Chamberlain and Lord Halifax, who had replaced Eden as Foreign Secretary in February 1938, began putting together plans for a visit to Rome. When this proposed visit was discussed in the Cabinet in late December 1938, it was assumed that the major topic of talks with Italy would be the Spanish issue and how to resolve it. Chamberlain stated his intention was to get 'something for something' from Mussolini and argued that it ought to be suggested to him that the longer he gives help to Franco, the harder it will be to extricate himself in the long run.[58] However, negotiations became more difficult during the visit when news came in of Franco's military successes from his advance on Catalonia.[59] As Chamberlain wrote to his sister Ida during the visit, 'I will be very glad when this Rome visit is over' as 'Franco's successes have created great difficulty for us'.[60] Indeed, Mussolini was as adamant as ever for Franco to achieve a complete victory and urged him not to accept 'compromises or mediations of any kind'.[61] Mussolini was even willing to become more involved if the war started to go in the Republic's favour or if another government intervened on its behalf.[62] As he told his Foreign Minister, Ciano, shortly after the British visit, 'if the French aid the Reds I will land 30 battalions at Valencia, even if this starts a world war'.[63]

Recognising Franco

Chamberlain returned from Rome having achieved little in his meetings with the Italians and with the knowledge that Franco was even closer to achieving total victory over the Republic. Accordingly, he was encouraged to start thinking seriously about putting in place plans for recognising Franco's government. Owen O'Malley, a British representative at Hendaye just over the French border, affirmed that it was in Britain's interests to do so and told the Foreign Office on 15 January 1939 that early recognition of Franco was essential if the British

[58] CAB 23/96/12, 21 Dec. 1938.
[59] Notes from conversations between British and Italian officials, 11-14 Jan. 1939, FO 371/23784, R 434/1/22.
[60] Chamberlain to Ida, 8 Jan. 1939, NC 18/1/1081; Hilda to Chamberlain, 9 Jan. 1939, NC 18/2/1106.
[61] Ciano, diary entry 9 Jan. 1939, 175.
[62] The ambassador to Italy to the Foreign Ministry, 14 Jan. 1939, Documents on German Foreign Policy (DGFP), Series D, vol. III (London: HMSO, 1951), 817.
[63] Ciano, diary entries 15 & 16 Jan. 1939, 178.

Government wanted 'to obtain an ally and play a large part in the reconstruction of Spain'.[64] Here we can see the British Government putting a 'denying allies' strategy into practice. This became even more pressing when Franco's forces entered Barcelona later that month and rendered the Republican war effort hopeless unless the western democracies abandoned the Non-Intervention Agreement.[65] Negrín accepted that this was extremely unlikely and finally admitted defeat in early February 1939. He subsequently informed the British Government that the Republican army would surrender if Franco would agree to make formal declarations that Spain would remain an independent power and not be dominated by the fascist powers; that Spaniards would be free to choose their own form of government; and that military and political leaders would be free to leave the country while there would be no political reprisals for those who stayed. If these conditions were not met, Negrín said that the Republic would continue fighting.[66]

The Foreign Office welcomed this proposal and requested Hodgson, the British representative to the rebels, to enquire with Franco's government whether an arrangement could be made. At the same time, however, members of Franco's government saw an opportunity to apply pressure to bring about a swift recognition of their regime. General Jordana, Franco's Foreign Minister, told Hodgson that British and French recognition was immaterial to Franco but that its delay would have an effect on the duration of the war. Playing on British humanitarian concerns, a member of Franco's diplomatic staff also told Eric Phipps, the British ambassador at Paris, that unless Britain recognised Franco he would launch an offensive 'entailing the slaughter of thousands of government troops'.[67] Hodgson therefore warned that delays in recognising Franco's Government would only be to the detriment of Anglo-Spanish relations while simultaneously prolonging the conflict.[68]

Delaying recognition was in direct contrast to the British desire to see an end to the war at the earliest possible moment. It also allowed more time for the German and Italian regimes to entrench themselves further in Spain while pressure on the British Government to bring an end to non-intervention was mounting among opponents of the policy.[69] Calls for abandoning

