

A STRUGGLE FOR EQUIDISTANCE? THE BLUE DIVISION, SPANISH DIPLOMACY, AND THE THEORY OF THREE WARS

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ABSTRACT: This article addresses two interconnected issues. On one hand, the specific weight of the Spanish Volunteer Division (The Blue Division) in shaping Spanish foreign policy during World War II, up until 1943. In relation to this, the text focuses on a moment of significant importance: the months between the Allied landing in North Africa (Operation Torch) and the exponential increase of Allied pressure on Spain in the summer of 1943. Throughout those months, under the leadership of its resourceful Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Jordana, Franco's Spain deployed what is perhaps the most distinctive phase of Spanish policy during the war. This is what we refer to as the phase of *imperfect equidistance*. Our thesis connects the existence of the Blue Division and the regime's determination to keep it at the frontlines with the design of this policy. The unit fighting in the East was indeed a fundamental piece in asserting the unique and independent nature-of Spanish foreign policy.

KEY WORDS: Franco's Spain – the Blue Division – Operation Torch – foreign policy

¿UNA LUCHA POR LA EQUIDISTANCIA? LA DIVISIÓN AZUL, LA DIPLOMACIA ESPAÑOLA Y LA TEORÍA DE LAS TRES GUERRAS

RESUMEN: El presente artículo aborda dos cuestiones interconectadas. Por un lado, el peso específico de la División Española de Voluntarios (La División Azul) en el diseño de la política exterior española a lo largo de la II Guerra Mundial, hasta 1943. En relación con ello, el texto se centra en un momento de singular importancia: Los meses entre el desembarco aliado en el norte de África (Operación Torch) y el aumento exponencial de la presión aliada sobre España a la

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altura del verano de 1943. A lo largo de aquellos meses la España de Franco, de la mano de su hábil ministro de Asuntos Exteriores, el Conde de Jordana, desplegó la que es quizás la fase más original de la política española durante la Guerra. Es lo que denominamos fase de *equidistancia imperfecta*. Nuestra tesis vincula la existencia de la División Azul, y la voluntad del régimen de mantener a esta en el frente, al diseño de dicha política. La unidad que combatía en el este era –en efecto– una pieza fundamental para hacer valer el carácter único y exento de presiones externas de la política española.

PALABRAS CLAVE: España de Franco – División Azul – Operación Torch – política exterior

The Second World War arguably posed the greatest diplomatic, political, and military challenge that Franco's regime had to face throughout its history. Neither during the toughest moments of the so-called Isolationism nor in the difficult 1970s, when it was hounded by the imminent death of the Generalísimo, was the regime closer to the abyss. Just after the conclusion of the Civil War, with its wounds still fresh and painful, the new regime was barely an amalgamation of groups as divided as they were lacking in internal logic and defined principles of action. The situation at hand was a fiery furnace of opposing, conflicting, and contradictory stances. It desperately required a period of political stabilization to define objectives, establish a legislative framework, and organize an orderly distribution of political power. All of this needed to be done among the various factions that had formed the victorious coalition in the Civil War. Time, in essence, was what Franco and his regime needed, and that was precisely what they would lack for more than six years.¹

During those years, the regime had to experiment with different diplomatic strategies to improve its survival options amidst the changing scenarios of the conflict. This process began during the Civil War and culminated in the first months of 1943 with the so-called phase of *imperfect equidistance*. In this phase, designed after the Allied landing in North Africa, the regime sought to play the card of Spain's centrality between the two opposing sides, surpassing the pro-Axis dialectic of previous phases. The *Theory of the Three Wars* played a particularly important role in this process, as a fundamental element to favour the continuity of the Blue Division (the Spanish voluntary unit fighting among Germany since

¹ An approach to the debate on the political nature of Francoism in: Juan Pablo FUSI, *Franco. Autoritarismo y Poder Personal*, Madrid: Punto de Lectura, 2000; Stanley PAYNE, *Fascism, Comparison and Definition*, Madison: Madison University Press 1983; Julius RUIZ, *Franco's Justice: The Repression in Madrid after the Spanish Civil War*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005; Juan LINZ, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*, London: Lynne Reiner Publishers, 2000; Stanley PAYNE, *El Régimen de Franco*, Madrid: Alianza, 1987; Enrique MORADIELLOS, *La España de Franco (1939-1975)*, Madrid: Síntesis, 2000; Ismael SAZ CAMPOS, *Fascismo y Franquismo*, Valencia: Universidad de Valencia 2004.

1942 in Soviet Russia) on the front and to demonstrate the genuinely Spanish character –free from foreign interference– of the regime’s foreign policy.

Our thesis aims to position the Blue Division as a key element in the design of Spain’s *imperfect equidistance* in 1943 through an analysis of the main political variables present at that time, as well as in the immediately preceding stages. Additionally, we aim to advance the study of one of the lesser-known phases of foreign policy during the war: the period defined by Francisco Gómez Jordana’s early months as Minister of Foreign Affairs. Our perception is that Spanish foreign policy during this phase, although mistaken in its interpretation of the reality and its implications, is the result of a process of deep political maturation, in which improvisation weighed less than a realistic, albeit perhaps unfocused, analysis of the variables of the moment.

IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SPANISH FOREIGN POLICY DURING WWII

The Spanish Civil War itself took place within an increasingly volatile international context. While some historians have tended to attribute the outcome of the conflict to exogenous elements, such an explanation seems excessive to us.² The war and its results can be explained by an internal political turn of events that was distinctly Spanish, although strongly influenced by the international context. This context naturally inclined Nationalist Spain to align itself in the European theatre with the emerging dictatorial powers, particularly Germany and Italy. However, this inclination had well-defined limits, determined by the internal twists and turns of Spanish politics and circumstances. During the Civil War, with the risk of an early European war with the Czechoslovakian crisis, Spain assured both England and France that it would maintain neutrality in the event of an armed conflict. Furthermore, Spanish ambassadors at the time tended to project an image of traditional conservatism in Europe rather than an overt approach to fascism.³

The conciliatory stance of Count Jordana as minister of Foreign Affairs did not prevent Spain from joining the Anti-Comintern Pact or leaving the League of Nations. Nevertheless, the Jordana-Bérard agreements demonstrated Spain’s desire to maintain stable relations with its still powerful neighbour and a desire for balance.⁴ In essence, the emerging Spain was not a monolithic regime,

2 See Paul PRESTON, *Franco, a Biography*, London: Harper Collins, 1993; Paul PRESTON, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain*, London: Harper Press, 2013. This thesis is supported, among others, by Sebastian Balfour, Angel Viñas and Julian Casanova.

3 See Emilio SÁENZ-FRANCÉS, *Entre la Antorcha y la Esvástica. Franco en la Encrucijada de la Segunda Guerra Mundial*, San Sebastián de los Reyes: Actas, 2009, chapter 1.

4 *Ibidem*.

despite the dialectical passion in that regard, but rather a multifaceted reality, articulated around two identities: one born from the seduction of totalitarianism, and the other traditional, reactionary, prudent, and fearful, within a volatile international context. This duality, crystallized in the ambivalences of General Franco himself, would be the main protagonist of Spanish foreign policy during World War II. The survivalist will of the Caudillo as the undisputed guiding figure of the 1939 regime would be the central character.⁵



Imagen 1. Ramón Serrano Suñer and the Count of Jordana. Both figures, with their distinctive imprint, were crucial in shaping Spanish foreign policy during World War II. Archivo ABC.

Just as the cannons of the Civil War were silenced, with no time for Spain or its new ruling class to catch their breath, World War II began. In its early stages, during the invasion of Poland and the so-called Phony War, Spain played what could be called the “peace card.” It encouraged offers and mediations to achieve an early end to the conflict, not out of idealistic reasons, but because a swift conclusion of the European conflict was the best guarantee for the future of Franco’s Spain. Furthermore, Spain hoped to play a prominent role in the shaping of that peace.⁶ The invasion and subsequent collapse of France in the spring of 1940 dealt a powerful blow to established mentalities and to everything that was perceived as secure regarding the balance of power in Europe. A new era was beginning, in which even the most unconfessed political dreams could potentially be fulfilled, allowing for an unrestrained irredentism that united Spain and Italy, two countries that felt mistreated by what was perceived as French

⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁶ *Ibidem.*

and British imperialism. This thought led Mussolini, already captivated by an unbridled fascination with the Führer's Reich, to enter the war, initiating Italy's painful participation in the conflict. However, Franco was not willing to go that far. The formula of Non-Belligerence, a mere preparatory state in the case of Italy, became, thanks to its conceptual ambiguity, one that perfectly suited the necessary and calculated ambivalence that would define Spanish foreign policy at this time.⁷ This became evident when the regime realized that a complete German victory would make Spain even more dependent on the Reich than it had been during the previous yoke of the democracies.

