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FROM CARTOGRAPHY TO DIPLOMACY. STRATEGIES AROUND GIBRALTAR DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

*CARTOGRAFÍA Y DIPLOMACIA. ESTRATEGIAS EN
 TORNO A GIBRALTAR DURANTE LA SEGUNDA GUERRA
 MUNDIAL*

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse the role of Gibraltar during the Spanish Civil War and World War 2. To that end, it begins with the cartographic information that Germans had about the Rock for a hypothetical invasion. The strategic enclave had already played a key role throughout the Spanish Civil War, but the outbreak of the world war highlighted its geographical importance in terms of control of the seas and world trade routes between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. Due to its geographical position, Gibraltar was located at the crossroads of multiple national and international interests. Under such circumstances, official government declarations differed greatly from unspoken realities: under Spanish neutrality lay an implicit support for the allies blocking a possible German invasion of the Rock. In fact, that was the position the allied powers expected from Francoist Spain.

Keywords: Maps, Second World War, Spain, Gibraltar.

Resumen

Este trabajo tiene por objetivo analizar el papel desempeñado por Gibraltar durante la guerra civil española y, especialmente, durante la guerra mundial. Para ello se parte de la información cartográfica que los alemanes dispusieron del Peñón para su

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posible conquista. El enclave -geográficamente estratégico- jugó un papel importante durante el conflicto español y, sobre todo, durante la guerra mundial porque representaba el control de gran parte del Mediterráneo y de rutas comerciales de primer orden. Debido a esa posición geográfica trascendental, Gibraltar fue objeto de una notable actividad diplomática donde se dieron cita intereses nacionales e internacionales. En tales circunstancias el relato oficial público marcó una distancia con respecto a las realidades tácitas: tras la neutralidad oficial española se ocultaba un apoyo implícito a los aliados al obstaculizar una posible conquista germana del Peñón. Precisamente esa actitud neutral era la que los aliados querían de España franquista.

Palabras clave: Mapas, Segunda Guerra Mundial, España, Gibraltar.

INTRODUCTION

One of history's main objectives is to reconstruct the past from a variety of sources that take us back to times and spaces that no longer exist as they did. Although this singular *science* of the past pays homage to chronology, it draws equally upon the geographical coordinates that frame the actions of men, events and battles. Cartography is a known invaluable source for historical information, which this paper proves. The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the Second World War (1939-1945) were two scenarios where the development of Iberian peninsula cartography played a key role. The recovery of the maps of the civil war is the result of a wise initiative carried out by the Government of Catalonia some years ago¹. The initiative was followed by other regions, mainly Andalusia where an exhibition took place in 2007 under the collaboration of public institutions such as the Junta de Andalucía (regional government), the Centre for Andalusian Studies and the Cartographic Institute of Andalusia². The cartographic climax of the series of maps focused on the civil war consisted of another set: those created by the Germans during the early years of the World War 2 (WW2) -based on their war experience supporting Francoist forces- with the idea of converting Spain into yet another battlefield. These German maps are the origin of the following pages which analyse the complex international

1 Nadal, Francesc y Urteaga, Luis (eds.), *Mapas y cartógrafos en la guerra civil española (1936-1939)*. Madrid, Ministerio de Fomento, 2013.

2 Exhibition VV.AA.: *Los mapas en la Guerra Civil (1936-1939)*. Sevilla, Consejería de Obras Públicas y Transportes, 2007. See: https://www.juntadeandalucia.es/institutoestadisticaycartografia/didactica/exposiciones/catalogo_exposicion_mapas_GC.pdf

situation in Spain in the early 1940s. A country still torn apart by the recent civil war which then has to navigate the turbulent waters of a world at war.

The *Deutsche Heereskarte* was drawn up during the WW2 and, within it, the maps of the lands of Andalusia which are dated between 1940-1941 and are based on the National Topographic Map (NTM). At the time, there were maps of almost all of Andalusia and its coasts, with the exception of the provinces of Huelva and Almería. The work of German cartographers was facilitated by their Spanish colleagues and they only had to focus on completing, profiling and highlighting everything that would be of interest to possible military operations in the area. Neither did the Germans waste this opportunity during the civil war to draw up maps with first-hand data. Perhaps the most significant exponent of these efforts was the enrichment of the pages of the NTM, corresponding to the strait of Gibraltar, thanks also to Spanish military maps produced during the thirties. Although the old page corresponding to this area dated back to 1917 and reached the so-called *neutral field*, in 1941 the Germans were already equipped with cartographic information according to their interests and intentions as far as *Europa Point*, the southernmost tip of the British colony.

An overall comparison between the Spanish map of 1917 and the German map of 1941 reveals some interesting details. The old NTM focused on the description of the land tracing details of the underwater geography. The lines deep drawn beyond the coast were no more than aesthetic fictions that had nothing to do with the real features. The Germans, however, took the time to discover the different depths in the bay, most likely to explore the possibilities of attacking the naval base from the sea. In particular, the page number 1078 (corresponding to the bay of Algeciras and Gibraltar) was completed with a detailed inclusion of the depth lines of the bay and the isthmus of the Rock³. But that bathymetry revealed the difficulties for a submarine attack in a relatively small bay, that had only a narrow corridor of more than 200 metres in depth, which could be used for the vessels to escape after launching of torpedoes, not to mention the added problem of a strong *Royal Navy* presence. It seemed more likely that a submarine attack would be used to support a real ground offensive and, if possible, accompanied by air cover. Indeed, the Germans also paid great attention to communication routes in the surroundings (the road to *Punta Carnero*, for example), for a likely ground attack on the Rock, including the installation of powerful batteries of artillery aimed at pummelling the west

3 Ibid., p. 45.

face of the Rock. Neither did they neglect considering possible sites for building airfields close to Gibraltar. That map was, among other documents, one of the basis that determined tactics for a future invasion of the Rock.

But if the hypothetical conquest of Gibraltar was a reality until mid-1941, its likelihood was reduced irreversibly after 1942. The opening of the Eastern Front (1941) and the landing of allied troops in the French Morocco (1942) dispelled the dangers threatening the Rock. The evolution of the conflict and the avatars of destiny would put those maps in the hands of the allied forces in May 1945 during the final stages of the assault on Berlin, the capital of the Reich. A few years later, and in the grip of the Cold War, the maps -now devoid of relevance or significance- were deposited in the U.S. Library of Congress. It was not until the birth of the new century, because of the interest of technicians and specialists at the Institute of Cartography of Andalusia, that we would re-encounter a reflection of the past in the form of maps of the Andalusian geography⁴.

Nowadays, those maps are a magnificent invitation to explore the past within the terrible and critical years of the post-war period that coincided with WW2⁵. We can observe settlements and villages, roads and railways, the state of inland waters and mineral resources behind their grids. Therefore, we have a useful geographical and historical document of the region in the early 1940s before us. With its long coastline, bordered by two seas, and opposite Africa with its strategic location, Andalusia became particularly relevant to the powers entrenched in the WW2. Specifically, the Atlantic coast and Gibraltar would become a particularly sensitive area to the interests of the contenders. The British had occupied the Rock of Gibraltar from the early 18th century making Oliver Cromwell's wish come true and giving them - with their powerful fleet - the keys to the Mediterranean. Gibraltar meant protection of the maritime route in the Strait and a starting point for an allied attack on the French colonies in Africa or Southern Italy. The Germans knew that conquering the Rock would give them substantial advantages in the course of the war. But any tactical moves against the British colony would require the inescapable collaboration of Spain and the opening of Andalusia to German forces. Hence, the pressure applied by Adolf Hitler on the Franco regime to

4 Most notably, we must mention the names of Don Moses Barea and Don Joaquín Cortés.

5 VV.AA., *La postguerra española y la segunda guerra mundial*. Córdoba, Diputación Provincial, 1990.

join the Axis Powers and the detailed cartographic work of the Germans in designing their warmongering plans⁶.

