

## Italo-German Collaboration and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939

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Historians have long studied the rapprochement that took place between Benito Mussolini's Italy and Adolf Hitler's Germany during the years 1935-1939, beginning with the latter's policy of benevolent neutrality in the Abyssinian conflict and ending with the Pact of Steel.<sup>1</sup> The road between the two was not always straight and can be said to have been both long and winding with a number of milestones along the way.<sup>2</sup> One of these was undoubtedly the close collaboration that took place in both the diplomatic and military spheres in relation to their joint intervention in the Spanish Civil War on the side of General Francisco Franco's insurgent/nationalist forces. As a factor in the Italo-German rapprochement this collaboration looms large and it is the intention of this chapter to revisit and reevaluate it by a close examination of the decision of both powers to intervene in Spain and their reasons for doing so, the extent of their military cooperation and determination to maintain support for Franco throughout the civil war and the degree of their cooperation with regard to the various diplomatic manoeuvres and initiatives which took place around the conflict.

### I

Mussolini's response to appeals for armed assistance from the Spanish insurgents following their failed military coup of 17-18 July 1936, which precipitated the civil war in Spain, was initially cautious. Only when he had assured himself, on the basis of reports from Italian diplomats, that neither France nor Britain nor Soviet Russia intended to intervene did the Italian dictator give the green light, on 27 July, for the dispatch of aircraft to assist in the airlift of pro-rebel Spanish Moroccan forces to the Spanish mainland and arms and munitions to those fighting in Spain. His decision to intervene was made in the expectation that a small amount of Italian war material would be decisive for the rebellion. It was based, partly at least, on Franco's personal assurances to the Italian Minister Plenipotentiary, Pier Filippo de Rossi del Lion Nero, and his Military Attaché, Major Guiseppe Luccardi, that victory for the rebels would be certain and quick provided some outside assistance was forthcoming, and that with victory he intended to establish 'a republican government in the fascist style adopted for the Spanish people'. Mussolini was soon to be disillusioned.<sup>3</sup> Hitler's decision to intervene was taken separately but almost simultaneously on 26 July and against the advice of his foreign and

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<sup>1</sup> The classic work in English is Elizabeth Wiskemann, *The Rome-Berlin Axis: A Study of the Relations between Hitler and Mussolini*, London: Collins, 1966.

<sup>2</sup> See Christian Leitz, *Nazi Foreign Policy, 1933-1941: The Road to Global War*, London: Routledge, 2004, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Preston, 'Mussolini's Spanish adventure: from limited risk to war' in Helen Graham and Paul Preston (eds.), *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain, 1936-1939*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996, pp. 21-51. Paul Preston, 'Italy and Spain in civil war and world war, 1936-1943' in Sebastian Balfour and Paul Preston (eds.), *Spain and the Great Powers in the Twentieth Century*, London: Routledge, 1999, pp. 152-5. John Coverdale, *Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pp. 69-74.

war ministries. In response to a personal appeal from Franco, delivered while the Führer was attending the Wagner festival at Bayreuth, he ordered the dispatch of transport and fighter aircraft and armaments to the rebel forces in Spain.<sup>4</sup> Under the Wagnerian codename *Unternehmen Feuerzauber* (operation Magic Fire) the organization of a support operation, known as Sonderstab W, was immediately set in motion.<sup>5</sup> From the outset both Hitler and Mussolini concentrated their support through Franco rather than any of the other Spanish generals.<sup>6</sup>