Following the unsuccessful planned invasion of the British Isles, Hitler shifted his attention to the Iberian Peninsula, contemplating the possibility of carrying out Operation Felix, which involved the occupation of Gibraltar. The process of political negotiation and pressure on Franco's regime to obtain its approval for the operation reached a crucial point with the inconclusive meeting between Franco and Hitler in Hendaye in October of that year. Spain did not refuse to cooperate but demanded a high price, meticulously calculated, to assume such a significant risk. By the end of 1940, the Spanish plan was definitively abandoned *due to the lack of necessary political prerequisites*.⁸ The war was moving away from Spain, leaving behind a sense of bitterness between Spain and the Reich. This was by no means an easy relationship. On the other hand, the appointment of Ramón Serrano Suñer as Minister of Foreign Affairs marked a particularly challenging phase in Spain's relationship with the United Kingdom and the United States. As if that were not enough, in the winter of 1940-1941, tensions arose in the regime's internal politics as the Falange pushed to increase their power, spurred on by radical sectors of the German Embassy in Madrid. This resulted in the so-called May Crisis of 1941, which was resolved by the Caudillo with the cold precision of a surgeon.⁹ Nonetheless, it revealed that the regime was plagued by intense political tensions, which were being instigated by the German Embassy in Madrid.¹⁰

THE DISPATCH OF THE BLUE DIVISION IN THE CONTEXT OF SPANISH FOREIGN POLICY

Everything changed on the morning of June 22, 1941. At dawn, German troops flooded across the Russian border.¹¹ The Second World War entered a comple-

7 See Victor MORALES LEZCANO, *Historia de la No-belligerancia Española Durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial (VI, 1940-X, 1943)*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: Excm. Mancomunidad de Cabildos de Las Palmas, 1980.

8 Emilio SAÉNZ-FRANCÉS, *Entre la Antorcha...*, *op. cit.*

9 See Joan María THOMÀS, *La Falange de Franco. El Proyecto Fascista del Régimen*, Barcelona: Plaza & Janes, 2000. p. 290-306.

10 See Klaus J. RUHL, *Franco, Falange y III Reich. España Durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial*, Madrid: Akal, 1986.

11 Cfr. Basil LIDDELL HART, *La Segunda Guerra Mundial*, Barcelona: Caralt, 2006. p. 180.

tely new phase of its development. The full might of the Wehrmacht was now focused on the vast Soviet steppes. Early in the morning, ambassadors of Axis-affiliated countries, including Spain, were informed of the commencement of operations.¹² Despite the losses suffered after nearly two years of war, the German army had strengthened since 1939. In fact, not only had its numbers increased, but its power was disproportionately superior to what it had at the start of the war.¹³ The Wehrmacht had grown from 3.75 million to 5 million soldiers; the Luftwaffe boasted 1.7 million personnel, including auxiliary troops and airborne forces; the Kriegsmarine had 400,000, and the Waffen-SS had expanded from 50,000 to 150,000 men. On June 14, 180 divisions, 3,350 tanks, 7,200 artillery pieces, and 2,000 aircraft amassed at the Polish and Czechoslovakian border, ready to surge into the Soviet Union. The German offensive aimed for a swift victory, capitalizing on the technical and strategic superiority of the Wehrmacht against a surprisingly unprepared Russia, oblivious to the imminent German attack. Despite the deteriorating German-Soviet relations since the signing of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, due to Hitler's interventions in the Balkans and Soviet aspirations in the region, the German invasion caught the Soviet leadership completely off guard. When the first rumours of preparatory activities reached the Kremlin on Saturday the 21st, Stalin hesitated to mobilize, hoping for a peaceful resolution to the situation.¹⁴

From Hitler's perspective, this was a different kind of conflict –a war of annihilation– where any chivalrous notions of warfare were replaced by a cold logic that saw the newly conquered territories as a source of slave labour necessary for building the Thousand-Year Reich and acquiring vast resources to sustain it. The initial stages of the campaign were a resounding success.

On the same day, the morning of June 22, after being informed of the new situation by Eberhard von Stohrer (German Ambassador in Madrid) and General Eugenio Espinosa de los Monteros Spanish representative in Berlin), Serrano Suñer, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, travelled to El Pardo to confer with the Caudillo, addressing the possibility of sending a volunteer division from the FET to assist the German effort. The following day, a Cabinet meeting was held, with the main topic of discussion revolving around the dispatch of a Spanish unit to the newly emerged Russian front. Apparently, a heated debate ensued between General Varela and Serrano himself regarding the nature of this force. Serrano has recounted on multiple occasions (for example, in an interview for the documentary series “Memoria de la Guerra” directed by

12 Espinosa de los Monteros to Serrano Suñer. Archivo del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, MAEC, 22-6-1941, R1113-1.

13 Cfr. John KEEGAN, *The Second World War*, New York: Penguin, 2005. p. 173 y 174.

14 *Ibidem*, p. 181. To delve into the debate regarding Stalin's knowledge of Hitler's plans see: John LUCKAS, *Hitler and Stalin*, London: Yale University Press, 2007.

Manuel Leguineche, broadcasted on Spanish Television in 1995) how he contradicted the general by asserting that the unit should not be a regular division of the Army. Serrano argued that if a clear connection could be established between the Spanish army and the division, that would de facto mean Spain entering into war with the Soviet Union. The following day, a mixed solution was agreed upon, where a voluntary unit would be formed but under the command of Spanish officers. Simultaneously, an impressive demonstration took place in front of the FET headquarters on Alcalá Street, accompanied by Serrano's famous speech: "Rusia es culpable," which, in the collective imagination, symbolized the creation of the Blue Division.

Days later, as Spain prepared, if not for war, at least for the deployment of its volunteer division, it fell upon the Duke of Alba to appease English suspicions in London:

"Antes de recibir su carta (...) me había esforzado ya en hacer comprender aquí la razón de nuestro derecho en combatir contra Rusia y creo que desde luego lo comprenden, al menos así me lo han dicho cuántos miembros del Gobierno he hablado, el propio jefe del Estado Mayor Imperial, general Hill, y no de otra manera pueden interpretarse los términos que usó Eden en su entrevista conmigo (...).¹⁵"

For Franco, the invasion of Russia was good news in every sense. Firstly, it confirmed that Hitler's war concerns were moving away from the Mediterranean, reducing the danger of Spain becoming involved in the war. Secondly, the invasion only strengthened Franco's belief in the invincibility of the Reich, which was once again reaffirmed through the attack on the sworn enemy of Francoist Spain. The invasion of Russia allowed Spain to take a calculated risk by officially sending a volunteer combat division, which symbolized Spain's loyalty to the German Reich and helped temper the distrust that had arisen between Spain and Germany in the preceding months, caused by the German-Soviet pact of 1939. Lastly, the Division would attract many of the more troublesome elements of the Falange, those most aligned with Nazism, thus relieving some pressure within the regime. In a sense, the creation of the combat unit was the perfect complement to the political crisis of the previous month. On the other hand, the invasion of the Soviet Union allowed the Spanish press to focus its hostility towards the Allies in their newer member, boosting Spanish identification with the Axis in a new war scenario ideologically better suited for Spain. While the protests from the British and American ambassadors regarding the

15 Alba to Serrano Suárez. Archivo del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, MAEC. 13-7-1941.R1083-13.

attitude of the press remained constant and justified, Spain could modulate its attacks by focusing on a more comfortable target –Soviet Russia, while enhancing its economic relationship with the democracies. From now until June 1943, when the war scenario would have completely changed, the Blue Division would indeed become the favourite toy of the Spanish press.