But in the end Francoist Spain did not participate in the war beside the fascist powers. The following lines are an attempt to unravel the historical situation and to understand the reasons for Spain's neutrality as well as Gibraltar's survival as an allied naval base. To do this, we need to revisit Gibraltar's special relationship with the Nationalists just a few years earlier, during the Spanish Civil War.

THE CIVIL WAR, FRANCO AND GIBRALTAR

Immediately after war broke out in July 1936, Gibraltar received an avalanche of people, anxious to find refuge under the protective shadow of the British flag. All those who feared reprisals from the rebels attempted to cross the border to save their lives. This was yet another example of the Rock's secular role as a place of refuge. In the same way that 19th century Spanish liberals had found their salvation, others who were persecuted in the following century had to leave. In fact, after the Republic was proclaimed, Gibraltar became a refuge and the door to exile for monarchists and conservatives. Members of the royal family left Spain by way of the Rock such as, for example, the then Don Juan de Borbón y Battenberg (future Count of Barcelona after the death of his father, Alfonso XIII). The flow of refugees intensified after Sanjurjada (August 1932) and, above all, after the victory of the Popular Front (February 1936). Not only right-wingers but also moderate Republicans (such as the first Republican mayor of Cordoba, Eloy Vaquero) crossed the Isthmus, fleeing the

6 There is available a huge number of studies about history of Gibraltar and it is not possible to quote here a significant part of them. Just to quote some of the most titles related to this article, see: Constantine, Stephen, *Community and Identity: the making of modern Gibraltar since 1704*. Manchester University Press, 2009; Finlayson, Tommy J., *The Fortress Came First*. Grendon, Gibraltar Books, 1996; Ponce Alberca, Julio, *Gibraltar and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939. Local, National and International Perspectives*. London, Bloomsbury, 2015; Ponce Alberca, Julio: "Espionaje en Gibraltar y su Campo (1936-1945)". *Revista Universitaria de Historia Militar (RUHM)*. 4 – 8 (2015). pp. 35-54; Ponce Alberca, Julio, "Gibraltar, Spain, and the Western Mediterranean during the Twentieth Century". Canessa, Andrew (ed.), *Barrier and Bridge. Spanish and Gibraltarian Perspectives on Their Border*, Brighton / Portland / Toronto, Sussex Academic Press-Canada Blanch Centre for Contemporary Spanish Studies-LSE, 2018. pp. 75-101; Rankin, Nicholas, *Defending the Rock: How Gibraltar defeated Hitler*. London, Faber&Faber, 2017 and Stockey, Gareth and Grocott, Chris, *Gibraltar: A Modern History*. University of Wales Press, 2012.

populist front. On 18 July, the tables turned, when hundreds of people fled the violent repression of insurgent troops and Falangist militias⁷.

Hospitality was a common feature accorded to all refugees, regardless of their ideological creed or political affiliation. Many *Llanitos* (as gibraltarians are named colloquially) had leanings and sympathies for one or the other, but they welcomed friends and family within the neutrality established under British law for the colony. This differed from the attitude of the Gibraltar authorities, starting with its governor, General Sir Charles Harington. His main concern was to maintain the *status quo* and tranquillity of the enclave. They quickly arranged for the evacuation of thousands of refugees to prevent overpopulation and its associated problems (disease, food, accommodation). In addition, they did not want the Gibraltar authorities to shelter a large number of left-wing and Republican refugees because of the risk of confrontation with the surrounding Francoist Spain, as well as possible ideological infection of workers in the military enclave.

However, this British neutrality was more apparent than real. The governor, the authorities and business elites in Gibraltar barely concealed their hostility towards the Spanish Republic, which was considered overly left-wing. This official attitude obeyed the guidelines of the government in London, but was amplified in the particular atmosphere of the Rock, inclined towards conservatism and the preservation of imperial pride, far from the prevailing reformism of the ruling progressive party in Spain. An early test of the true meaning of British *neutrality* with respect to the Spanish Civil War occurred in the early days of the war, when the Republican fleet attempted to block the Strait.

As we know, most of the ships in the Spanish Navy proclaimed themselves loyal to the Republic because the crews mutinied against Nationalist sympathiser officers. Most of the destroyers and the fleet of submarines remained under orders from Madrid, in addition to the battleship *Jaime I* and cruisers *Libertad* and *Miguel de Cervantes*. These units formed a fleet under the command of head of operations Pedro Prado Mendizabal who ordered a successful blockade of the Strait from Malaga to prevent the passage of Nationalist convoys from Ceuta to Cadiz and Algeciras. The Republican fleet moved quickly, but soon needed fuel that could only be acquired in two nearby, non-hostile ports:

7 All references about Gibraltar and the Spanish conflict in Ponce Alberca, Julio, *Gibraltar and the Spanish Civil War*.

Tangiers and Gibraltar. On 21 July the ships set out for Tangiers where they were denied the sale of fuel. The U.S. consul asked American companies not to sell supplies to the new arrivals, while general Franco protested to the Tangiers Control Committee: demanding the immediate departure of those *pirate* ships which were not entitled to refuel in international ports.

After being turned away, the following day they went to the Rock, but the governor put up all possible obstacles receiving a further complaint from Franco at the presence of the *Jaime I*, the *Libertad*, the *Cervantes* and the *Sánchez Barcáiztegui*, among other ships in the Bay of Algeciras. A Royal Navy officer visited one of the ships -the *Jaime I*- to gauge the extent to which the fleet was revolutionary and was surprised by the appearance of the frigate captain in command (probably Fernando Navarro Capdevila) who had "(...) forgotten to put on his socks" ⁸. Everything was mayhem, dirty and discipline was far from the standards expected by English sailors.⁹ The report sent to London was yet again negative for the Republican cause, and the British authorities refused to supply those ships. In essence, the official English opinion coincided with the telegram sent by Franco to the governor of Gibraltar:

"The condition of their crews is that of real communism, when not dead or wounded, the commanders and officers have been arrested... It is not in the interest of Spain to supply them with oil nor should these vessels be allowed to refuel in British waters, I urge Your Excellency to convey these circumstances to the British H.M. Government so that the anarchic presence of these ships in the Mediterranean ends as soon as possible"¹⁰.

At last, the Republican oil tanker *Ophir* arrived with 500 tons of fuel which enabled the fleet to leave the bay of Algeciras, but not before it was harassed by domestic aviation. The aerial attack from Ceuta focused on the cruisers *Cervantes* and *Libertad*, and the battleship *Jaime I*. Bombs from these aircraft fell near the English transatlantic armed merchant cruiser *Chitral* and the destroyer *Shamrock* carrying British evacuees to Gibraltar from Malaga. In the course of combat, the remains of shells fell on Gibraltar (inside the fortress in

8 See: Alpert, Michael, *La guerra civil en el mar*. Madrid, Siglo XXI, 1987, p. 83.

9 According to some accounts, some Royal Navy officers sympathised with Franco's forces. To the British navy it seemed unimaginable that crews might turn against their officers, execute them and allow sailors to take control of the ships. See: Hodgson, Robert, *Franco frente a Hitler*. Barcelona, Editorial AHR, 1954, p. 94.

10 Ponce Alberca, Julio, "La guerra civil española y Gibraltar. Los refugiados españoles en el Peñón". *Almoraima*. n° 25. 2001. p.392.

the vicinity of the Rock Hotel, and even in Sandy Bay and Catalan Bay, on the other side of the Rock). There were even explosions at the RAF headquarters and the Royal Naval Cinema. The following day, Brigadier Brooks (Acting Governor and Commander-in-Chief in Gibraltar) submitted a strong protest against the Republican authorities because of the entry of those ships which posed a risk by firing their anti-aircraft guns over the Rock.