[64] O'Malley to Foreign Office, 15 Jan. 1939, FO 371/24126, W 1081/8/41.
[65] Francisco J. Romero Salvado, The Spanish Civil War: Origins, Course and Outcomes (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 171-73.
[66] Stevenson to Foreign Office, 13 Feb. 1939, FO 371/24127, W 2559/8/41.
[67] Phipps to Halifax, 16 Feb. 1939, FO 371/24152, W 2823/1443/41.
[68] Hodgson to Foreign Office, 15 Feb. 1939, FO 371/24152, W 2729/1443/41.
[69] Tom Buchanan, The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 107-36

non-intervention and aiding the Republic even came from within the Conservative Party. Vyvyan Adams, the vehemently anti-appeasement Conservative MP for Leeds West, appraised British policy in Spain for The Daily Telegraph. 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.[70] Adams received numerous letters congratulating him for speaking out on the policy. Halifax, however, responded to Adams personally, expressing his confusion as to why he would advocate taking an action which would 'give rise to the very situation which non-intervention was designed to prevent'.[71] Halifax was referring not only to the potential of escalating the conflict by siding with the Republic, but also to pushing Franco further into the arms of Hitler and Mussolini by doing so.

The policy pursued by the British Government was designed to prevent such an alliance and, it was hoped, ensure Franco's benevolent neutrality in a future European war. Indeed, when Hodgson had been sent to enquire whether Franco would agree to those conditions laid out by Negrín, Chamberlain wrote that he would not allow delays in negotiations as it might prevent the British Government from 'establishing excellent relations with Franco who at present seems well disposed to us'. He also hoped that 'if the Italians are not in too bad a temper, we might get Franco'.[72] The Cabinet had already discussed earlier in the month that 'so long as His Majesty's Government maintained its present attitude towards General Franco's Administration [withholding recognition]', they were 'impotent to promote one of the principle purposes of British policy in Spain, namely, the effective combating of German and Italian influence within General Franco's regime'.[73] Halifax had also argued in the Foreign Office that it 'is of primary importance to efface as soon as possible the bitterness at present prevailing against His Majesty's Government among General Franco's adherents' and place the British in a 'far better position than at present to combat by diplomatic means the excessive influence of Germany and Italy on the course of the evolution of the new Spain'. He rightly noted that Germany and Italy would dislike 'our belated bid to snatch from them and secure the fruits of

[70] 'British Policy Towards Spain', The Daily Telegraph, 24 Jan. 1939, 6.
[71] Letter from Halifax to Adams, 27 Jan. 1939, British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics, V[yvyan Adams Papers], Ordered Correspondence Files, 'Spain & Franco, January 1939', V/1/4/15.
[72] Chamberlain to Hilda, 19 Feb. 1939, NC 18/1/1086.
[73] Extracts from Cabinet Conclusions, 27 Feb. 1939, FO 371/24132, W 3444/1443/41.

General Franco's victory', but also that 'there is very much more to be gained than there is to be risked by early recognition of Franco'.[74]

Despite the urgency felt by Chamberlain and Halifax, they had not only brought to Franco's attention those conditions laid out by Negrín, but also offered to act in a mediatory capacity if they were accepted.[75] Chamberlain wrote to his sister Hilda on 19 February that he was 'very hopeful about Spain' after hearing that the Spanish Government was willing to surrender if Franco would give 'reasonable assurances about reprisals'.[76] However, unwilling to accept anything less than unconditional surrender, Franco rejected the proposal when it was brought to him.[77] Accordingly, Pablo de Azcárate, the Republican ambassador at London, insisted that his government would adjust its conditions and surrender if only their clause regarding political reprisals was agreed. Halifax allowed time for this to first be approved by Negrín and agreed to then bring it to Franco's attention. However, neither the Foreign Office nor Chamberlain was keen on there being any delays. When discussing the issue in the Cabinet, it was agreed that it was better to recognise Franco 'as soon as possible' because the longer recognition was held back 'the less value it will have in Franco's eyes'.[78] Chamberlain had written to his sister that he had 'kept back recognition to see if we can get this surrender arranged as clearly that is the best order' but expressed categorically that he would not delay it if negotiations dragged on for too long.[79] For reasons that are still not entirely clear, the message did not reach Negrín until it was too late and the British Government decided to press on with its recognition of Franco without any agreement in place.[80]