Imagen 2. Volunteers of the Blue Division on their way to their training camps in Germany. Archivo ABC.

The resulting division had a unique profile. The significant presence of high-ranking Falange members, as well as a notable number of university students, created a unit with a strong ideological component which, especially in the early stages, caused some frictions between representatives of different political sensitivities among the volunteers, mainly in the months leading up to their entry into combat.¹⁶ The motivations of many of these early recruits were a mixture of ideological commitment and a certain adventurous irresponsibility, often rooted in the belief, fuelled by the overwhelming success of the German invasion in its early stages, that the Division's role would simply be to take part in the final battles of the Russian defeat before participating in the victory parade in Moscow. For the military personnel, as Xavier Moreno has indicated, the Blue Division represented a golden opportunity to climb the ranks in the saturated hierarchy of the army.¹⁷ The Division was led by one of the few generals who was genuinely associated with the Falangist political project: Agustín Muñoz Grandes, Secretary General of the Party until his resignation in March 1940 and later Military Governor of the newly created Campo de Gibraltar military area. Muñoz Grandes fully identified with

¹⁶ Conversation with a former member of the Division, who prefers to remain anonymous.

¹⁷ Xavier MORENO, *La División Azul. Sangre Española en Rusia*, Barcelona: Crítica, 2004. p. 96. See also: Gerald R. KEINFELD & Lewis TAMBS, *La División Española de Hitler*, Madrid; San Martín, 1979.

the ideological baggage of the unit he commanded.¹⁸ His vision: the Division became a symbol of the unique nature of Spanish foreign policy during the war. On one hand, it demonstrated a clear alignment with the Axis but also distanced itself from the Reich by limiting military collaboration to a voluntary division, positioning Spain as a moral and ideological belligerent. On the other hand, the Division allowed Spain to embody its political arguments to the Allies, showcasing a clear commitment to the German fight against communism while not excluding the possibility of constructive relations with the Anglo-Saxon powers.

As is well known, the Blue Division was integrated into the German army as the 250th Division after intensive training at the Grafenwöhr camp. Initially assigned to combat units focused on the capture of Moscow, it was later deployed to the Leningrad sector, the Volkhov Front. The Division reached the front when the German advance halted with the onset of winter, without having achieved the complete defeat of the Soviet Army. The German armies faced a harsh winter, and Hitler, fearing a retreat like that of the Napoleonic army's disaster in 1812, refrained from allowing any strategic withdrawal to more favourable positions to spend those months. The Blue Division would thus experience the hardships of combat in that context as part of the besieging forces of Leningrad.¹⁹

As we have pointed out, neither the United Kingdom nor the United States were in a position at that moment to exert significant pressure on Spain to force the withdrawal of the Blue Division, nor could they collectively exercise a decisive influence to substantially alter Spain's foreign policy. Allied policy at this time would thus focus primarily on preventing Spanish active belligerence in the conflict, primarily through economic reasoning and nuanced political pressure.²⁰ The Allies would not significantly concern themselves with the Division. In 1941 there were other more pressing political elements in Spanish foreign policy that would constitute their priority. However, this does not mean that Anglo-Saxon diplomacy did not attribute due importance to a fact they considered of enormous gravity: the presence of a Spanish combat unit fighting alongside the Axis in World War II. In 1943 the Blue Division would become a weapon of immense potential pressure on the regime when the circumstances were deemed suitable for its use.

On the other hand, Franco was never a man to fully identify himself with any of the structural undertakings of his government, and even less so

18 The most relevant biography of Muñoz Grandes: Luis TOGORES, *Muñoz Grandes. Héroe de Marruecos. General de la División Azul*, Barcelona: Espasa: 2014.

19 Conversation with a former member of the Division, who prefers to remain anonymous.

20 Christian LEITZ, "More carrot than stick. British Economic Warfare and Spain, 1941-1944", *XXth Century British History Journal*, 246 (1998), p. 246-273.

during World War II. Thus, he had remained discreetly in the background during the process that led to the dispatch of the Blue Division taking great care to limit his public statements identifying with the unit. As Javier Tusell aptly pointed out: “As always, Franco allowed policies to be initiated, reserving the right to veto or appropriate them according to the evolution of circumstances”.²¹ However, what Franco did, without mentioning the combat unit, was to include in his diplomatic conversations an argument legitimizing the fight on the Eastern Front. As is well known, during the audience following the presentation of credentials by U.S. Ambassador Carlton Hayes in 1942, the Caudillo expressed his differential perception of the legitimacy of the conflict and the justification for Spain’s non-belligerent status based on it. In Franco’s view, there were two conflicts: one pitting the Anglo-Saxon powers against Germany, in which Spain was neutral, and another pitting the Axis against Soviet communism, in which Spain was a moral belligerent, justifying the deployment of the Blue Division.²² A year later, this theory would have developed significantly.

TORCH AND THE POLICY OF PERFECT EQUIDISTANCE

The Allied landing in North Africa (Operation Torch) in November 1942 abruptly ushered in a new phase in the war’s theatre. The arrival of Anglo-American forces in North Africa placed Spain once again at the strategic center of the conflict. Spain found itself flanked by Axis armies and Anglo-American forces, and pressure on Spain in divergent directions soon manifested, albeit in radically different forms. Firstly, the Reich resumed and intensified its political and diplomatic pressure on the Spanish regime, often resorting to clumsy and blatant practices of parallel diplomacy and the basest political coercion.²³ Although undoubtedly lacking proper coordination, these initiatives nevertheless had an enormous potential to destabilize General Franco’s regime. On the other hand, the Allies, who were embarking on a delicate military operation in which Spanish neutrality was a key component of their success, opted for restraint and a solicitous attitude towards Franco’s regime. Both were, however, attitudes with an expiration date defined by the moment when Allied dominance in North Africa was guaranteed. Spain saw in this new phase a golden opportunity to assert a new political status for its regime in relation to the belligerents.

²¹ Javier TUSELL, *Franco, España y la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Entre el Eje y la Neutralidad*, Barcelona: Temas de Hoy, 1995, p. 373.

²² Carlton J.H. HAYES, *Misión de Guerra en España: 1942-1945*, Madrid: E.P.E.S.A, 1956, p. 41-43.

²³ A relevant study on this matter can be found in: Klaus Jörg RUHL, *Franco, Falange..., op. cit.*

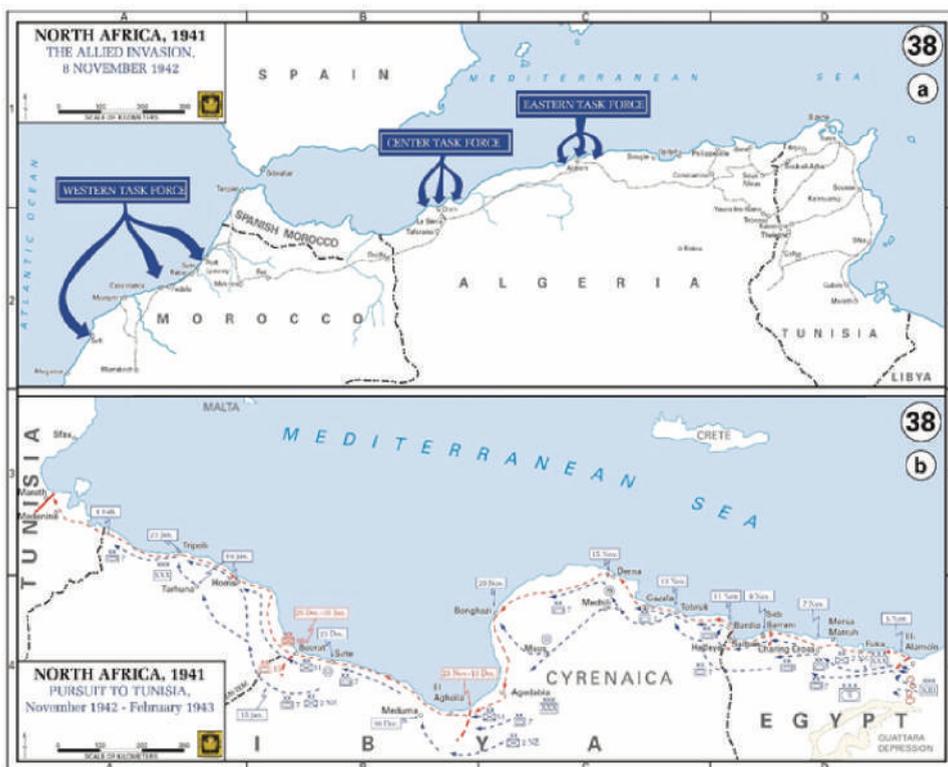


Imagen 3. The Operation Torch and the collapse of the Axis in North Africa. Map courtesy of the Department of History, United States Military Academy.