The Nationalists were also warned through the British consul in Tétouan who informed General Franco. The Foreign Office summoned both -although with different tones and under different terms- refusing to tolerate violence over the colony¹¹. However, General Alfredo Kindelán was welcomed cordially in Gibraltar to apologise on behalf of General Franco and to deal with the details of the incident and the circumstances¹². And beyond this courtesy, Kindelán was permitted to use the telephone in Gibraltar (Britain's most important communications centre in continental Europe) to communicate abroad (Lisbon, Berlin and Rome) and to coordinate the operation of the arrival of German and Italian aircraft in Spain¹³. This was an important detail because, in addition, and according to the general's own testimony, he was received as an "*official representative of Franco*" and was allowed to embark on a Nationalist seaplane bound for Ceuta. They could not have been more cooperative when allowing these calls in the shelter of the government's telephone network. It is worthwhile to compare this event with another fact: in 1938 the Gibraltar authorities arrested the members of the crew of the Republican destroyer *José Luis Díez* for attempting to communicate with its own radio from *Europa Point*¹⁴. Quite a contrast.

After their exit from the Strait was thwarted, both coasts were in Nationalist hands, as were the surroundings of Gibraltar. The government in Madrid lost control of the area and this would never be regained, as it was unable to establish a naval blockade, nor was it able to maintain its ephemeral reconquest of San Roque. Nationalist aircraft controlled the skies of the good part of the south of the Peninsula while the Non-Intervention Committee (a French initiative backed

11 Urgent telegram from the Foreign Office (7 August 1936) in *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, second series, Volume XVII. London, HMSO, 1979, p.70. Regarding the damage in Gibraltar, see: *Gibraltar Chronicle*, 23 July 1936.

12 See: *The Times*, 23 and 24 July 1936. Specifically, in the issue "*Protest against firing at Gibraltar*", p. 14

13 See: Alpert, *La guerra civil*, p.97. The American ITT also provided special telephone lines for the rebels, see: Beevor, Anthony, *The Spanish Civil War*. London, Cassell, 2000, p. 48.

14 See: Kindelán, Alfredo, *Mis cuadernos de guerra*. Barcelona, Planeta, 1982, pp. 83-84.

by Great Britain) treated both sides equally without recognising their warring party status. The Republican fleet was then hewn into two (the Mediterranean and Atlantic) failing to control the sea despite their superior number of units.

From then on, and throughout the war, the borders of Gibraltar would become permeable to flows of aid and discreet but crucial supplies for the Nationalist cause. In contrast, the Republic would find only barriers to getting hold of weapons and war supplies, as shown by the mechanisms implemented by the Non-Intervention Committee. The *evil neutrality* (as it came to be defined) deployed by the English government's strategy left ample evidence in its wake that there was something going on. The Labour opposition and the supporters of the Republican cause alleged that the Conservative cabinets of Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain were cooperating with the rebels, but governments always denied this, brandishing arguments such as the search for peace by avoiding the expansion of the local Spanish conflict to the rest of Europe, upholding British interests and sustaining the complicated international balance. In November 1936, labour MP Josiah Wedgwood informed the Minister of Colonies that he had been told by a British officer about aid dispensed by the Admiralty to the Nationalist troops. Among other services, according to the MP, secret information had been given to the insurgents on the movements and state of the Republican fleet¹⁵.

But Gibraltar was giving the Nationalists far more than information. Apart from telling gestures like giving Kindelán access to the communication network on the Rock, they deployed the *HMS Queen Elizabeth* opposite the bay of Algeciras to hinder naval attacks by the Republican fleet and opened the land and maritime communications with La Línea and Algeciras to trade, especially with fuel (a product that was carefully excluded from the list of the weapons embargo, ammunition, etc.). All in all, it seems that even war equipment was sold discreetly, as observed by German *chargé d'affaires* Hans Voelckers:

"As for England we have made the interesting observation that she is supplying the Whites with ammunition via Gibraltar, and that the British cruiser commander here has recently been supplying us with information on Russian arms deliveries to

15 See: Algarbani Rodríguez, José Manuel, "El SIMP. El Servicio de Información del Ejército nacional en el Campo de Gibraltar". *Almoraima*, n° 29. 2003. p. 499.

the Red Government, which he certainly would not do without instructions"¹⁶.

We also know that on 11 August 1936, the military governor of Algeciras requested permission from the English authorities to send a couple of boats to Gibraltar to buy supplies. This was agreed to, on the condition that those responsible for transport were dressed in civilian clothes. A report preserved in the Public Record Office acknowledged that:

"Armed boats of the Spanish Tobacco Monopoly are constantly travelling from Gibraltar to Algeciras with provisions under protection of Rebel Army officers... Provisions are also brought on board the Algeciras mail boat and the tank boat which carries wood... Ammunition is carried in a fishing boat painted white which is armed with machine guns and officers of the Foreign Legion"¹⁷.

All this support was supplemented by several pro-Franco activities which were very widespread among the most influential social sectors in the colony. Merchants like the Imossi, senior officials and members of the Catholic and Anglican churches were fully encouraging to the "rebel" side. For some, the military coup meant defending the cause of God and Christian civilization; for others, an opportunity to do business by erasing the leftist influence in Spain; for yet others, it meant carrying out the instructions, real - or hidden- of non-intervention¹⁸. The Gibraltar company Bland, for example, made every effort in its active trade with national ports and the sight of its ships was well known in Seville. In the meantime, the Republican fleet bartered for any type of aid or acquisition of material. It was even said that German planes - according to

16 See: Beevor, Anthony, *The Spanish Civil War*. London, Orbis Publishing Ltd., 1982 edition, p. 112. Spanish translation: "*En cuanto a Inglaterra hemos observado que está suministrando municiones a los blancos (nacionales) vía Gibraltar, siendo informados a través del comandante de cruceros británico de entregas de armas rusas al gobierno republicano, lo cual no hubiera hecho sin instrucciones*".

17 Quoted in: Stockey, Gareth J., *Gibraltar during the years of the Spanish Second Republic and Civil War (c. 1931-1939)*, University of Lancaster (unpublished), p. 64. (Information taken from The National Archives, hereinafter referred to as TNA, CO 91/500/2). Spanish translation: "*Botes artillados del monopolio de tabacos español están constantemente trasladándose desde Gibraltar hacia Algeciras con provisiones bajo la protección de oficiales nacionales... Las provisiones son también transportadas en la nave que lleva el correo a Algeciras y otro que transporta madera... La munición es transportada en un pesquero armado y con oficiales de la Legión a bordo*".

18 See: *Ibidem*, p. 65.

statements made by the journalist Henry Buckley - refuelled at Gibraltar's small airfield during the early days of war to support the rebellion in Seville¹⁹. These are probably exaggerated reports but, but nonetheless, Gibraltar was far from being truly neutral.

Obviously, not all the Gibraltarians were in agreement with the state of affairs. Some Gibraltarians fought with the Republicans while others helped many Spanish refugees who ended up making their permanent homes on the Rock. But the authorities and the main merchants - in other words, the colonial elite - transformed Gibraltar into a beneficial source of resources for the Nationalists with the tolerance and under the auspices of His Majesty's Government. Franco was very aware, despite the narrowing of relations with Hitler's Germany and fascist Italy, that they were directly and explicitly helping his victory. The head of the Spanish State under the control of the *nacionales* received, in varying degrees, help from one or another, to the extent that its most outstanding ideological significance was that the deep anti-communism and expansionism of Hitler was considered the price to pay for concessions on the part of the English (appeasement policy, Anschluss, Munich). General Franco therefore had significant room to manoeuvre in the midst of the interests of the different powers, excluding - of course - the USSR.