In intervening in the civil war in Spain both the Italians and Germans were highly motivated by ideological, strategic and economic considerations but it was the first of these that initially drove their intervention and sustained it thereafter. The common struggle against Bolshevism, above all preventing a victorious communist republic emerging from the Spanish conflict, with its consequent encouragement for international communism and its negative ramifications for the advance of fascism in Europe, produced in the words of Ulrich von Hassell, German Ambassador at Rome, ‘a sudden increase in the warmth of German-Italian cooperation’.<sup>7</sup> As early as 25 July Hassell in a meeting with the Italian Foreign Minister, Galeazzo Ciano, spoke about the situation in Spain and the German Government’s concern with regard to an eventual communist victory in the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>8</sup> Almost two weeks later on 6 August Ciano insisted to Hassell that confronted by the threat of communism in Spain ‘the greatest vigilance and closest collaboration between Germany and Italy were necessary’. He believed it was right that ‘the military of the two countries, also, should come to agreement for all contingencies’ and that ‘fortunately this was already under way’.<sup>9</sup> Hitler certainly recognized the importance of Italo-German collaboration. According to the Hungarian Minister at Rome, Baron Frederick Villani, in conversation with Ciano on 7 September 1936, the Führer, in his recent conversation with the Hungarian Prince Regent, Admiral Miklós Horthy, had revealed:

his intention of following an active anti-Communist policy. He said that in Spain it was working effectively, and that, in this connection, he was happy to be able to provide further proof of the good relations between Italy and Germany, since the operation in Spain in support of General Franco had been carried out in common.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For details see Angel Viñas, *Hitler, Franco y el Estallido de la Guerra Civil: Antecedentes y Consecuencias*, Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2001, pp. 368-84; Angel Viñas and Carlos Seidel, ‘Franco’s request to the Third Reich for military assistance’, *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 11, 2002, pp. 200-5; and Christian Leitz, ‘Nazi Germany’s intervention in the Spanish Civil War and the foundation of HISMA/ROWAK’ in Graham and Preston (eds.), *The Republic Besieged*, pp. 53-7.

<sup>5</sup> For details see Raymond Proctor, *Hitler’s Luftwaffe and the Spanish Civil War*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983, pp. 10-19.

<sup>6</sup> Viñas and Seidel, ‘Franco’s request’, pp. 208-9.

<sup>7</sup> Ulrich von Hassell, German Ambassador at Rome, to the German Foreign Ministry, 18 December 1936. *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, series D, vol. III, no. 157, p. 170. Hereafter DGFP.

<sup>8</sup> Meeting of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, [Galeazzo] Ciano, with the German Ambassador at Rome, von Hassell, 25 July 1936. *Documenti Diplomatici Italiani, 1935-1939*, series 8, vol. IV, no. 621, p. 697. Hereafter DDI.

<sup>9</sup> Hassell to the German Foreign Ministry, 6 August 1936. DGFP, series D, vol. III, no. 30, p. 30.

<sup>10</sup> Ciano’s conversation with the Hungarian Minister at Rome, Baron Frederick Villani, 7 September 1936. Malcolm Muggeridge (ed.), *Ciano’s Diplomatic Papers*, London: Odhams, 1948, pp. 36-7.

The German Embassy in Rome was fully aware of Italy's serious concern at the increased communist threat created by the civil war in Spain. The German Foreign Ministry was informed on 14 August 1936 that:

the situation is considered so serious here because victory for the Spanish [Republican] Government is regarded as the equivalent of a victory for Communism. Such a development is abhorred in Italy for ideological reasons...it is feared that Bolshevism, once it had taken hold in Spain, might also spread beyond her frontiers.<sup>11</sup>

With the recent election victory of the French Popular Front movement in mind, Mussolini was certainly worried that a victory for the Left in Spain might encourage revolutionaries in France and western Europe, including Italy. As he told his wife, Rachele: 'Bolshevism in Spain would mean Bolshevism in France, Bolshevism at Italy's back and the danger of [the] Bolshevisation of Europe'.<sup>12</sup> The Duce and Ciano continued throughout the civil war to regard their intervention in Spain as safeguarding fascism in Italy. As the Foreign Minister later reflected in October 1937: 'At Málaga, at Guadalajara, at Santander, we were fighting in defence of our civilisation and Revolution'.<sup>13</sup>