The regime did not accurately interpret this new situation. It considered that, in its dealings with the Allies, it had achieved, with the changes brought about by the new Minister of Foreign Affairs –the seasoned and effective Francisco Gómez Jordana– a status of privileged interlocution, in which controversial elements of the regime’s foreign policy could be taken for granted, including the presence of the Blue Division on the Eastern Front. Initiatives like the Iberian Bloc (a weak alliance with Portugal agreed in November 1942), the Peace Offer that would materialize in early 1943 (known as the D Plan), and the attempt to purchase modern weaponry from the Reich (negotiating with the increasing prices of raw materials that the Reich was acquiring from Spain, primarily wolfram) were essentially expressions of a new foreign policy approach.²⁴ It was a well-articulated design; more complex and ambitious than the front-line policy led by Serrano Suñer. It aimed to be fundamentally autonomous and emphasized the pivotal

24 See Emilio SÁENZ-FRANCÉS, “The ambassadorship of Hans Adolf von Moltke (1943): the turning point in German-Spanish relations during the Second World War”. *German History*, 31, (2013), p. 23-41.

role of the Blue Division as a reflection of Spain's specific stance within the realities of war. The only problem was that the premise upon which the regime based this design was fundamentally flawed in the short term: The Allies were not willing to compromise more than what was strictly necessary. Spain was granted a respite, but the Anglo-Saxon intention was to settle scores with it at the earliest opportunity once the war in Africa was concluded.



Imagen 4: Formation of the Iberian Bloc. Jordana, Salazar, Nicolás Franco, and Teotónio Pereira.

Archivo ABC.

As for the relations with the Reich, the Blue Division continued to be a source of fluctuating disagreements between the two countries. The relationship between Spain and Germany was notably tense in the early months of 1943. During those weeks, the German embassy in Madrid sought to ensure the unit's continuity on the front, fearing a reduction in troops or even a withdrawal of the Division, with the potential damage of the idea of continental Europe fighting a common war against communism. In their conversations, Ambassador von Hans Adolf Moltke and Count Jordana began to unfold a new dialectic. The Blue Division existed for a specific interest: the fight against communism. This struggle was independent of other war scenarios or realities. Ultimately, Spain sought to emphasize its autonomy within a declared desire to remain strategically aligned with the Reich, mostly in relation to the war in the west. A global alignment with Hitler's Germany was becoming extremely difficult.

On February 12, a relevant meeting was held between Ambassador von Moltke and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The issue of the Division's relief was addressed with the lukewarm approach that the Spanish government seemed to adopt. The minutes of the meeting are one of the rare examples

where the conversation is reproduced in a dialogue format. It can be described as a cold conversation, with tension accumulated due to the significant number of dangerous misunderstandings surrounding the real intentions of the German forces north of the Pyrenees²⁵, the recent disaster of Stalingrad, and Jordana's zeal to be the sole interlocutor in Spanish foreign policy, in contrast to the widespread practices of parallel diplomacy by prominent members of the embassy. These were some of the dominant elements in the meeting:

VON MOLTKE: My government has asked why the Censorship has not allowed the circulation of the slogans that were given to the Press a few days ago to encourage a flow of volunteers to the Blue Division due to the German retreat caused by the Russian offensive this winter. He preemptively answered that this does not represent a new position in the Spanish government or a change in stance towards Germany.

CONDE JORDANA: I conducted the censorship because it is evident that everything related to foreign policy is my responsibility and no one else's. I stopped the circulation of those slogans on my own orders because I understood that they are highly detrimental from various perspectives, especially to German interests. Creating a situation of unrest and perhaps the danger of an Anglo-Saxon attack in Spain is the least beneficial for Germany, while a calm policy, without stridency, benefits them by safeguarding them from counterattacks south of the Pyrenees.

VON MOLTKE: These days the Press is waging a strong anti-communist campaign. Does Spain assume that Germany no longer counts and can be considered defeated? Does this campaign mean that Spain believes it is time to take up the anti-communist banner, as if it had already fallen from Germany's hands?

CONDE DE JORDANA: Indeed, that interpretation could be given, and for that reason, the publication of those slogans aimed at recruiting volunteers for the Blue Division was not allowed. It was too strong and could have justified such an interpretation to some extent. On the other hand,

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

this current anti-communist campaign is not directed at Germany but at other countries, to make them realize the level of danger that a Russian victory and the defeat of the German Army would pose to Europe (an eventuality that we are clearly not in, nor does Spain believe it will happen).

VON MOLTKE: By observing this anti-communist campaign, it seems as if you are preparing to send reinforcements to the Blue Division, giving the impression that there is a grave danger and that Spain needs to engage in combat.

CONDE JORDANA: No, it is not about that. What is happening is that we do not understand why England does not realize that danger, and that is why we want to emphasize it. In our opinion, it is much preferable for England to decide on peace with Germany rather than face the possibility of a communist invasion of the European continent.

VON MOLTKE: So far, the situation on the Russian front does not justify any alarm at all, as the withdrawal of German troops there is just a minor incident of the war, of little importance, and it is not advisable to give the impression that there are serious dangers for Europe.²⁶



Imagen 5. Hans Adolf von Moltke at the moment of presenting his credentials to General Franco. Archivo ABC.

²⁶ Summary of the conversation between German Ambassador VON MOLTKE and the Minister of Foreign Affairs on February 12, 1943. MAEC. Grupo 37. R2300-1.

During the early months of 1943, there was a notable change in the relationship between Spain and the Allies. The Allied landing in North Africa triggered a series of incorrect assumptions by the Spanish government regarding the debt owed to Franco's government by the Anglo-Saxon powers. These assumptions were based on the regime's cooperation prior to the Torch operation. The United Kingdom, which had been more active in its diplomatic efforts with Spain up to this point, significantly contributed to fostering this false sense of security within the regime. This was evident in the overly flattering attitude displayed by Ambassador Samuel Hoare in his conversations with Count Jordana during the first three months of the year, when both parties agreed to exchange ideas and general perceptions about the progress of the war. Franco himself inspired and encouraged these meetings.

During the Kings' day reception in 1943, Franco showed particular deference to the British ambassador, and they had a brief conversation about the course of the war and Spain's fears of a possible division of Europe between the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union. As a result, both parties agreed to engage in a general conversation about the course of the war. The outcome would be a series of meetings between Hoare, not with the Caudillo, but with the Count of Jordana.²⁷ Luis Suárez Fernández contends that Franco could have construed this proposition to engage in a conversation about the course of the War as an insinuated invitation to delve into the possibility of Spain mediating in the conflict.²⁸ Hoare attached great importance to this development and urgently requested from London a set of talking points to use in these still loosely defined meetings.

Indeed, on January 13, Hoare received a hastily prepared document from the Foreign Office, which involved several departments and ministries of the British government. This document presented relevant data on the evolution of the war that could be used to emphasize the formidable dimension of the Allied powers to Franco and his Minister of Foreign Affairs. The specific data presented in the report demonstrated the increasing material superiority of the Anglo-American armies as well as the rapid increase in British production over the past year. According to the document, which was divided into two parts—one analysing the increase in Allied resources and the other focused on the gradual decrease in Axis resources—the air power of the RAF was already equal to that of Italy and Germany combined, while the failure of the summer offensive in Russia would limit German operational capabilities due to the lack of vital Caucasian oil.²⁹ The Afrika Korps would inevitably be defeated in the coming months, erasing the Axis influence in the Mediterranean.