Taking these factors into account it is understandable that it would have been difficult to sever the tacit cordiality between Francoist Spain and Chamberlain's Government, however outward appearances indicated the contrary. Gibraltar started building its airport in 1938, and at the same time, it began reinforcing its land and naval defences in anticipation of a future conflict. The authorities of the Franco regime, for their part, had started installing cannons around the Bay of Algeciras in 1937 for the purpose of controlling the Strait in coordination with the artillery in Ceuta. In addition, in 1938, Harington was relieved by General Ironside - a less diplomatic man than his predecessor - while the unofficial Spanish consul in Gibraltar, Luciano Lopez Ferrer, was not always up to the job. But the basic understanding was never breached, even when at the end of February General Queipo de Llano gave an unfortunate speech in La Línea lamenting Spain's loss of Gibraltar. His words caused a flurry of concern in London to which Franco reacted quickly. Senior Gibraltarian civilians were assured that they had received a "*emphatic denial*" by General

19 See: Téllez, Juan José, *Gibraltar en tiempos de los espías*. Sevilla, Andalucía abierta, 2005, pp.78 and 114. Henry Buckley's observations are compiled in his work titled *Vida y muerte en la República española*.

Franco's representatives, who, in contrast, blamed everything on a "*bastard plot by the Reds living in Gibraltar*"²⁰. The English authorities accepted these explanations, but Burgos stopped General Queipo's public manifestations, withdrawing him from the radio space he had been using for propaganda purposes since the beginning of the war. It was clear that it was one thing to use inflammatory national-patriotic rhetoric and another to endanger vital relationships gratuitously and recklessly.

A year later, in February 1939, the now former Governor Harington gave a lecture at the *Royal Empire Society* where he purported that Franco was not a threat to Britain's interests:

"I have always been very interested to read in the press about all the cannons with which General Franco is threatening Gibraltar and all the heavy 12-inch mortars located in Pelayo, close to Algeciras. There have never been more than four of those huge mortars, and according to my knowledge, all were withdrawn a month ago, before I left Gibraltar, two to the Ebro front and two to Cadiz. (...) I am not advocating for General Franco... (but) I am quite sure that Franco will not put up with the German or Italian troops for a day more than necessary. He is sick of them... I do not believe and I have never believed that Franco's Spain will take orders from Herr Hitler or Mussolini"²¹.

FROM STRICT NEUTRALITY TO THE HENDAYE INTERVIEW

The civil war ended on 1 April 1939 a few months before the German and Soviet troops moved into Poland (September) beginning the World War. A week later, Spain signed the Anti-Comintern Pact in what appeared to be Franco's unconditional alignment with Germany, Italy and Japan. However, Franco would declare neutrality when the conflict began, in line with the expected evolution of events. After months of *impasse*, the real German offensive began in the spring of 1940, conquering Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and France. In light of this military success, Spain declared itself "non-belligerent" (a legal tactic also used by Italy as a step before

20 See: TNA, FO 371/22662.

21 Quoted by Hills, George, *El Peñón de la discordia. Historia de Gibraltar*. Madrid, Ed. San Martín, 1974, pp. 503-504.

getting involved in the World War). This was followed by unambiguous acts of closeness to the Axis such as, among others, Spain's unilateral occupation of Tangiers (June 1940), sending nazi sympathizer Ramón Serrano Suñer to Germany (September) and his appointment as Minister for Foreign Affairs (October). Everything seemed to indicate that Spain would become involved in the war with Germany and correspondence between Franco and Hitler during the autumn of 1940 ratified a mutual desire for an alliance. However, the Spanish-German alliance did not materialise, and nor did Spain join the war. Only a detailed analysis of the events of those days reveals the reasons for Spanish neutrality in the context determined by the presence of Gibraltar as British strategic enclave.

Despite the harmony between the Spain that emerged from the civil war and European fascist regimes, in truth, a good part of the national economy was within the British sphere which retained material interests and strategic fundamental rights in the peninsula, including the colony of Gibraltar. The German influence had grown since the civil war but trade with Britain -including strategic materials- continued, as well as fuel supply imports and financial services in the hands of British banks. In such circumstances, it is understandable that Spain would declare neutrality amid a conflict between the powers with which it had relationships. In addition, war had been declared following the invasion of Poland though none of the contenders had dared to put their war machine in motion for months. Only as of the month of June 1940 -with German troops in the French Pyrenees- would Franco adopt a series of measures which would, in any case, preclude the adoption of firm commitments.

The internal situation in the country was very sensitive both from an economic (the extremely harsh post-war period) and a political point of view (pressure from, and conflicts between, the different families of the regime, control of the *Falange* (or FET-JONS, the unique political party under Francoism), the concerned monarchist forces, etc.). In the midst of these internal difficulties and tumultuous international waters, the Spanish dictator would be careful to maintain political balance to garner the maximum benefits that could be derived from the war in the making. If Hitler was to achieve victory, Franco was willing not to miss out on the opportunity to share in the triumph of the Axis by entering the conflict shortly before its conclusion. Otherwise, a more prudent attitude would be to remain neutral as demanded by Great Britain. The behaviour of the general remained within these parameters during the early years of the Second World War.

Given the rapid German advance, in June 1940 Franco sent General Juan Vigón Suerodíaz to meet with Hitler and German Foreign Minister Von Ribbentrop. Just days earlier, Spanish troops had occupied the international city of Tangiers and Franco had drafted a letter to the Führer that would be delivered by Vigón. The letter shows Spain's clear adhesion to the German cause, while at the same time, highlighting the country's shortcomings towards embarking on a new war. In parallel, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Juan Luis Beigbeder -although against Spain joining the war waged by the Axis- had delivered the German ambassador a list of Spanish demands in Northwest Africa (Oranesado, all of Morocco, expansion to the south of the Sahara and the expansion of Spanish Guinea). Italy had by then joined the war and Spain was not willing to get left behind, provided victory of the Axis was clear. Deep down, Hitler did not need the Spanish forces to go to war (whose contribution would be, in any case, very limited due to the lack of technique and of materials) but was interested in the opening of the Spanish border to allow them to cross the peninsula and conquer Gibraltar, which provided crucial support of the *Royal Navy* together with Malta and Alexandria, in addition to their presence in Crete and Cyprus²².

Vigón had established himself as one of Franco's confidantes after his initial contacts with Hitler. Before the end of June, Vigón was promoted to the position of Air Minister replacing General Yagüe (with clear preference for the Axis) who was severely admonished by the dictator. A few weeks later, in July, Vigón would be one of those responsible for receiving a visit from a German delegation led by Admiral Wilhelm Canaris with the objective of exploring the possibilities of an attack on Gibraltar. By then, the Germans were considering various possibilities for beating England: landing in the British Isles (Operation *Sealion*) or breaking its periphery (evicting them from the Mediterranean and controlling a good part of its sea routes). Canaris was more in favour of this second option and took advantage of his trip to Spain to travel to the Campo area and study a plan of attack. The British were aware of these machinations and did everything within their means to keep Spain neutral. The Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs even hinted to the Spanish ambassador that they might be amenable to discussing Gibraltar once the war was over. As a result, the Duke of Alba sent the following telegram to Spain:

"The English Government hopes that will we continue to have good relations, and having learned lessons from its past policy

22 Only Crete would be conquered by the Germans in 1941 after an airborne operation.

errors toward Spain, at a later date it will be willing to consider all our problems and aspirations, even the question of Gibraltar"²³.

During the last week of July 1940, Gibraltar was analysed from several perspectives as to the design for a possible attack. A ticket was even bought on the plane covering the Seville-Ceuta route for a specialist in assault operations, Hans Mikosch, who arrived to review the area from the air after deliberately diverting the aircraft. This soldier was responsible for drafting a report with Admiral Canaris about the conquest of Gibraltar which was delivered in Berlin in early August, just after their return to Germany. Before returning to their country, the German retinue asked the Spaniards for more detailed information from observation posts in La Línea and Algeciras, better maps and suitable places for amassing infantry forces. That plan was referred to the office of the General Alfred Jodl and for several days it was thoroughly analysed by the High Command of the Wehrmacht. What was in the Mikosch-Canaris report?