Accordingly, focus shifted to the practicalities of recognising Franco and to what would become of Britain's diplomatic relations with the Republican Government. This issue presented further difficulties for the British Government because significant portions of southern and central Spain still remained under Republican control in early 1939.[81] Admiral

[74] Cabinet Offices to Foreign Office, 16 Feb. 1939, FO 371/24153, W 2777/1443/41; Ida to Chamberlain, 9 Feb. 1939, NC 18/2/1110.
[75] CAB 23/97, 15 Feb. 1939.
[76] Chamberlain to Hilda, 19 Feb. 1939, NC 18/1/1086.
[77] Hodgson to Foreign Office, 20 Feb. 1939, FO 371/24148, W 3226/374/41.
[78] CAB 24/283/19, 13 Feb. 1939; on Azcárate's time in the London embassy, see his memoirs, Pablo de Azcárate, Mi embajada en Londres durante la Guerra civil española (Madrid: Ariel, 2012)
[79] Chamberlain to Hilda, 19 Feb. 1939, NC 18/1/1086.
[80] Jose Alvarez del Vayo, *Freedom's Battle* (London: William Heinemann, 1940), 285; Gabriel Jackson, Juan Negrín: Physiologist, Socialist and Spanish Republican War Leader (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), 287-288; Paul Preston, The Last Days of the Spanish Republic (London: HarperCollins, 2016), 107.
[81] Hugh Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, 4th edn. (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 861-63.

C.G. Jarrett asked the Foreign Office a few days before the recognition of Franco if he was correct in assuming that recognition would be simultaneously withdrawn from the Republican Government when it was granted to Franco. He was informed that while de jure recognition would in fact be withdrawn, the Republic would continue to have de facto recognition over the territory still under its control.[82]

This was just one of two possible courses outlined by the Foreign Office, and this policy of continuing to recognise the Republic as the de facto government in territory still under its control was subsequently thrown out. This course of action outlined to Jarrett had been regarded as the 'best option on a practical level' because the alternative – withdrawing any form of recognition from the Republic – implied that the British Government viewed the Republic as merely 'disorganised rebels' and considered the war to be over. This, the Foreign Office believed, would have been 'no doubt satisfactory to Franco, but hardly in accordance with the practical facts of the situation'. Ultimately, however, the British Government found itself being forced into taking this approach.[83] It was already feared that to acknowledging de facto recognition of the Republic in some parts of Spain would 'arouse Franco's resentment' but the final nail in the coffin for the Republic's diplomatic relations with Britain came on 25 February when Hodgson warned the Foreign Office that Franco would not even acknowledge recognition of his government unless the British 'completely break ties with the "Reds"'.[84] Accordingly, Chamberlain decided that recognition would be withdrawn from the Republican Government. Halifax broke the news to Pablo de Azcárate on 25 February 1939 that 'we are going to recognise Franco – your diplomatic privileges must now come to an end'. He then told the Duke of Alba, Franco's ambassador at London, that Britain, in conjunction with the French, was going to recognise Franco and that a new British ambassador would be appointed in due course.[85]

On Monday 27 February, the British and French Governments formally recognised Franco's regime as the only legitimate government in Spain. By this point, Franco already

[82] Jarrett to Howard, 24 Feb. 1939, FO 371/24152, W 3358/1443/41.
[83] Foreign Office minute by Beckett, 24 Feb. 1939, FO 371/24152, W 3359/1443/41.
[84] Hodgson to Foreign Office, 25 Feb. 1939, FO 371/24152, W 3451/1443/41.
[85] Halifax to Pablo de Azcárate, 25 Feb. 1939, FO 371/24152, W 3392/1443/41, letter to Duke of Alba enclosed; Maurice Peterson was appointed as the ambassador to Spain in March 1939. On his experiences there, see Maurice Peterson, Both Sides of the Curtain: An Autobiography (London: Constable, 1950), 153-235.

enjoyed full recognition of Germany, Italy, Portugal, Japan and the Vatican, among others.[86] Chamberlain announced to the House of Commons that the decision had been made over the weekend, and backed up the decision with an explanation of the current military situation in Spain:

> As a result of the fall of Barcelona and overrunning of Catalonia, General Franco is now in control of the greater part of Spanish territory both on and beyond the mainland. Included in this territory are the most important industrial centres in Spain and the sources of most of her productions. Even if the Republican forces in the southern sector should continue to maintain some show of resistance, there can be no doubt now of the ultimate issue of the struggle, the prolongation of which can only result in further suffering and loss of life.[87]

It is clear that the decision to recognise Franco was eased by the knowledge that his military victory was guaranteed and imminent. Some historians have suggested that the decision to grant unconditional recognition to Franco had been taken a few weeks earlier on 8 February but the decision to announce it publicly was put off.[88] If Chamberlain justified recognising Franco on the premise that after the fall of Barcelona there was absolutely no possibility of anything other than a Francoist victory then this is plausible. At any rate, the British Government had certainly taken the decision to recognise Franco earlier than Chamberlain liked to admit. However, that it would be unconditional surrender clearly had not been fully decided as negotiating conditions, especially regarding reprisals, was clearly still on the table, as was the question of what would become of British diplomatic relations with the Republican Government.

The Labour Party leader, Clement Attlee, did not believe the decision had been made as recently as the weekend that had just passed and argued that simultaneously withdrawing recognition from the Republican Government while granting it to Franco was unjustifiable. He affirmed not only that the government of Juan Negrín was a legally elected one but that it was also still capable of fighting on and, with aid, could have defeated the rebels as it possessed an army of some 500,000 soldiers. 'Those are not conditions', Attlee asserted, 'which justify the recognition of General Franco either de facto or de jure, and certainly they do not justify the

[86] Edwards, p. 193; the two most important governments that had still not recognised Franco were those of the Soviet Union and the United States.

[87] The Times, 28 Feb. 1939, 14; HC Deb (5th Series) 28 Feb. 1939, vol. 344, c1118.

[88] See, for example, Preston, Last Days, 144-47, where he suggests that Chamberlain lied when questioned in Parliament on the issue of whether a decision had been taken to recognise Franco unconditionally.

taking away of recognition from Republican Spain'.[89] Negrín had requested arms in October 1938 and again in February 1939 and assured the British consul in Bilbao, Ralph Stevenson, that with them he would be able to turn the tide of the war.[90] Of course, viewing Spain through the lens of his democratic socialist ideology, Attlee was not thinking of the practicalities of the situation.[91] Only aid on an immense scale could have enabled the Republic to turn the situation around, and that is without considering how the German and Italian Governments would have responded.[92] It will be recalled that Mussolini was more than willing to become more in involved in Spain in order to ensure that Franco won.

Although many critics of British policy in Spain doubted whether German and Italian influence could be eradicated, Chamberlain and Halifax believed there was still time to do so and therefore the earlier they recognised Franco, the better. In defence of their policy, the Foreign Office drew up a list of assurances that the British Government had received from Franco, Mussolini and Hitler over the previous three years regarding the political independence of Spain.[93] Chamberlain did not necessarily believe these assurances, but they remained one of the few tools at his disposal to combat domestic criticism. Nevertheless, there was little that could be done to weaken Franco's ties to the Italian and German regimes until recognition had been granted as the first step in improving Anglo-Spanish relations.

Abandoning Humanitarianism

British humanitarian activities that helped supporters of the Republican Government had always met with a hostile reaction from the Francoists, as discussed previously with the cases of Málaga and the Basque country, and therefore a cautious attitude to humanitarianism was kept in place throughout the civil war. Accordingly, when the British Government had recognised Franco and hoped to establish a good relationship with the new Spain, it decided to

[89] HC Deb (5th Series) 28 Feb. 1939, vol. 344, cc1103-1106.

[90] Stevenson to Foreign Office, 31 Oct. 1938, FO 371/22631, W 14601/5/41. Chamberlain's attitude after the Munich Conference ensured there would not be a positive response to such a request. In early October, he said in the Cabinet that had high hoped for 'stopping the war before the winter', see CAB 23/95/12, 3 October 1938; also see Edwards, 206-7.

[91] On the Labour Party's attitude towards rearmament and non-intervention, see John Callaghan, The Labour Party and Foreign Policy: A History (London: Routledge, 2007), 131, 134-38.