27 Emilio SAÉNZ-FRANCÉS, *Entre la Antorcha...*, *op. cit.*, p. 727.

28 Cfr. Luis SUAREZ, *España Franco y la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Desde 1939 hasta 1945*, San Sebastian de los Reyes: Actas, 1997. p. 459.

29 Foreign Office a Madrid (Raising Resources of the United Nations-Germany's Diminishing Resources). 13-1-1943. National Archives of the United Kingdom - NAUK. FO371-34810.

Based on this document, Jordana and Hoare held their first so called *general meeting* on February 19. The British ambassador handed Jordana a memorandum in which he presented the optimistic view that the British Empire and the Allies had for the future. The document called on Spain to accelerate its return to strict neutrality due to the speed at which Hoare believed the Axis collapse could occur.³⁰ Although the Blue Division was not explicitly mentioned in the text, it was undoubtedly implicit in the Allied arguments.

On February 22, Jordana and Hoare met again. In response to the British document, the Spanish minister would provide another memorandum, a *Secret Memorandum*, in which the Spanish proposal for promoting a separate peace between the Western Allies, mainly the United Kingdom, and Germany was subtly suggested. This was the first formulation of the D Plan, intended to halt the Russian onslaught on Europe that would arise from the continuation of the conflict and the exhaustion of the belligerents through an early and negotiated peace. The Allied victories were somewhat condescendingly portrayed as nothing more than a passing fancy. However, Spain was, in a certain way, distancing itself from the Axis. The alignment with the Reich was no longer the result of a shared destiny or a moral indebtedness from the Spanish Civil War, but rather an alliance against a common enemy. In this context, the presence of the Blue Division –although without being named explicitly– on the Eastern Front, emerged as a crucial element. Another crucial element was the negative and condescending perception by the Spanish foreign minister of American foreign policy. The *Theory of the Three Wars* began to take shape:

“A common mistake of nations is to assume that the world stands still in an international situation. Communism is the greatest danger to the world, and if it is supported by the formidable force of a major power, it is natural for those not blinded by their own circumstances to be alarmed. In this alarm that we Spaniards feel, we are not alone, as we are accompanied by other peoples, especially those surrounding Russia. The sympathies of these countries undoubtedly lean towards anything that opposes Soviet forces, and if Russia were to emerge victorious, England would likely have to take a similar stance. It may well be that then England would not consider these current fears excessive and would feel the need to join those who oppose this danger.

³⁰ Cfr. Memorandum. The Present Position of the War as seen by the British Government. NAUK. FO371-34810. Also reproduced in the record of the meeting on the 19th between Jordana and Franco. MAEC. R2300-5.

We, who are not in the war and do not wish to be, view the events with great impartiality. We are certain that there is a European interest that motivates and concerns us. However, in our view, England, due to the passions that war inevitably brings, is currently following a path that goes against its own interest. It can be asserted that what has changed the situation of the Anglo-Saxons in the war thus far has been not so much their own efforts, but rather the push from Russia. If events continue to unfold as they have, it will be Russia that deeply penetrates German territory. And we ask: what is more dangerous, not only for the continent but also for England itself? A Germany not completely defeated but still strong enough to serve as a bulwark against communism, a Germany hated by all its neighbors, which would strip it of authority even if it remained intact? Or a Sovietized Germany (...)? Germany is the only strong entity in Central Europe capable of achieving the great task of containment and even destruction of communism, and in the face of this, all petty divisions should disappear for us to confront this major problem that prevails above all.

We desire the restoration of European interests in Asia (...)"

The fact that the regime excluded the United States as a driving force behind that peace is evident. The attempt to create a rift between England and the United States was rather short-sighted:

"Another concern that troubles us as Spaniards and Europeans is the presence of Americans in Africa and the intimate disdain shown by their ruling classes, generals, and leaders towards the English nation, whom they aspire to replace in world domination. These reasons, I believe, justify before the British ambassador and the English government the concerns of our nation and our longing for close European collaboration in defense of common interests.

This collaboration would allow us to permanently resolve the major communist problem, restore our position and prestige in Asia, limit Japan's expansion, and bring normality to the African continent. Germany is a reality of

eighty million souls, and Italy is another reality of forty-two million. Let us not make the thoughtless mistake of considering eternal peace, for it has been seen that peace lasts only twenty years. The greatest service we can provide to Europe and the true wisdom lies in not letting opportune moments for peace slip away, as these moments pass and situations change to our disadvantage. (...)

Victory and defeat do not solely depend on predictions or the accumulation of materials. History constantly shows us how random events, unforeseen and beyond the control of the actors in war, can overturn preparations and turn victory into defeat or vice versa. While weapons clash, one is never certain of triumph, and failing to seize favorable opportunities entails great responsibility before history, the world, and one's own country.³¹

What the *Secret Memorandum* implied was the staging of Spain's new stance towards the war. A new policy of *imperfect equidistance* which would have one of its most defining (and final) materializations in the *theory of the three wars*: One war between the United States and Japan, in which Spain supported the former; another between Germany and communist Russia, in which Spain was a moral belligerent; and a final one between the Allies and the Axis, in which Spain remained neutral.³² It also proposed an ambitious strategy on the part of Spain, albeit short-lived, known as *Plan D*, an offer for negotiated peace between the parties, sponsored from Madrid, to enable a joint effort against communism.³³

The crucial relevance of this exchange of opinions between the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the British Ambassador is the carefully crafted conceptual articulation of a complex argument that aimed to safeguard the fundamental elements of the foreign policy devised Count Jordana in the long run. In other words, the arguments put forth by Jordana and their final development in the so-called *theory of the three wars* were part of a well-defined strategy built around a principle of action that can be termed as

31 Summary of the Conversation held between the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Sir Samuel Hoare. Initiated at 13:10 on February 22, 1943. MAEC. R. 23005. Hoare informed Anthony Eden about the start of his discussions with Jordana and the initial results thereof. See Hoare to Eden, February 22, 1941. NAUK. FO371-34810. See also Hoare to Eden, March 1, 1942. NAUK. FO361-34810.

32 The canonical and definitive version of that theory was expressed by Franco to Ambassador Hayes in the audience they held on July 29, 1943. National Archives of the United States (NARA) Foreign Relations of the United States Series. (FRUS), 1943.

33 See Emilio SAÉNZ-FRANCÉS, *Entre la Antorcha...*, *op. cit.*, p. 727-767.

imperfect equidistance among the contenders of the Second World War. This equidistance could be deemed imperfect due to various factors, with the preeminent one being the Blue Division, the ultimate symbol of political affinity between the Axis and Franco's Spain. The regime was well aware of the pivotal role played by the Division. The need to safeguard its presence on the Eastern front had its foundation in Spanish internal politics dynamics; in its relevance articulating relations with Hitler's Germany and in its significance as a symbol of the specific uniqueness of Spanish foreign policy. Trading off the division was out of the agenda. Hoare's apparent compliance in those meetings contributed to fostering a false sense of security within the regime. But the Allies, both the British and, above all, the Americans, were willing to acknowledge *only as long as the war in Africa bolstered Spain's geopolitical position*, notwithstanding the mutual aversion of both countries towards Franco and his regime.

On February 26, the general conversations between the minister and the ambassador resumed. Hoare detailed his response to Jordana, informing him that there was a significant gap between the perception of the British government and that of Spain. Firstly, Hoare shared with Jordana the conclusions of the Casablanca Conference, in which any compromise peace with Germany was ruled out. The rest of the ambassador's presentation focused on dismantling, one by one, the Spanish arguments against the Soviet Union. Hoare accurately pointed out that the possibility of Soviet armies reaching the very heart of Europe, given the current course of the war, was motivated solely by the rupture of the pact with Russia that Hitler had signed in 1939 and the joint destruction of Poland as a buffer state. According to the ambassador, however, the prospect of Russia becoming a hegemonic power in Europe after the war was out of the question. The Soviet Union would require many years and Anglo-American assistance to recover, and the victory of the Allies would not be solely attributable to the military feats of the Russians. England, in any case, and not Russia, would be the dominant military force on the continent, with its navy reigning supreme as no other had since 1815. For the United Kingdom, it was Germany, not Russia that posed the main threat to Europe. In the future of the continent, which was already being planned in London, the neutral countries would be acknowledged according to their historical foundation. Spain would not be an exception.³⁴ Shortly after the meeting, Sir Samuel left Madrid to embark on one of his *tours* across Spain, with Andalusia being his destination on this occasion. The meetings would not resume until a month later.