The first German plan to snatch Gibraltar from the British consisted of a fairly rapid attack in several phases. Firstly, the entire population of the Campo area would be evacuated, making it an exclusively military zone, and the communications network would be improved, while a battalion of special forces occupied the isthmus to prevent any English offensive. During a second phase, they would bomb the Rock from the ground to take the defences, the entries of the tunnels, machine guns, military installations and, of course, the naval units stationed in the port at that time. Artillery fire would be supported by a concentrated aerial bombardment in the northern part of the city, warships and fortifications. This would be carried out using the airfields in the south of France along with those of the provinces of Cadiz, Malaga, Seville and Granada. Again, the artillery would attack the rock, focusing their fire on the dikes, the arsenal and the port. Finally, the third stage would have as protagonists in an assault a sapper battalion, another of special forces and a third mountain battalion. These forces would enter by land from the north-west and travel to the north wharf by speedboat. The conquest was expected to be fast and the Spanish infantry's mission would be to secure the points taken²⁴.

23 See: Cosa, Juan de la (pseud. Carrero Blanco), *Gibraltar. Comentarios de un español*. Valencia, 1952, p.147. In this text, he urged Spain to redouble their claims but, obviously, the English had not been committed to anything under the ambiguous wording of "considering at a later date".

24 See: Escuadra, Alfonso, *A la sombra de la Roca. La Segunda Guerra Mundial desde el Campo de Gibraltar*. Córdoba, Cajasur-Ayuntamiento de La Línea de la Concepción, 1997, pp. 100-112.

But the Mikosch-Canaris project went no further than General Jodl's office. In itself, it was a first approach to the problem posed, a general outline that required more precise maps (the Germans would draft these themselves) and, above all, demanded an open collaboration on the part of Spain. At this point, Hitler and his intentions did not receive full support because Franco was willing to join the war at the last minute, but before he did so, it had to be clear that England was close to defeat. For the time being, the Spanish dictator would continue playing a double game by sending letters promising Hitler that he was committed to the cause of the Axis while signing trade agreements with Great Britain which were crucial to maintain a minimum in the Spanish economy. Hence Franco's demand for energy and food supplies from Germany as prerequisites for going to war, together with a package of territorial claims. He had to get rid of them with guarantees of dependence on English supplies and this did not yet seem possible with Britain still withstanding bombing from the *Luftwaffe*. Further still, Franco was not at all sure that the English government would surrender even if Hitler reached London while Britain could keep fighting from its colonies or former colonies associated with the *Commonwealth*, mainly from Canada. As a result, the last minutes of the war still seemed far away so it was advisable to clear the horizon and the result of the war before making a decision.

While Spain and the recently occupied territory of Tangiers remained neutral, Franco did not hesitate to send the Teutonophile Ramón Serrano Suñer to Germany in mid-September. There he would meet with Von Ribbentrop and Hitler, following up the contacts made by general Vigón. For more than 15 days he travelled between Berlin and Rome, negotiating the terms for Spain to enter the war within the limits imposed by Franco, avoiding making too many commitments, and Germany's unwillingness to grant Spain too many colonies in Africa at the expense of Pétain's France. The understanding between the Germans and Spaniards was far from perfect and, in view of the circumstances, it was decided hold a high level meeting: the Meeting of Hendaye (23 October 1940).

IN THE FACE OF GERMAN INTENTIONS

The historic meeting lasted just a few hours, but has caused rivers of ink to flow for years. According to the Franco regime's hagiographers, Franco succeeded in preserving Spanish neutrality in Hendaye despite pressure from the Fuehrer.

According to this interpretation, the Spanish dictator was endowed with a type of clairvoyance that enabled him to see the possible outcome of the war, leading him to stay out of the conflict, thus preserving peace. That providential peace would be a recurring theme in Francoist propaganda for decades. Around the celebration of the so-called *25 years of peace*, the dictator would be exalted in films (*Franco, ese hombre*) by José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, 1964) and in difficult-to-classify, unusual songs (*Un gran hombre*, 1966)²⁵. An outstanding example of the atmosphere of support for the Caudillo for his “achievements” 20 years earlier is encapsulated in the work of Agustín del Río Cisneros, which was reissued in 1965 under the title of *Viraje político español durante la IIª guerra mundial (1942-1945) y réplica al cerco internacional (1945-1946)*²⁶. As you might imagine, its pages make no mention of the Interview in Hendaye, while Franco is revealed to the reader as a “Caudillo” who guarantees national independence and peace.

In light of these pro-Franco views of the Interview of Hendaye, some proposed -now in democratic times- interpretations that attempted to show that Franco had an unlimited desire for war and that he aspired to take part in the conflict. But these interpretations inadequately answer the question of why Franco did not do so in view of the broad discretionary powers he held at the time. Today we know that, in effect, Franco intended and wanted to join the war, provided that the costs and the risks were not excessive, to allow him to take a seat at the table with the conquering fascist leaders at a later date. The problem was that the potential risks -both at home and abroad- discouraged total alliance with the Axis in 1940 and, far more clearly during the following years. Franco was not unaware of the consequences of entering the war and was well aware of this when he went to the Hendaye station platform.

We know through multiple sources and testimonies what happened on the afternoon of 23 October 1940, although not all the details coincide and the available information is not complete. Perhaps one of the most reliable reconstructions of the treaty is the document published by the Americans in

25 These views are still shared both inside and outside Spain in diverse literature. One example of this is a novel by American authors Jane and Burt Boyar entitled *Hitler Stopped by Franco*, published in 2001 by Marbella House in the United States.

26 Published by Ediciones del Movimiento, that book is in fact an incorporation of two books that the same author had already written. Namely *España, rumbo a la postguerra. La paz española de Franco* (1947) and *Política internacional de España. El caso español en la ONU* (1946).

1946 as part of *The Spanish Government and the Axis*, albeit incomplete²⁷. In short, and for the purposes of these paragraphs, we know that the interview of Hendaye lasted just a few hours (15.40 to midnight on 23 October) that it took place in an apparently cordial atmosphere but without firm agreements between the two leaders who met in person for the first and last times in their lives. Franco expressed his appreciation for Germany's assistance during the conflict 1936-1939 and showed himself to be totally aligned with the Axis in the war. In fact, the gesture of replacing neutralist Beigbeder with Axis supporter Serrano Suñer just days before the Interview of Hendaye was a sample of the turnaround in Franco's policy. He was willing to enter the war if the English defeat was guaranteed but otherwise, Franco would put on the table the enormous economic difficulties facing Spain, ambitious territorial claims and a period of time for them to commit to definitively.

Given the attitude of the Spanish, Hitler used the conversation to give a dissertation on the successful course of the war, the promising future for German weapons, the certain defeat of England (or the attainment of a peace treaty), the expected isolation of the U.S. (which it considered would not join the war as several months of preparation would be needed) and the relatively solid alliance with the Soviet Union. But he was unwilling to give Spain much more than vital supplies (cereals, fuel). Of course, Hitler was not willing to agree to Spain's North African demands at the expense of its relationship with Vichy France. What he basically sought was to be allowed to cross the peninsula to take over Gibraltar and establish bases in the Canary Islands, rather than any military assistance that would have been, in any case, very meagre. Franco continued with his demands and offered a series of opinions on the war contrary to Hitler's expectations. He commented, for example, that after the conquest of the British Isles, the British government might continue its war efforts from Canada with the support of its fleet, or that taking Gibraltar would mean the partial closure of the Mediterranean which would remain open on the eastern side with the base in Alexandria and the control of Suez. In light of this, Hitler yawned, became angry and was on the verge of abandoning the meeting. After three hours of exchanging monologues, dinner was prepared on board the *Erika*, Hitler's special train. After dinner there was a new meeting, but they only repeated their positions throughout the afternoon. At midnight, the

27 See: United States. Department of State. *The Spanish Government and the Axis: Documents*. Washington, United States Government Printing Office, 1946. These documents were released to the press on 4 March 1946 by the State Department. These are available, among other sites, online: <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/> in the project *Avalon* at Yale University.