For his part, Hitler was no less committed to fighting the anti-communist cause in Spain and no less fearful of the potential spreading of the Communist contagion should Franco lose in Spain. He told the British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, after the Munich Conference on 30 September 1938, that he had supported Franco only because of his abhorrence of communism and insisted that if he, Hitler, had failed to stop communism in Spain it could have spread to France, Holland and Belgium.<sup>14</sup> Referring to his decision to intervene, later still, in February 1942, Hitler explained that 'if there had not been the danger of the Red peril's overwhelming Europe', he would not have 'intervened in the revolution in Spain'.<sup>15</sup> His memory was not at fault. According to the Permanent Under-Secretary at the British Foreign Office, Sir Robert Vansittart, who was visiting Berlin in a semi-official capacity in August 1936 on the occasion of the Olympic Games, Nazi ruling circles were obsessed with events in Spain and the threat of Bolshevism.<sup>16</sup> Weeks earlier, on the same day that he took the decision to intervene in Spain, 26 July 1936, Hitler told Joachim von Ribbentrop before he departed for London as Ambassador that a victory for communism in Spain would in short time result in the

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<sup>11</sup> Baron Johan von Plessen, German Chargé d'Affaires at Rome, to the German Foreign Ministry, 14 August 1936. DGFP, series D, vol. III, no. 40, p. 39.

<sup>12</sup> Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 3rd edition, London: Penguin, 1977, p. 353.

<sup>13</sup> M. Muggeridge (ed.), *Ciano's Hidden Diary, 1937-1938*, New York: Dutton, 1953, diary entry 29 October 1937, p. 26.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Whealey, *Hitler and Spain: The Nazi Role in the Spanish Civil War*, Lexington KY; University of Kentucky Press, 1989, p. 29.

<sup>15</sup> Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Hitler's Table Talk: His Private Conversations*, 3rd edition, London: Phoenix Press, 2000, p. 320.

<sup>16</sup> 'A Busman's Holiday: Memorandum by Sir Robert Vansittart', 10 September 1936. *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, 2nd series, vol. XVII, app. I, p. 760. See also, Glyn Stone, 'Sir Robert Vansittart and Spain, 1931-1941' in T.G. Otte and Constantine Pagedas (eds.), *Personalities, War and Diplomacy: Essays in International History*, London: Frank Cass, 1997, pp. 133-4.

Bolshevisation of France.<sup>17</sup> It was above all, as Vansittart put it, the possibility of ‘an external convergence, that Communism will extend in Europe and round on, if not, encircle Germany’ which concerned Berlin.<sup>18</sup> In the short term, the possible further strengthening of the links, through Spanish events, between France ruled by a Left-wing Popular Front Government, Soviet Russia linked by the Franco-Soviet Pact of 1935 and Czechoslovakia linked to both powers through treaties of guarantee, was all too real.<sup>19</sup> Bearing in mind the ongoing military conversations between France and Russia which continued well into 1937, the longer term racist-imperialist ambitions of the Third Reich could be threatened by the establishment, in Hitler’s words of a ‘Bolshevik state’ in Spain which would ‘constitute a land bridge for France to North Africa’ that would safeguard the passage of French colonial troops to the northern frontier of France thereby improving her strategic defence.<sup>20</sup> Conversely, a victory for the militarists in Spain would weaken Germany’s potential adversaries, in particular the ‘hate inspired’ French, improve the Reich’s strategic defence and enhance its prospects for the conquest of *Lebensraum* in the East; whether as an end in itself or merely a staging post in a phased programme (*Stufenplan*) for world dominion.<sup>21</sup>

Ideologically, neither Hitler nor Mussolini concerned themselves with attempting to establish a fascist regime in Spain to replace the Spanish Parliamentary Republic. With the possible exception of the Farinacci mission to Spain early in 1937, Italy made no serious or sustained attempt to convert Franco’s regime during the civil war.<sup>22</sup> Although the German Ambassador in Spain, General Wilhelm Faupel, was involved with the one genuine Spanish fascist movement, the *Falange Española de las JONS*, there was never any intention of seeking to establish a National Socialist regime in Spain. Hitler himself believed, as he told Nazi Party officials in April 1937, that such an objective was impossible to achieve not to say ‘superfluous and absurd’.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, any prospect of establishing a purely fascist regime in Spain was seriously undermined by the forcible fusion of the *Falange Española de las JONS* with the Carlists and the rest of the Spanish Right to form a new political organization under Franco’s leadership, the *Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las JONS* in April 1937.<sup>24</sup> This was certainly compatible with German and Italian intervention in Spain because, as the German Foreign Ministry

<sup>17</sup> Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, p. 356. Denis Smyth, ‘Reflex reaction: Germany and the onset of the Spanish Civil War’ in Paul Preston, (ed.), *Revolution and War in Spain, 1931-1939*, London: Methuen, 1984, pp. 253, 257.