[92] Preston, Last Days, 2-8; Hugh Thomas, 859-890.

[93] Foreign Office minute, 2 March 1939, FO 371/24153, W 3710/1443/41; Chamberlain's personal notes from his conversations with Adolf Hitler, Sep. 1938, NC 8/26/3.

not only sever diplomatic ties with the Republic but also to wash its hands of humanitarian responsibilities.[94]

Earlier in the civil war, Franco had put in place military tribunals which offered a façade of legitimacy to the repression being unleashed on Republicans and to project a better image of his regime abroad. In early 1939, along with assurances regarding the territorial integrity of Spain, he also gave public assurances that there would be no 'political' reprisals.[95] As he did with assurances about German and Italian territorial ambitions in Spain, Chamberlain also tried to combat criticism of his lack of humanitarian considerations in his decision-making. He said in the House of Commons that the British Government had 'noted with satisfaction the public statements of General Franco concerning the determination of himself and his government to take proceedings only in the cases of those against whom criminal charges are laid'. Clement Attlee followed with a scathing attack on the fact that recognition had been given unconditionally and that the only assurances against political reprisals had been 'a mere statement from Franco that no one except law breakers will be dealt with'. 'But the law', Attlee went on, 'is what General Franco makes it'.[96]

Indeed, the British Government was well aware of the violent fate that awaited so many in Spain.[97] Franco had issued the Law of Political Responsibilities on 13 February which ensured that anybody who had supported the Republic after October 1934 could be considered a criminal and anybody who had fought for the Republic during the civil war was guilty of military rebellion.[98] Before the Law of Political Responsibilities, the British Government had estimated that there were at least 50,000 persons in the south of Spain who were in danger of their lives on account of their political or military activities if captured by the rebels.[99] Aside

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[94] British humanitarianism in the Spanish Civil War largely benefitted the rebels, although many British consuls helped large numbers of Republican supporters. See Tom Buchanan, 'Edge of Darkness: British "Front-Line" Diplomacy in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1937', Contemporary European History, 12, 3 (2003), 279-303; Anderson, 'British Maritime Evacuations' (forthcoming, 2017).

[95] Peter Anderson, 'Scandal and Diplomacy: The Use of Military Tribunals to Keep the Francoist Repression Afloat during the Civil War', in Peter Anderson and Miguel Angel del Arco Blanco (eds), Mass Killings and Violence in Spain, 1936-1952, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 72-89 (82-7).

[96] HC Deb (5th Series) 28 Feb. 1939, vol. 344, cc1101-1109. Franco's telegram to Chamberlain stated that people would be tried only for crimes according to Spanish law promulgated before the outbreak of the civil war in 1936.

[97] CAB 23/97, 15 Feb. 1939.

[98] Stanley Payne, The Franco Regime, 1936-1975 (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 221-225; Preston, Spanish Holocaust, 403; Julius Ruiz, *Franco's* Justice: Repression in Madrid after the Spanish Civil War (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 131-164.

[99] Gooden to Foreign Office, 8 Feb. 1939, minute by Pollock, 9 Feb., FO 371/24153, W 2247/2082/41.

from those in the south, it was recognised that hundreds of thousands more were in territory from which escape was possible.[100] Already by the end of February, the French Government had taken in some 300,000 Spanish women, children and elderly men at a considerable daily cost but many more were expected to flee across the border.[101]

The French Government, however, was much more willing to assist in their evacuation than the British Government which was trying to maintain its impartial stance in order to appease Franco. In early February Eleanor Rathbone, an independent MP, had asked whether the government would be willing to admit Spanish Republican officials whose lives were in danger in the event of Franco's victory. George Mounsey, a Foreign Office Assistant Under-Secretary prevaricated, avoiding making an executive decision by replying that an interdepartmental meeting needed to be held to discuss the issue before giving an official answer. Mounsey suggested to his colleagues that Spanish refugees ought to be categorised into two types: non-combatants and combatants. He hoped that most of the former would return to Spain but recognised the possibility that considerable numbers would not and therefore become 'more or less a permanent liability'. The 'combatants' were believed to be in 'an even worse plight' but Mounsey argued that there were 'obvious objections to dealing with their case on ordinary charitable lines'. At any rate, it was hoped that the French Government would continue handling the issue without much of a commitment from Britain.[102]