Spanish entourage said goodbye and set off for San Sebastian. That morning, in the Palacio de Ayete, Franco composed a document -a secret protocol- which ensured future entry in the war subject to a series of conditions (economic and military aid) and "at the time set by common agreement by the three powers"²⁸.

Franco, therefore, had not secured any commitment from Hitler about his North African aspirations. According to the secret protocol, Gibraltar would be given to Spain, but the Axis powers only promised to consider the other Spanish requests within a general framework "... and which could be carried out for the purpose in the peace treaties after the defeat of England"²⁹. Neither did Hitler get what he wanted: crossing Spain to seize the British enclave. Hendaye was the chronicle of a disagreement because of conflicting interests. Hitler wanted to see England break quickly, not understanding that the war demanded the conquest of the land and seas and Spain meant no more to him than a road to Gibraltar and the ability to use its ports and airfields. The Spanish dictator, however, was not so certain that Great Britain would be defeated, but wanted to share the benefits of peace with the fascist powers in the event of such an eventuality. Until the horizon was clear, Franco would remain neutral, while still giving the appearance of non-belligerency.

There were more than enough reasons to follow a prudent policy of avoiding commitments. The economic and commercial links between Spain and Great Britain were strong and although the English were suffering great hardship, they were not yet defeated. They maintained their supply lines in the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans. The United States sold large amounts of material to Great Britain under a unique neutral system compatible with commercial trade (any country could buy from the United States in exchange for carrying goods in their own ships, a *cash and carry* system). England not only resisted but dared to bomb Berlin (one of the attacks occurred in September 1940 while Serrano Suñer was in Berlin and the Spanish Minister had to take refuge in a bomb shelter for four hours). In July, with *Force H* in Gibraltar, the English had neutralised the French fleet in Mers-el-Kebir and Dakar to stop it from falling to the Axis and in November, the Italian fleet was hit hard by *Swordfish* aircraft in Taranto. On the other hand, Serrano Suñer himself witnessed the German reluctance to satisfy what were considered excessive requests by

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid. According to the sources consulted, this document disappeared from the Spanish archives, but the Americans found the German copy which was published by the Department of State in the 1960s. See: *The Spanish government and the Axis* (https://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/spmenu.asp).

Von Ribbentrop, an attitude that the Interview of Hendaye would not change. Canaris, while devising his initial plan to invade Gibraltar, was well aware of the Spanish shortcomings to enter the war and the cost of Spain as an ally³⁰. All this context revealed the true state of play to the Spanish authorities and explains why the Germans explored other alternatives³¹. Moreover, Churchill sent Samuel Hoare as ambassador to Madrid in May of 1940. Their mission: to maintain Spanish neutrality at all costs and using all possible resources.

Neither did Spain's domestic policy bode well for entering the war and siding with the Axis. The political families that supported the 18th July (outbreak of the civil war) and which supported the political figures of the regime did not share the same enthusiasm for Fascism, and even less so for Nazism. The monarchists, the Catholics and quite a few senior military officers, for various reasons, were very far from what Hitler represented. And this was known outside Spain. As early as the 9 October 1936, the head of Spanish Affairs at the Foreign Office, Montagu-Pollock, gave a fairly accurate description of what Spain would be after the war:

“Our chances of regaining our influence in Spain during this phase [post-war, it would be after 1939] is considerable, due to the fact that the Spanish revolution, unlike the fascist and Nazi revolutions, will have been won essentially by the military, which lean, by tradition toward the United Kingdom and France rather than Germany and Italy. (...) Therefore, it is a British interest arising from a liberal military dictatorship more than a fascist dictatorship: 1) to counteract the Italian and German influence; 2) to stabilise the internal situation”³².

30 Moradiellos, Enrique, *Franco frente a Churchill*. Barcelona, Península, 2005. pp. 129-130. It is interesting to quote that the Spanish government protected Canaris' family after the war (Basset, Richard. *El enigma del almirante Canaris*. Barcelona, Crítica, 2006). Some sources point out that Canaris warned Franco about the risks involved in entering the war. See: Mueller, Michael, *Canaris: The Life and Death of Hitler's Spymaster*. Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 2007, chapter 22 (Operation Felix), note 65.

31 Germans explored closer relationships with Moroccan nationalists as an alternative to Franco for an ally in the region (see Pack, Sasha D., *The Deepest Border: The Strait of Gibraltar and the Making of the Modern Hispano-African Borderland*. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2019. pp. 238-239).

32 Quoted by Moradiellos, Enrique, “El general apacible. La imagen oficial británica de Franco durante la guerra civil”. Preston, Paul (ed.). *La República asediada. Hostilidad internacional y conflictos internos durante la Guerra Civil*. Barcelona, Península, 1999. p. 28.

In the same sense, the serious likelihood of internal dissent in the regime itself should Spain have entered the war has been underlined. Not all the military leaders, such as Beigbeder, Varela, Orgaz, Saliquet or Kindelán, among others, shared Yagüe or Serrano's sympathies. Some of them had been bribed by the British government to guarantee their loyalty to the neutrality. Ambassador Hoare and some members of Churchill's cabinet knew about the bribery operation, which was channelled through financier Juan March³³. Neither were many Spaniards in favour of undertaking a new war, not even the losers that were in Spain (obviously aside from those Spaniards that fought against Hitler embedded in the allied forces) because "... keeping the peace, however little it offers, was preferable to embarking on war exploits with the allies, which may or may not result in more freedom and justice"³⁴.

However, it was advisable to be ready for anything and, of course, recovering Gibraltar by fishing in the troubled waters of the war was a possibility. Franco personally told Hitler in his letter of 22 September 1940 that he had his own plans prepared in secret, which was true, although the Germans did not seem to give this the attention it deserved. In August 1939, Franco ordered a complete photogrammetric study of the Rock to accurately locate all the targets necessary to beat (English artillery, fuel tanks, arsenal, etc.). A few months later, the National Defence Board approved a plan to block the Strait which included the naval blockade of French North African ports and the Portuguese coast. It also appointed the *Fortification Commission of the Southern Border* that prompted a series of works (installation of guns, building roads for transport) described as defensive by the English. Spain was firmly committed to attacking and occupying Gibraltar with Spanish troops in ideal circumstances only. In October 1940, Franco finally had Plan C of the Central Command of the Army. It was a plan in several phases, that would begin with a heavy artillery attack and continue from the Spanish coast, which would be followed by an air attack to expel the British fleet. The Germans or Italians were not expected to get involved unless the English attacked the Canary Islands, the Balearic Islands, Morocco or landed in Portugal. Together with the artillery strike, the use of chemical weapons possibly yperite (mustard gas) was considered to double

33 See: Garcés, Joan E., *Soberanos e intervenidos. Estrategias globales, americanos y españoles*. Madrid, Siglo XXI, 1996, starting on p. 5. On Juan March: Dixon, Arturo, *Señor monopolio. La asombrosa vida de Juan March*. Barcelona, Planeta, 1985 and, more recently, Ferrer Guasp, Pere, *Juan March. El hombre más misterioso del mundo*. Barcelona, Ediciones B, 2004.

34 See: Cazorla Sánchez, Antonio, "La paz: necesidad y usos de un mito político". Lemus López, Encarnación y Quirosa-Cheyrouze y Muñoz, Rafael (coords.), *La Transición en Andalucía*. Huelva-Almería, Universities of Huelva and Almería, 2002, p. 104.

down on the Rock and, to top it off, the 1st Section of the State Council devised a mining project for the area³⁵.