³⁴ Summary of the Conversation Held between the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Sir Samuel Hoare. Initiated at 13:10 on February 26, 1943. MAEC. R.23005.

Meanwhile, on March 1, 1943, Sir Samuel Hoare sent a lengthy confidential report to Anthony Eden at his request. This report provided an overview of the perspective with which he believed the increasing Allied pressure on Spain should be approached, once the operations in North Africa were concluded. All of this was conveyed from the standpoint of the always cautious Hoare, whose opinion, however, hinted at a change this time. The Blue Division was, for the first time, one of the main issues addressed. The suggested perspective was entirely cautious: to wait until the final victory of the Allies was assured before raising the issue with Franco's regime.³⁵ According to Hoare, it was still too early for the Allied strategy towards the Caudillo and his regime to shift from appeasement to open pressure. Thus, in the early months of 1943, the Allies' primary focus, in clear connection with the military effort in North Africa, was to continue focussing on promoting measures to facilitate the passage of French refugees through the Pyrenees, seeking to join the forces of Free France in Africa. Allied caution, championed by Hoare, fuelled Jordana and the Caudillo's sense of security.³⁶

During the pause in the conversations between Jordana and Hoare, Spain vigorously deployed its new international policy. Its objective was to seduce other relevant actors in the European context with the genuine nature of the new Spanish policy and materialize it into an offer of negotiated peace inspired from Madrid. The main neutral powers were approached. However, Jordana did not take advantage of this impasse to present the same arguments expressed to Hoare to the American ambassador, Carlton Hayes while the Reich embassy was approached on similar terms.³⁷ The Spanish leadership was unable to perceive that the American star was on an unstoppable rise within the Anglo-Saxon leadership. The Spanish proposal envisioned the creation of a so-called *Committee of Six* (*Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ireland, Portugal, and Turkey*), all neutral states united in the defense of mutual interests.³⁸ Ultimately, Turkey was not contacted. The Holy See, while not part of the Committee of Six, was one of the flanks that Spain carefully attended to. Catholic Hungary was also contacted. In general, despite the kind words exchanged, these contacts did not result in tangible political changes. The course of the war, increasingly favourable to the Allies, rapidly reduced the supposed autonomy of Spanish action.

³⁵ Hoare a Eden. 1-3-1943. NAUK. FO371-34754.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ Cfr. Summary of the Interview between the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Chargé d'Affaires of Germany at 12:15 PM on March 31st. MAEC. R2300-1.

³⁸ Cfr. Proposal to hold an exchange of views on economic matters among neutral European powers. 8-3-1943. MAEC. R1562-1.



Imagen 6. Anthony Eden and Samuel Hoare. Hoare was undoubtedly an effective British ambassador. However, he also had a marked personal agenda that exasperated the Foreign Secretary. Archivo ABC.

The final act of the Hoare-Jordana general meetings took place on Friday, March 26. Presumably, in connection with the definitive consolidation of Allied forces in North Africa, Hoare chose to focus his discussions with the minister on more specific issues that had been present throughout these three months, but whose importance had been somewhat veiled by matters of a general nature. During the meetings held in January and February, the ambassador had cautiously highlighted several complaints to the Spanish government regarding specific aspects of its policy that were incongruent with the new foreign orientation of the regime. By March, none of these complaints had been addressed satisfactorily. With victories in Africa and the beginning of the end of fascism, the patience of the Allies would quickly start to wear thin.³⁹

However, Jordana was not yet giving up. Or perhaps he was not fully aware of the dynamics of the Anglo-Saxon attitude. On April 16th, the 450th anniversary of Columbus's arrival in that city was commemorated. To mark this occasion, a solemn meeting of the Council of Hispanidad was organized. The majority of American ambassadors attended, and speeches were delivered by

39 Emilio SAÉNZ-FRANCÉS, *Entre la Antorcha...*, *op. cit.*, p. 739.

the ambassadors of Chile and Argentina. In response, Jordana expressed the need for a prompt peace among the contenders of the global conflict.⁴⁰ The reception of the speech was mixed, and it did not generate international enthusiasm, even in Portugal, where the lack of prior consultation with Dr. Salazar regarding such a symbolic step was considered discourteous.⁴¹ The reaction from the United States was not only negative but also contributed to the overall increase in pressure from the media on the State Department to maintain friendly relations with a pro-Nazi government like Spain's, which, in their eyes, deserved, at best, only slightly more lenient treatment than Hitler, Tojo, or Mussolini.⁴²

AMERICA ENTERS THE STAGE⁴³

Samuel Hoare was a wolf in sheep's clothing, behaving as such. A very different case was American diplomacy. Much less developed and established with respect to Spain than the British one, it was at the same time much more paradoxical.⁴⁴ The American ambassador, Carlton Hayes, a historian who, unlike his British counterpart, sympathized with Spain and its people, but was obliged to implement a maximalist policy –advocated by the Department of State– regarding Spain. And undoubtedly, albeit reluctantly, he did so, to his own frustration and that of the British, advocates of a necessary policy of containment towards Franco and his regime. The disdain of Spanish foreign policy towards the United States was, indeed, comparable to the thinly veiled hostility of the Roosevelt administration towards fascist Franco. The first months of 1943, albeit from Hayes' often tempered perspective, were marked by increasing American pressure on Spain in various areas –primarily the role of the Spanish press or Spain's tolerance of Axis espionage activities on its territory– in a tone that

40 Speech by Gómez Jordana before the Council of Hispanidad. April 16, 1942. MAEC. R1372-10.

41 Emilio SÁENZ-FRANCÉS, *Entre la Antorcha...*, *op. cit.*, p. 739.

42 Cfr. Cárdenas to Jordana. 20-4-1943. Archivo del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores MAEC. R1467-13.

43 The work of Joan María Thomàs is fundamental in everything related to Spain and the United States during the war. Joan María THOMÀS, *Roosevelt y Franco. De la Guerra Civil Española a Pearl Harbor*, Barcelona: Edhasa, 2007 & Joan María THOMÀS, *La Batalla del Wolfgramio. Estados Unidos y España de Pearl Harbor a la Guerra Fría*, Barcelona: Càtedra, 2010. For an insight into the long-term Spain - United States relations, see: Misael Arturo LOPEZ ZAPICO, "La política exterior española hacia Estados Unidos desde la crisis del '98" in Marta HERNÁNDEZ RUIZ, José María BENEYTO & Juan Carlos PAREIRA (coord.), *Historia de la política exterior española en los siglos XX y XXI (Vol. 2)*, Madrid: CEU Ediciones, 2015, p. 161-207. The works of Aurora Boch are also relevant for understanding the shaping of the American perception of Spain during the years of the Second Republic and the Civil War: Aurora BOCH: "Entre la democracia y la neutralidad: Estados Unidos ante la Guerra Civil Española", *Ayer*, 90 (2013), p. 167-187.

44 Jordana to Nicolás Franco. 11-5-1943. Archivo del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, MAEC. R2221-13.

far exceeded what Hoare found advisable or convenient in the early weeks of 1943. This often led him to turn to an old ally, Viscount Halifax, the British ambassador in Washington, to moderate the tone of American demands. But it was already clear that, in terms of power and influence, the American perspective was gaining prominence in all areas of the Allied side. Increasingly, Hoare and the Foreign Office had to yield to the will of the Department of State.⁴⁵



Imagen 7. Carlton Hayes portrayed by Zuloaga. Despite his sympathy for Spain, the ambassador was tasked with leading the hardening of the Allied stance towards Spain, from 1943 onwards. Archivo ABC.