The French Government had in fact already asked for British assistance in the maintenance of Spanish refugees but received a non-committal reply.[103] Although the Foreign Office had in the past been willing to assist in the evacuation and maintenance of refugees to a certain extent, it avoided going beyond a point from which its impartial attitude towards the civil war could be challenged.[104] This remained the case in early 1939. For instance, when Republican officials in Madrid requested assistance for evacuating between 5,000 and 10,000 persons wishing to leave Spain, the Foreign Office made a list of the pros and cons of offering assistance. Humanitarianism was the main factor in favour and it was pondered whether Franco might be happy for the British Government to do so since it would reduce the number of dissidents within his regime. However, recalling Franco's resentment over British evacuations

[100] Foreign Office minute by Pollock, 10 Feb. 1939, FO 371/24153, W 2391/2082/41.
[101] HL Deb (5th Series) 9 March 1939, vol. 344, c135.
[102] Foreign Office minutes by Mallet, 3 Feb. 1939, and Mounsey, 6 Feb. 1939, FO 371/24153, W 2082/2082/41; also see Stone, 'Neville Chamberlain', 384.
[103] Foreign Office minutes by Mallet, 3 Feb. 1939, and Mounsey, 6 Feb. 1939, FO 371/24153, W 2082/2082/41.
[104] Anderson, 'British Maritime Evacuations' (forthcoming, 2017); Buchanan, 'Edge of Darkness', 285-87.

of refugees in the past which he considered a form of intervention, it was feared that doing so again was likely to arouse the same resentment.[105]

In early 1939 the Foreign Office recognised some additional reasons for not assisting with evacuations. Firstly, the situation was considered far less manageable due to the numbers that were now likely to leave Spain. The British consul in Valencia, Abbington Gooden, received enquiries from Spanish officials regarding the possibility of their evacuation in the event of the rebels capturing the rest of Spain. He was informed that no Spaniards were to be evacuated unless they formed part of an exchange commission or were in immediate danger because the numbers were expected be so vast that it was not possible to help more than a 'small fraction of them'.[106]

Secondly, there was a concern in the Foreign Office that such assistance might prolong the war. On the one hand, it was possible that if those still fighting knew they were able to escape Spain safely, the assistance in doing so would encourage them to give up the fight and bring an end to the war sooner. On the other hand, however, it could also have encouraged many to continue fighting if they knew that if their efforts failed they would simply have been able to escape on a British ship.[107] Indeed, the Foreign Office urged British consuls in Spain not to give Republicans promises concerning evacuations because it was felt that 'the expectation of being able to get away on a British warship at the last moment' would encourage many to continue fighting.[108] Although this reluctance to offer any substantial assistance in evacuating refugees resulted in many being unable to leave Spain, the British stance was determined by the core objectives of non-intervention: bringing a war to an end as soon as possible and establishing good relations with the victor.

Conclusion

There was continuity in British policy in Spain from the summer of 1936 through to the end of the civil war in 1939 and beyond.[109] It has been suggested by Moradiellos that British policy in Spain was subordinated to appeasement only after it became clear that the war would be a

[105] Stevenson to Foreign Office, 9 July 1937, minute by Pollock, 10 July 1937FO 371/24103, W 12732/1/41.
[106] Gooden to Foreign Office, 26 Feb.1939, FO 371/24153, W 2247/2082/41.
[107] Gooden to Foreign Office, 28 Feb. 1939, FO 371/24153, W 3571/2082/41.
[108] Gooden to Foreign Office, 26 Feb. 1939, FO 371/24153, W 2247/2082/41.
[109] Preston, Franco, 461.

prolonged one and Germany and Italy became heavily involved.[110] This article has demonstrated that the wider programme of general appeasement in Europe was always an integral part of British policy in Spain. First and foremost, the British Government wanted to avoid war in Europe. British officials recognised, of course, that war was a real possibility and therefore better conditions needed to be created to facilitate fighting in one. Throughout the civil war, the British Government became increasingly aware of the fact that Franco would eventually win and, as the prestige of the German and Italian regimes was bound up with Franco's ultimate victory, the British realised the importance of treading lightly in their diplomatic relations with his government. In this regard, it appears unlikely that fears of a communist regime being established in Spain, as Little has argued, or a marked preference for a rebel victory, as Moradiellos suggests, had a significant influence on the formation or maintaining of British non-intervention, despite the personal sympathies of many British Conservatives at the time.[111]