<sup>18</sup> DBFP, second series, vol. XVII, app. I, p. 761. Stone, ‘Sir Robert Vansittart and Spain’, p. 134.

<sup>19</sup> Smyth, ‘Reflex reaction’, p. 252. See also Viñas, *Hitler, Franco y el Estallido de la Guerra Civil*, pp. 293-4.

<sup>20</sup> Smyth, ‘Reflex reaction’, pp. 254-5.

<sup>21</sup> Hans-Henning Abendroth, *Hitler in der Spanischen Arena: Die Deutsch-Spanischen Beziehungen im Spannungsfeld der Europäischen Interessenpolitik vom Ausbruch des Bürgerkrieges bis zum Ausbruch des Weltkrieges, 1936-1939*, Paderborn: Schöningh, 1973, pp. 35-6. For Hitler’s programme of conquest and the *Stufenplan* see Klaus Hilderbrand, *The Foreign Policy of the Third Reich*, London, Batsford, 1973.

<sup>22</sup> Coverdale, *Italian Intervention*, pp. 78-83, 399-404. Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, p. 353. For the Farinacci mission see Harry Fornari, *Mussolini’s Gadfly: Roberto Farinacci*, Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1971, pp. 162-4.

<sup>23</sup> Smyth, ‘Reflex reaction’, p. 244. See also Gerhard Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler’s Germany: Starting World War II, 1937-1939*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, pp. 155-6.

<sup>24</sup> See Martin Blinkhorn, ‘Conservatism, traditionalism and fascism in Spain, 1898-1937’ in Martin Blinkhorn (ed.), *Fascists and Conservatives: The Radical Right and the Establishment in Twentieth Century Europe*, London: Unwin Hyman, 1990, pp. 129-34.

made clear in December 1938, the goal of policy in Spain was victory by Franco ‘as the prerequisite for establishing an authoritarian Spain which is militarily and economically strong and will adhere to the Rome Berlin Axis’.<sup>25</sup>

While sharing common ideological concerns over the Spanish conflict with Italy, the Germans during its course invested less in terms of military support for Franco both in terms of the number of personnel involved in Spain and in armaments supplied. In this connection, it has been variously estimated that the total cost of Italian war material amounted to between 6 billion and 8.5 billion lire (£64-£95 million) while for Germany the cost is variously estimated at between 412 million and 540 million reichmarks (£35 million and £46 million).<sup>26</sup> In Berlin this greater commitment on the part of the Italians was recognized and in German eyes justified Italy’s strategic interests in the civil war. As the German Foreign Minister, Baron Constantin von Neurath noted, in early December 1936: ‘we recognize that Italian interests in Spain go further than ours, if only for geographic reasons’.<sup>27</sup> As early as 14 August the German Foreign Ministry had been advised that a victory for communism in Spain was ‘highly undesirable’ because the Italians believed that ‘it would finally result in strengthening the position of France and Russia in the Mediterranean at the expense of Italy’.<sup>28</sup> Germany’s recognition of Italy’s greater strategic interest was communicated to the Italians on a number of occasions. On 23 September 1936 Hans Frank, German Minister of Justice, reassured Mussolini personally that Germany was giving aid to Franco ‘solely because of solidarity in the field of political ideas’ and that it had ‘neither interests nor aims in the Mediterranean’. According to Frank, Hitler was anxious that the Duce should know that he regarded the Mediterranean as ‘a purely Italian sea. Italy has a right to positions of privilege and control in the Mediterranean. The interests of the Germans are turned towards the Baltic which is their Mediterranean’.<sup>29</sup> When Hitler saw Ciano at Berchtesgaden on 24 October 1936 he declared that in Spain ‘Italians and Germans have together dug the first trench against Bolshevism’ and assured him that as far as he was concerned the Mediterranean was an Italian sea and that any future modification of the Mediterranean balance of power ‘must be in Italy’s favour’.<sup>30</sup> Almost a year later, on the occasion of Mussolini’s visit to see Hitler in Berlin in September 1937, it was agreed that with regard to Spain ‘the interests and potentialities of Italy will have due preference’ and, quite generally, Italy would not ‘be impeded by Germany in the Mediterranean’. In return, ‘the special German