And the American pressure throughout these months, with the backdrop of the regime's oil supplies, bore fruit.⁴⁶ During the early months of 1943, marked by the implementation of *Plan D* and the policy of *imperfect equidistance*, the regime relegated the United States to a rather secondary role in its diplomatic calculations. British acquiescence seemed sufficient. However, with the fall of Sicily and fascism, American pressure on Spain intensified. There was also a veiled fear of a more rapid turn of events in the war unfavourable to the Axis. Spain began to yield. The situation regarding the pressure on the Spanish press is noteworthy, and the impact of the measures taken to address Hayes' demands is conclusive, especially concerning the media prominence of the Blue Division. The result of the investigations into the Spanish press of the period allows us to affirm that, with some nuances, it was precisely in June 1943 when a substantial change in the attitude of the Spanish press towards the war occurred. References to the Blue Division –as a fundamental leitmotif– were drastically reduced, and while it cannot be said that the press became, by any

⁴⁵ See Emilio SÁENZ-FRANCÉS, "De águilas y Leones. Diplomacia británica en España 1939-1953. Tiempo de guerra y era de cambios" in Joan María THOMÀS (coord.), *Estados Unidos, Alemania, Gran Bretaña, Japón y sus relaciones con España entre la Guerra y la Postguerra (1939-1953)*, Madrid: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2016, p. 151-190.

⁴⁶ See THOMÀS, *La Batalla del Wolframio...*, *op. cit.*, p. 28-61.

means, pro-Allied, it did become more impartial in its assessment of the two sides in the conflict (excluding, of course, Soviet Russia), although conspicuous cases like the newspaper *Informaciones* continued to give blatant evidence of their pro-German sentiment.⁴⁷

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive preserves a document titled *Confidential Instructions to Newspaper Directors for Approaching News and Comments in Light of These Principles and Considerations*.⁴⁸ We know that the document is from 1943, but its exact date is unknown, so we mention it here cautiously. The fundamental instruction was a message: “SPAIN HAS NOT ENTERED THE WAR,” which was to constitute the new main guiding principle of the Spanish press. It had to be emphasized that Spain had maintained cordial relations with all the countries involved in the conflict since the beginning. The press was ordered to detach itself from the idea that the Allies promoted the spread of communism in Europe, recommending that emphasis be placed on the fact that broad sectors within the democracies had supported the 1936 uprising. On the other hand, the genuinely Spanish nature of the regime, free from any foreign influence, was to be highlighted, and it was to be emphasized that none of the warring factions in the war was politically homogenous, making it impossible to ascribe Spain to any of them ideologically.⁴⁹ The document was the beginning of the fading of the Blue Division’s prominence in the Spanish press.⁵⁰ It was precisely in this juncture that the Division began its symbolic withdrawal from the frontlines.

The American pressure on Spain at this juncture would culminate in July 1943. Africa was secured for the Allies, fascist Italy had collapsed, and the fortunes of war were declining on the Eastern Front. The United States was not willing to wait any longer. Indeed, on the 29th of July, the Caudillo received Ambassador Hayes at the El Pardo Palace. The historian began by reiterating, once again, the assurances given by President Roosevelt to Spain regarding the Allied landings in North Africa. He then stated that, given the events in Italy, it was crucial for Spain to clarify its foreign policy by officially and definitively returning to neutrality, abandoning the ambiguity of non-belligerence. Franco replied that Spain was de facto neutral but wanted to avoid the connotation of indifference towards the conflict that neutrality implied. The Caudillo added that he was not surprised by Italy’s fall but that a similar development in Germany was not to be expected, where morale was

⁴⁷ We are currently working on an article that addresses the shift in the Spanish press through a study using quantitative methodologies. This study will include the Campaign Leaflet of the Blue Division.

⁴⁸ Confidential Instructions to Newspaper Editors for Framing News and Commentaries in Light of These Principles and Considerations. 1943. MAEC R1371-2.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

excellent. Furthermore, the ambassador stated that while he knew that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs intended to implement a policy of genuine neutrality, unfortunately, the same could not be said for other government agencies. In response, Franco asked the ambassador to specify which departments of the Spanish government were hindering the Spanish policy of neutrality, to which Hayes mentioned the Falange, the Vice-Secretariat of Popular Education, and the agencies responsible for local and postal policy. The ambassador also referred to the issue of the press, obtaining a commitment from the Caudillo that, henceforth, there would be no further discrimination against American propaganda or war reports.⁵¹

But the key point of the audience was undoubtedly the reference to the Blue Division by the American ambassador, who highlighted the inconvenience for Spain's position with the Allies of keeping that unit on the Russian front. It was the first time that the issue had been raised so bluntly to the Head of State. Hayes states in his memoirs that he brought up this issue without instructions from Washington to do so.⁵² Franco did not lose his temper, as Hayes feared,⁵³ but responded to the ambassador with a long monologue about the reasons that had led Spain to send that voluntary unit to fight side by side with Germany on the Soviet steppes. The connection between Franco's arguments and those employed by Gómez Jordana a few weeks earlier in his conversations with Ambassador Hoare is evident. From that discourse emerged Franco's final exposition to Hayes of the cynical *theory of the three wars*, which the Caudillo believed were being fought within the global conflict. One war between England and the United States against the Third Reich, in which Spain was not only neutral but even benevolent towards the democracies. Another war of Europe against communism, in which Spain was just another belligerent, facing the threat that the Soviet Union posed to the continent. And a third war (for Franco, always ready to provide surprises of this kind, undoubtedly the most important of the three) being fought in the Pacific against the most formidable and fearsome enemy, Japan, to which –it was implicit– all of the American war effort should be directed, diverting it away from Europe and its problems. Spain even desired to assist the democracies in their fight against the Empire of the Rising Sun, but its weakness prevented it from doing so as it would have wished.⁵⁴ At the end of the audience, Franco assured Hayes that he would personally address the issues he had raised with the utmost interest, and he requested that Hayes express to President Roosevelt, whom he considered a

51 Cfr. Hayes to Hull. 29-7-1943. FRUS, 1943.

52 Cfr. Samuel HOARE, *Ambassador on Special Mission*, London: Collins 1946, p. 203 & 204.

53 *Ibidem*, p. 204.

54 Cfr. Hayes to Hull. 29-7-1943. FRUS, 1943.

great leader, his highest esteem. The ambassador described the audience as *unusually friendly*.⁵⁵

Indeed, it was a completely cordial audience, after which everything indicated that Hayes would find satisfaction on some of the issues on which he had exerted strong pressure on the Santa Cruz Palace (mainly regarding the attitude of the Spanish press where, as we have outlined a change was already on the move). There was nothing to suggest an imminent radical change in the Allies' attitude towards Spain. Pressure was mounting but Franco's regime could face the future, even with the fall of fascism, with some tranquillity. Nothing seemed to fundamentally question the terms of Spanish foreign policy, *that imperfect equidistance* that began to take shape with the Allied landings in North Africa. However, the following weeks would bring unpleasant surprises to the Caudillo and his regime. American pressure had been expressed in a primarily friendly manner, and it was possible to satisfy it through specific modifications, moderate shifts. The question of the future of the Blue Division could be addressed in terms of internal strategy and self-interest, rather than external pressure. The Spanish government seemed to ultimately have a certain timeframe or room for manoeuvre regarding the troops fighting alongside the Axis forces in this regard.

SAMUEL HOARE CHANGES TONE

However, Sir Samuel Hoare was going to precipitate events in an adverse direction for the continuity of the Blue Division on the front. On August 19, 1943, in Quebec, the first plenary session of the Allied conference between Roosevelt and Churchill (along with Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King) was held, codenamed Quadrant. The fundamental milestone of the summit was the planning of Operation Overlord, the opening of a new front in Europe on the French coast. In less than a year, Overlord would materialize with the Allied landing in Normandy. Furthermore, the progress of the war in other hotspots was discussed: the Far East, where the British desired to play a greater role after the defeat of Germany, and the Mediterranean, with the planning of what would be the invasion of the Italian peninsula starting in September.

Besides discussing global war strategy, Spain was also a topic of discussion in the Quebec meetings. In Quadrant, it was agreed that the time had come to toughen the policy towards Franco's regime. It was considered right not only to demand strict neutrality from Spain but also favourable concessions to the Allies in a scenario where the survival of Franco's dictatorship itself was being questioned. At the conference, the US Chiefs of Staff proposed applying a severe and

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

frank policy towards Spain that would lead to the satisfaction of the Allies' demands on the regime.⁵⁶ Specifically, they believed that Spain should concentrate its military forces in northern Spain and end its military assistance to the Axis.