It was clear that Franco had his own project and would not allow the Germans to conquer Gibraltar. It would be a theatre of exclusively Spanish operations which would, in any case, be specified when the end of the war approached. The temptation was great, as was pressure from Germany. In November 1940, an extraordinary council of ministers was convened to analyse the situation and determine Serrano Suñer's position during his next interview with the Fuehrer. At that Council of Ministers, the Minister of the Navy, Admiral Salvador Moreno, introduced a document that contained 21 reasons why Spain should remain neutral for the time being. The report had been prepared by the then former head of operations at the Navy Defence Staff, Luis Carrero Blanco. General Franco was impressed by the precision of the report; months later, Carrero would be appointed Undersecretary of the Presidency of the Government, starting a political career that would continue for the rest of his life along with the dictator. In short, that interesting report highlighted Spain's shortcomings and its dependence on the supplies that arrived by sea. Only if Suez fell into German hands would it be able to close off the Mediterranean with an attack on Gibraltar. In that case, the Axis would be able to provide Spain with supplies through the Mediterranean, while the German promise of supply by railway through the French border, was clearly insufficient. Carrero realised that the Canary Islands and Guinea would have to be sacrificed if Spain joined the war by conquering Gibraltar. In light of these risks, and so few practical results, neutrality was deemed necessary³⁶. At this point, Carrero did no more than point to his agreement with many other military figures. He also recommended that General Carlos Martínez Campos, from the General Staff of the Navy, to

35 All these plans in: Ros Agudo, Manuel, "Preparativos secretos de Franco para atacar Gibraltar (1939-1941)". *Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea*, n. 23. 2001. pp. 299-314.

36 The text from this report is available from: http://www.portierramaryaire.com/arts/espana_sgm_1.php (consulted in May 2007).

Carrero's 21-point report reflected the prudent logic of crippling arguments and a fine and extraordinarily wise sense of strategy. Indeed, among other successes, Carrero succeeding in guessing English intentions: Britain's troops and transports were ready in the summer of 1940 to pre-emptively occupy the Canary Islands if Spain had joined the Axis. This is also what the British told the Americans would happen on 17 October 1942 if Franco resisted the landing in North Africa. See: Garcés, Joan. E.: *Soberanos e intervenidos*, p. 27.

take the greatest precautions and to preserve neutrality³⁷.

By his side, Hitler gave the green light to the preparations for *Operation Phoenix* through the 18th General Regulation. The plan was clearly inspired by the Mikosch-Canaris project. Around mid-January 1941 the Spanish border would be crossed by German forces that would reach the Campo area approximately 25 days later. When the time came, there would be an air attack to disable the fortress defences and disperse the fleet that would be chased by submarines deployed for the purpose. The infantry and elite troops would be in position within 36 hours. The Germans were seeking simple Spanish cooperation to allow the German forces through. Hence the heavy pressure exerted on the Spanish government regarding the date on which they would enter the war (scheduled for January 1941). But in December 1940, the Italians suffered a serious setback in Egypt and Cyrenaica, when the English took 38,000 prisoners. Hitler would have to take immediate action in the eastern Mediterranean by sending forces to North Africa and the Balkans. *Operation Phoenix* was put aside for the moment awaiting a future opportunity. This would never materialise.

THE ABANDONMENT OF A THWARTED COMPANY

Complications in the eastern Mediterranean forced Hitler to direct his attention away from the Strait, although he never forgot about it completely. This development gave Spain more time to see how the hostilities were evolving and to decide which card to play in the future. All the possibilities were still open and, from its special position of non-belligerence, Franco was very attentive to the possible fall of the Suez Canal that would have led - as Carrero warned in his report - to the forced enlistment of Spain in the conflict, because of Gibraltar. In light of the situation, Franco persisted with his strategy of blowing hot and cold with the Germans without breaking his vital links in the Atlantic. In

37 Also, in 1939 renowned international relations specialist Camilo Barcia Trelles -in the Movement's official publications- had warned against Spain's possible adhesion to the Italian-German alliance: "*Hence the error, in our opinion, committed by those who, in the interest of the Rome-Berlin Axis allude to the relevance of becoming a triangle, one of whose vertices would be supported in the western lands of Europe, far from the Italians and the Germans. The existing Anti-Comintern Pact is one thing, and the aggregation of additions to the mentioned military pact is another, if these aggregations are not based on an essential geographical contiguity*". See: Barcia Trelles, Camilo, *Puntos cardinales de la política internacional española*. Barcelona, Ediciones FE, 1939, p. 29.

fact, although on 5 December 1940 the Spanish Government allowed German units onto its coasts to restock, just days later, on the 11 December, Spain rejected the German request to cross the border to head for Gibraltar. Despite Hitler's increased desperation, he was busy mitigating the Italian debacles in the eastern Mediterranean while Franco was still waiting to see how things would transpire, particularly whether the Germans would be able to take the Suez Canal.

In the spring of 1941, the German offensive on Greece and the Balkans and the landing of the Afrika Korps under the command of Erwin Rommel were seriously threatening the base in Alexandria. At the same time, the Germans strategists were still awaiting Gibraltar and, in fact, the German map of this area is dated April 1941. But the British managed to resist the German thrust, stopping them in El Alamein, a few kilometres from the base in Alexandria. Hitler believed that the possibility of closing the Mediterranean was close, but Franco was still nowhere near considering that the time had come to join the conflict. Moreover, Rudolf Hess' disastrous flight to the United Kingdom in May and his incarceration in Scotland made it highly unlikely that peace would come in the short term. Only Hitler's decision to attack the Soviet Union (*Operation Barbarossa*, June 1941) opened the door to a singular Spanish intervention in the war, limited in time and in space, (the dispatch of the *Blue Division*). Franco achieved several of his objectives: to appease Hitler, diverting his attention from the attack on Gibraltar by channelling the impetus of certain Germanophile Falangist generals (Agustín Muñoz Grandes) and showing the British and Americans the limits of his non-belligerent attitude. In the end, some months earlier in March, Franco had reached an agreement with the English on the situation in Tangier. The effective neutrality was preserved despite public gestures and private temptations. Ambassador Hoare's calculations of restrictions on fuel supplies across the Atlantic and the serious threat of conquest of the Canary Islands showed Franco the way forward. The allies squeezed but did not smother the Spanish dictator.

Naturally, the complex balances of foreign policy was reflected in domestic political changes. The promotion of Serrano Suñer as Minister of Foreign Affairs meant transferring him from the Ministry of the Interior, which would be occupied almost nine months later by Valentin Galarza, a member of the military and a close confidant of Franco who had hitherto been secretariat of the Presidency. This position would go to Carrero Blanco, the prudent navy officer who recommended staying out of the war. The Falange was thus deprived of an important source of power (control over civil governors,

town councils, provincial councils, public order, surveillance and repressive activities, etc.). There was no shortage of Falangist protests, but Galarza appointed Carlist Antonio Iturmendi as Undersecretary of the Ministry. Two Falangist collaborators of Serrano Suñer –Antonio Tovar and Dionisio Ridruejo– also lost their positions. As a result, Franco moved pieces in his government to curtail the Falange's power, further secure his own and relieve pressures in favour of an alleged fascistization. To the extent that the allies won the war, the influence of the Falange would be extinguished within the twists and turns of an authoritarian and personalist regime.

While all this was happening on the other side of the border, Gibraltar had been experiencing vicissitudes and upheavals since 1939. As the war turned sour, the British government ordered the mass evacuation of the civilian population from the Rock, mainly toward Jamaica and the metropolis. Paradoxes of destiny caused a significant number to suffer the ordeal of the German bombing in London while life in Gibraltar continued in general atmosphere of calm. Gibraltar became an authentic military fortress with a port, airport, warehouses for supplies in the event of a prolonged siege, coastal artillery, a remarkable anti-aircraft device and kilometres of tunnels. But its strength was also the Spanish neutrality. While Spain remained neutral, few aircraft could cover the distance back and forth to attack Gibraltar, not to mention problems of precision and accuracy. In fact, bombing raids on the Rock were sporadic and caused little damage. The French attacked in the summer of 1940 in retaliation for the sinking of the Gallic fleet at Mers-el-Kebir, but it would be the Italians that would most frequently overfly the Rock. The most worrying threat was that of the German submarines on either side of the Strait and the Italian manned torpedoes that were launched from the *Otterra* across the bay of Algeciras. Given the limited depth of the bay of Algeciras, the best choice for a submarine attack against Gibraltar was the manned torpedoes as was demonstrated with the sinking of some ships by the Italians. Geographical factors were crucial and determinant to draw up an attack plan from the sea. German U-boats were able to hurt the British fleet on the open sea near Gibraltar, as it happened when the aircraft carrier *HMS Ark Royal* was sunk in November 1941. But it would be suicidal to entry the shallow bay to shoot torpedoes because escorts might intercept them easily. To get out from the bay after an attack was so complicated that was never tried. Neither an air raid might be effective to destroy the Fortress. Geography showed the unique weakness of the Rock: a ground assault after an intense artillery bombardment. And for that purpose the Spanish collaboration was essential.