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<sup>25</sup> Memorandum by Karl Schwendemann, Head of Political Division 3a (Spain and Portugal), 3 December 1938. DGFP, series D, Vol. III, no. 701, p. 803.

<sup>26</sup> Glyn Stone, *Spain, Portugal and the Great Powers, 1931-1941*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 29.

<sup>27</sup> Foreign Minister Constantin von Neurath to the German Embassy at Rome, 5 December 1936. DGFP, series D, vol. III, no. 142, p. 153.

<sup>28</sup> Plessen to the German Foreign Ministry, 14 August 1936. DGFP, series D, vol. III, no. 40, p. 39.

<sup>29</sup> Meeting of the Head of Government, [Benito] Mussolini, with German Minister, [Hans] Frank, Rome, 23 September 1936. DDI, series 8, vol. V, no. 101, p. 111. Conversation between the Duce and Herr Frank, 23 September 1936. Muggerridge (ed.), *Ciano’s Diplomatic Papers*, p. 44.

<sup>30</sup> Conversation with the Fuehrer, 24 October 1936. Muggerridge (ed.), *Ciano’s Diplomatic Papers*, p. 57. Meeting of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ciano, with Chancellor of the Reich, [Adolf] Hitler, Berchtesgaden, 24 October 1936, DDI, series 8, vol. V, no. 277, p. 317.

interests in Austria would not be impaired by Italy'.<sup>31</sup> It suited German interests at this point to concede priority in the Mediterranean to Italy because as Hitler recognized there was a growing Anglo-Italian rivalry in the Mediterranean. He told his military leaders at the Hossbach Conference of 5 November 1937 that 'Italy – who under the spell of her history, driven by necessity and led by a genius – was expanding her power position, and thus was coming more and more into conflict with British interests'.<sup>32</sup>

In supporting Franco by the commitment of military personnel Italy far outdid their German collaborators. Throughout the duration of the civil war more than 16,000 Germans helped the Nationalist forces, although the maximum in Spain at any one time was 10,000. These forces included the Condor Legion dispatched in December 1936, which consisted of 5,000 tank and air personnel. At their maximum, Italian forces in Spain numbered between 40,000 and 50,000 troops, including air personnel, though 80,000 actually went to Spain. German casualties were very slight, amounting to no more than 300 dead. Italian losses were far heavier with around 4,000 dead and 11,000-12,000 wounded.<sup>33</sup> The Germans were content to support this greater Italian commitment while deliberately limiting their own contribution not, as has been claimed by some historians,<sup>34</sup> in order to prolong the conflict and thereby keep alive the tensions engendered by it as a distraction from Nazi political and military expansion in central and eastern Europe, but because they were not prepared to run the risk of provoking a general conflagration by sending combat troops into the Spanish arena. Admittedly, Hitler told his military leaders at the Hossbach Conference that Germany was more interested in a continuation of the war with all the tensions arising from it between Italy and France in the Mediterranean.<sup>35</sup> However, he was convinced that the dispatch of a large number of German combat troops to Spain would risk a general conflagration. As a result when, in December 1936, Mussolini began to substantially increase his military commitment to Franco – within three months 50,000 Italian troops were sent to Spain – the Germans were more circumspect. The Foreign Ministry anxious to avoid further international complications, if not odium, took the view that if Italy considered intervention necessary and possible then 'let her intervene, although there are also considerable objections even against this' but Germany 'should not permit herself to be drawn deeper into the Spanish enterprise'.<sup>36</sup> Neurath, Field Marshal Werner Von Blomberg, the German War Minister, and Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, Chief of the Naval High Command (OKM – *Oberkommando der Marine*), also feared being drawn into a protracted war not vital to German interests and opposed any deployment of German combat troops in Spain. Hitler agreed, confiding to his generals on 21 December that he would not emulate Mussolini by sending large numbers of German troops to Spain. His decision to limit German intervention was

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<sup>31</sup> The German Foreign Ministry to All German Diplomatic Missions in Europe, 30 September 1937. DGFP, series D, vol. I, no. 1, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Minutes of the Conference in the Reich Chancellery, Berlin, 5 November 1937, DGFP, series D, vol. I, no. 19, p. 33.