In light of the United States proposal, on August 20, the British Chiefs of Staff presented a report on the perspective from which they believed the hardening of the peninsular policy should be approached and the resulting corrections in Spanish policy, with one limitation: that the pressure exerted on Spain should not involve the Allies assuming military commitments on the peninsula. A new demand was included in the list: the withdrawal of the Blue Division.⁵⁷

However, this agreement did not have the endorsement of the Foreign Office. On the same day, August 22, Anthony Eden sent a note to Churchill expressing his doubts about the convenience of radicalizing the Allied stance towards Spain, emphasizing that, in any case, the decision to toughen the policy should be based on political criteria and not exclusively military ones.⁵⁸ Ultimately, it was also a matter of competencies. That same day, Eden telegraphed the Foreign Office to seek the department's opinion on the new policy proposed by the British and US chiefs of staff, expressing serious doubts about the real possibilities of obtaining from Spain what the British commanders had proposed. Sir Orme Sargent's response fully embraced Eden's cautious views, emphasizing that in the past, Germany's policy of blackmailing Franco's regime had been one of the fundamental causes of frustration for many of the Axis's objectives regarding Spain. The Allies should avoid making the same mistake.⁵⁹

But Sargent's telegram also referred to a matter of fundamental importance. Sir Samuel Hoare, in his audience with Franco on August 21 at Pazo de Meirás, had taken the lead and (as the press had already begun to highlight) apparently presented Franco not only with a significant set of demands but an ultimatum. In reality, according to Hoare's own report on the interview, which he referred to as the *Spanish Berchtesgaden*⁶⁰, its content had barely exceeded the terms that had defined Carlton Hayes's meeting with the Caudillo just a month before. The Blue Division once again became a relevant topic:

⁵⁶ The key elements of the American proposal are outlined in a telegram from Anthony Eden (also in Quebec) to Sir Orme Sargent. See Eden to Sargent (Quadrant to Air Ministry). 22-8-1943. NAUK. CAB121-512.

⁵⁷ POLICY TOWARDS SPAIN. Memorandum by the British Chiefs of Staff. 20-8-1943. NAUK. CAB122-956. On August 9th, the Combined Chiefs of Staff had submitted a report on the strategy to achieve the defeat of the Axis in Europe, which referred to Spain and could well have served as the basis for the American and British memorandums. *Cfr.* COMBINED CHIEFS OF STAFF. STRATEGIC CONCEPT FOR THE DEFEAT OF THE AXIS IN EUROPE. 9-8-1943. NAUK. PREM3-405-4.

⁵⁸ *Cfr.* Note from Eden to Churchill. 22-8-1943. NAUK. PREM3-405-4.

⁵⁹ Sargent to Eden. Undated. Likely between August 22 and August 24. NAUK. CAB121-412.

⁶⁰ *Cfr.* Hoare, cit. p. 220.

“As to the Blue Division he began with the old story of crusade and communistic threat to Europe and its effect on the Allies had disturbed him. He insisted that it was nothing more than a symbolic gesture and that his idea had been only to leave it in Russia for a short time—adding that he would never allow it to be involved in conflict with Americans or ourselves and if there was any such risk he would withdraw it immediately. (...)”⁶¹

The meeting with the British ambassador didn't bring any significant changes compared to the previous one with Hayes, especially when it came to the Blue Division. If anything, the topic was approached with even greater caution and restraint. The relevance, therefore, was not so much the content of the interview itself but the unilateral action taken by the ambassador himself, just before it took place, recommending to the British authorities in London to give considerable publicity to the interview, suggesting that Hoare intended to firmly demand the withdrawal of the Blue Division and immediate redress of the Allied grievances. We know that the initiative originated from the ambassador himself, as referenced in a telegram from the Foreign Office.⁶²



Imagen 8: The Spanish embassy in Berlin. The previous alignment between Franco's Spain and Nazi Germany was the crucial element upon which the relationship of the Allies with Spain pivoted in the final phase of the war. Archivo ABC.

61 Hoare to Foreign Office. 21-8-1943. CAB122-956.

62 Foreign Office to Campbell. 24-8-1943. NAUK. CAB122-956

According to Carlton Hayes' memoirs, who undoubtedly felt resentment towards this initiative by his British counterpart, the Allied press campaign intensified with Sir Samuel Hoare's departure for England, immediately after his visit to Pazo de Meiras. This campaign falsely assumed that Hoare had presented an ultimatum to the Caudillo, which was far from the truth.⁶³ On August 21, *The New York Times*, a newspaper that provided detailed coverage of the audience, claimed that Hoare had attended the interview with the mission of severely admonishing the Caudillo. During those days, the Spanish issue took a prominent place in the American press. The *Christian Science Monitor* stated that Franco had asked Hoare for the Allies to supply weapons to Spain, allegedly with the aim of intensifying the repression under which the Spanish population lived.⁶⁴ According to Hayes, the media campaign praising the British ambassador as the first representative of the United Nations in Spain to openly address the Caudillo had a clear personal objective. It allowed Hoare to benefit from the support of the press and public opinion, as he initiated a new policy of firmness that had long been demanded concerning Franco's regime.⁶⁵ Ultimately, this was a unilateral move by Hoare, in our opinion, driven by his desire to improve his overall reputation within the Foreign Office and mitigate the stigma of being an appeaser. The ambassador correctly perceived that a new era was approaching, marked by much greater severity of the United States in their relations with Spain, and he was ready to align himself with the winning side. His initiative coincided, in a deliberate and calculated manner, with the discussions on the Spanish issue taking place in Quebec, lending credibility to the idea that the policy proposed by the military staffs was not only realistic but already being successfully implemented by Hoare. The intensity of the campaign initiated by Hoare quickly reached Quebec, causing not only surprise but also displeasure in Anthony Eden.⁶⁶ The allied leaders could do nothing but endorse Hoare's move, advancing the clock regarding Spain. The opposite would have been a diplomatic gift to the Spanish Regime that they were not willing to offer.

In the autumn of 1943, the Blue Division would start to fade away due to increasing pressure from the Allies on Spain. This pressure, which began with the meeting between Samuel Hoare and the Caudillo, that unexpectedly became a catalyst for a significant escalation in political pressure on Spain. As the Allies shifted their priorities and focused on the main objectives and gains to be achieved from Spain, the gradual withdrawal of the Blue Division as a political necessity gained momentum. Initially, it was reduced to a diminished

63 Carlton J. HAYES, *Misión de Guerra...*, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

64 Cardenas to Jordana. 26-8-1943. MAEC. R1468-12.

65 *Ibidem*, p. 313.

66 Eden to Sargent (Quadrant to War Cabinet Offices). 24-8-1943. NAUK. FO371-34755.

Blue Legion and eventually repatriated in its entirety. This occurred during a critical moment in the fate of the Axis forces.

The months leading up to the unexpected intensification of Allied pressure on Spain in the spring and summer of 1943, which we have referred to as imperfect equidistance, dominated much of the reflections in these pages. During this time, Francisco Franco's regime sought to develop a long-term foreign action plan to navigate the protracted conflict with reasonable stability. In planning this foreign policy design, the existence of the Blue Division played a necessarily relevant role, regardless of the personal opinions of the regime's different actors regarding its significance or suitability. Thus, to a greater extent than previously acknowledged, a substantial part of this political design aimed to protect and support the Division's role. The most tangible outcome of this reality was the Theory of the Three Wars; an ultimately desperate attempt to find a place for the Division within a foreign policy that increasingly accommodated the Allies. This formulation emerged as a last resort when the imperfect equidistance policy itself had entered a crisis.

Up to now, the central role of the Division as a key component of Spanish foreign action during those months had not been sufficiently assessed. Its importance in shaping the imperfect equidistance policy was fundamental. It is almost ironic that the Allied diplomat who in the early months of 1943 did the most to provide assurances to Spain, Sir Samuel Hoare, was the one who, in a selfish political calculation, hastened its decline.

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