Indeed, comparisons can be drawn between non-intervention in Spain, and more specifically the reluctance to aid the Republic, and British policy towards Czechoslovakia in 1938 and 1939, at least in terms of Chamberlain's attitude and diplomatic response. For instance, as Hitler's intentions for Czechoslovakia became more evident during 1938, Chamberlain offered his assistance to Hitler in bringing about an armistice to prevent Germany taking military action. As Hitler was interested in improving Anglo-German relations, they came to the agreement, along with France and Italy, of annexing portions of Czechoslovakia that had a German-majority population.[112] Chamberlain had said as early as March 1938, six months before the Munich Agreement, that 'you only have to look at the map to see that nothing that France or we could do could possibly save Czechoslovakia from being overrun by the Germans, if they wanted to do it … therefore we could not help Czechoslovakia – she would simply be a pretext for going to war with Germany'.[113] It will be recalled that Chamberlain's attitude towards the bombing of British ships in the summer of that year evoked similar language when he told his sister that he had 'gone over every form of retaliation' but nothing he could do would work unless he was willing to abandon his policy of appeasement and go to war with the dictators.[114] Certainly, there were significant legal, political, diplomatic and

[110] Moradiellos, Neutralidad benévola, 256-268.
[111] Little, 'Red Scare'; Little, Malevolent Neutrality.
[112] CAB, 24/279/14, 6 Oct. 1938.
[113] Feiling, 325.
[114] Chamberlain to Hilda, 25 June 1938, NC 18/1/1057

geostrategic issues that set British policies in Czechoslovakia and Spain apart, but Chamberlain's attitude in both cases was clearly determined by his resolve to uphold the policy of appeasement and avoid conflict.

In Spain, Chamberlain sought an armistice and offered to act as an intermediary between the two sides. When this was rejected by Franco, the Foreign Office considered offering de facto recognition of the Republican Government in areas of Spain still under its control but abandoned this idea when it was, unsurprisingly, also rejected Franco. Thus the policy of appeasement in Spain determined that Franco would have the unconditional recognition of the British Government. When Hitler violated the Munich agreement in March 1939 and invaded the remainder of Czechoslovakia, just as when Franco rejected all proposals for any form of conditional surrender, there was very little the British Government could do without resorting to military action. Rather than a fear of the spread of communism forcing the British Government into adopting 'malevolent neutrality', pragmatic neutrality in response to the threat posed by the rise of fascism arguably had a more significant impact on the adoption and development of British neutrality in Spain.

This also highlights the extent to which Anglo-Spanish relations were not simply a case of a Great Power directing its policy towards a smaller power: the British accepted that Franco possessed considerable agency and his approval had to be courted, not taken for granted. Whilst historians of the 'malevolent neutrality' school focus on British initiative and Spanish reaction, by linking the Spanish conflict with wider appeasement, this new interpretation shows instead that British neutrality was not just a one-way policy but equally about ensuring reciprocal benevolent neutrality from Franco.

Ultimately, British self-interest took precedence over anything else in Spain. Regardless of British attitudes to either side in the civil war, the British Government from the beginning to the end of the conflict wanted to ensure that the war did not escalate into a wider European conflict. Assuming this objective would be achieved, ensuring that whatever government emerged in Spain would adopt a benevolent neutrality in a future European war was deemed essential. A policy of neutrality offered the best means of doing this. Not only did it entail fewer risks of military conflict, but it also allowed for the British Government to continue its wider policy of general appeasement in Europe while putting it in a position from which it could develop cordial relations with whichever side emerged from the conflict in Spain. As the civil war progressed and it became increasingly clear to the British Government

that Franco would win, this ‘denying allies’ strategy was able to be gradually put into practice and would remain at the core of Anglo-Spanish relations in the aftermath of the civil war and during the Second World War.