All in all, Gibraltar remained a base and the British fleet kept control of the sea despite some notable losses (the aforementioned HMS *Ark Royal* that provided valuable services and its role in the sinking of the German battleship *Bismarck*). This base and the others in the Mediterranean kept the Italian fleet, which suffered another defeat at Cape Matapan (March 1941), at bay. But without a doubt it was in 1942, when the United States joined the war in the European theatre, when the balance of the war changed completely and Gibraltar became extremely important, as it was the only allied base available to prepare for an invasion in the western Mediterranean, as observed by the General Dwight Eisenhower, Head Strategist of the *Operation Torch* by means of which the allies conquered the French colonies in North Africa (Morocco, Oran and Algiers). The operation took place on 8 November 1942 after weeks of stockpiling materials in Gibraltar where *Ike* established his headquarters during that historic operation.

In the face of such changes in the theatre of war, Franco decided to make a further twist in his foreign policy. Already toward the end of the summer of 1942, he exploited the clashes in Begoña to remodel the government and replace Serrano Suñer in Foreign Affairs with General Francisco Martin Revermann Souza, a man with far more neutral leanings. The Germans had been stopped in Stalingrad and it was already clear that they would neither take Suez nor control the Mediterranean. The letter sent by President Roosevelt to Franco announcing the November 1942 landing and guaranteeing that Spain had nothing to fear from the allied offensive was highly significant. Just days later, Spain concluded its military occupation of the international city of Tangier, although it would govern there until 1945.

The situations were imposed. The possibility of joining the war at the last moment to sit at the table with the conquerors had disappeared now that Hitler's dream of victory was slipping from his hands. On the other hand, Spain was ill prepared for a war that would also have meant the suicide of the Franco regime. In this regard, Samuel Hoare shared a very sharp picture of Spain in early 1942 with Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden:

"People's discontent has become more bitter. Incompetence, corruption and the spirit of revenge of the Falangist machinery has taken a turn for the worse. Hunger and disease constantly raise their menacing heads and, judging by the increasingly open criticism, the government has lost any friends it might have had (...) I would say that the general is determined... to keep Spain

out of the war, not because he dislikes the Germans or believes that Germany can be defeated, but because he knows that not a single Spaniard wants Spain to become involved in the fight”³⁸.

In 1943, the progressive estrangement of Spain from the Axis opened greater distances. Franco certainly knew that the allies might try to take some kind of action against Spain, now that the course of the war had changed. An attack of this nature was unlikely, but not impossible. In fact, on 10 February 1943, Minister Gómez-Jordana signed a secret protocol with the German government by means of which Spain undertook to deal with the allies if they invaded the country or its dependent territories. This commitment was secured in exchange for arms shipments and, strictly speaking, did not pose a risk to Spanish foreign policy since, even without the secret agreement, the Franco regime would have defended itself from the entry of allied troops.

Obviously, there were misgivings in Spain in the face of the victorious allies who were isolating the peninsula. Months later, in October, the Spanish government once again declared neutrality, leaving in its wake the confusing non-belligerence formula, repatriating the Blue Division in November. By that time, the allies began to exert heavy pressure on Franco not to sell tungsten to the Germans. In fact, what the allies were trying to do was ensure that only they would have access to Spanish tungsten, knowing that Spanish government would not put up too much resistance, since it sold large quantities of this material to the British. A good part of this tungsten was sold through Spanish agents in Seville who channelled it towards English hands that took this precious war material to Gibraltar where there were facilities for manufacturing certain weapons. Such enormous volumes were supplied that the Italians tried to sabotage this traffic with secret service operations. This was in the summer of 1943³⁹. In May, 1944 Spain cut off exports of tungsten to Germany.

Moreover, the Japanese representation in Tangier was closed and some Spanish collaboration with the Anglo-Americans was established in military affairs. Franco was clearly trying to save his regime in what he considered was an adverse situation in the final years of the World War. The allies had no sympathy for a dictatorship that had postulated collaboration with the Axis and, of course, the Soviets were keen to see General Franco disappear. But

38 TNA, Foreign Office (FO) 371/31234 obtained by Cazorla Sánchez, Antonio, “La paz”, p. 112.

39 See: Heiberg, Morten, *Emperadores del Mediterráneo: Franco, Mussolini y la guerra civil española*. Barcelona, Crítica, 2004, p. 209. This author claims to know the names of these Spanish entrepreneurs in Seville.

the British and United States governments adopted a wait-and-see approach to whether Franco would manage to stay in power, balancing the different *political families* (to the detriment of the Falange) and preserving a *status quo* characterised by anti-communism.

Obviously, we must not mistake the attitude of these governments (very lukewarm in their condemnation of the Franco regime) with that of the vast majority of English and American public opinion. However much Spain sought to dress its unique dictatorship after 1945 in democratic clothing (“Lex fori of the Spanish people”; the incorporation of Catholics, the banning of fascist salutes) was not credible outside our borders. Government officials, journalists and diplomats who visited Spain never believed in the sincerity of the Spanish neutrality since it was, in fact, the result of the failure of the Axis and the thwarting of intentions to join Hitler’s victory at the last minute. If Franco’s attitude changed it was due to domestic and, above all, external pressure⁴⁰. And if the Anglo-Saxon powers tolerated Franco’s dictatorship it was because the alternatives were too risky and because it represented another anti-communist device, even at the expense of lack of freedom as was the case in Portugal and Greece.

As of 1945, the world was moving toward a bipolar configuration in which Franco would hoist the flag of anti-communism. His interviews and letters with Hitler or Mussolini were far behind him, but Prime Minister Clement Attlee, and President Harry S. Truman supported a blockade against the Franco regime that exerted pressure but did not drown him. Stalin proved to be the real enemy, far more powerful than the dictatorship of a country of second or third ranked with a citizenship repressed and denied of their freedom. In fact, the dictator was still head of State when he died in his bed in 1975, having entered into agreements with the United States during his almost 40-year regime. In a conversation with the Conde de Rodezno, Franco even confessed that “the true nature of his relations with the Anglo-Saxons was a secret between he and them”⁴¹. In 1949, in response to a question from a journalist of the *Daily Telegraph* about Gibraltar, Franco stated his position in the following terms:

“Gibraltar will always be a shadow between our two nations. It is a piece of our own Spanish territory that some of our thinkers

40 For examples of these ideas on Franco’s Spain, see: Hughes, John, *Report from Spain*. New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1947 or Foltz, Charles, *Masquerade in Spain*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1948.

41 See: Garcés, Joan E., *Soberanos e intervenidos*, p. 38.

call a thorn in the heart of Spain. Although, due to the neutrality of our nation, it had a role during the last war, albeit a modest one, it lacks, in itself, any military value. These days the Strait has become all the sea from Cadiz to Ibiza, and its military value is measured by hundreds of hectares and dozens of aerodromes. Its strategic importance has grown to encompass Spain in its entirety"⁴².

The old German maps of Gibraltar and the Andalusian coast have become no more than history. After being captured by the Americans, they languished under the dust of time and oblivion in the United States Library of Congress for years. There they lay, as witnesses to a complex story which, in these short paragraphs, we have attempted to summarise.

42 Source: Cosa, Juan de la (pseud. Carrero Blanco): *Gibraltar*, p.18.

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