<sup>33</sup> Stone, *Spain, Portugal and the Great Powers*, pp. 34-5.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Weinberg, *Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany, 1937-1939*, pp. 143-4, 163.

<sup>35</sup> Minutes of the Conference in the Reich Chancellery, Berlin, 5 November 1937, DGFP, series D, vol. I, no. 19, p. 37.

<sup>36</sup> Memorandum by Acting State Secretary Hans Dieckhoff, undated. DGFP, series D, vol. III, no. 145, pp. 155-6.

reinforced two days later by the warning of Yvon Delbos, French Foreign Minister, that if Germany sent further troop transports, in addition to the Condor Legion, such action would 'necessarily lead to war'. This underlined the risk that large scale German intervention would provoke a hostile anti-Nazi coalition comprising Soviet Russia and the western democracies, the key objective of Soviet policy in Spain. However, by limiting intervention communist influenced could be neutralised without unduly antagonizing Britain and France.<sup>37</sup>

All along, Mussolini recognized and understood that Italy was providing more aid to Franco than Germany. At a conference held in Rome on 6 December 1936 attended by himself, Ciano, Alberto Pariani, Under-Secretary for War and Chief of Staff of the Army, Domenico Cavagnari, Under-Secretary and Chief of Staff for the Navy, Giuseppe Valle, Under-Secretary and Air Chief of Staff, Military Intelligence Chief Mario Roatta and Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, Chief of the *Abwehr* (German Military Intelligence), the Duce emphasized his determination to intervene substantially in Spain with combat troops. Canaris, under strict instructions from Berlin, was deliberately non-committal and discouraging about the prospects of Germany following suit.<sup>38</sup> When, a month later on 13 January 1937, Bernardo Attolico, Italian Ambassador at Berlin, raised the issue of Germany sending larger troop contingents to Spain, Neurath 'told him clearly' that 'we were not prepared to do this, because we considered that such a step would seriously endanger the larger European situation'.<sup>39</sup> Mussolini was not at all put out by Germany's refusal to emulate Italy's contribution in Spain. He did not attempt, for example, on the occasion of Head of the Luftwaffe Hermann Göring's visit to Rome in late January 1937, to persuade his Axis partner to make a greater contribution to the Spanish Nationalist cause, emphasizing that as far as the Spanish question went Italy intended 'to push matters to the limit without, however, running the risk of a general war'.<sup>40</sup> The Duce did not wish to enhance Germany's influence in the Mediterranean because as Ciano explained to Roberto Cantalupo, briefly Italian Ambassador to Nationalist Spain: 'If we close the door of Spain to the Russians, only to open it to the Germans, we can kiss our Latin and Mediterranean policy goodbye'.<sup>41</sup>

The Germans occasionally had misgivings about allowing Italy to take the lead in terms of their respective military commitments to the Nationalist forces. In January 1937

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<sup>37</sup> Stone, *Spain, Portugal and the Great Powers*, pp. 39-40. Heinz Höhne, *Canaris*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1979, pp. 237-8. Smyth, 'Reflex reaction', pp. 258-60. Willard Frank Jr., 'The Spanish Civil War and the coming of the Second World War', *International History Review*, vol. 9, 1987, p. 377.

<sup>38</sup> Conference of Head of Government Mussolini, Foreign Minister Ciano, Under-Secretary for War and Army Chief of Staff [Alberto] Pariani, Under-Secretary for the Navy and Naval Chief of Staff [Domenico] Cavagnari, Under-Secretary for Air and Air Chief of Staff [Giuseppe] Valle, Head of Military Intelligence [Mario] Roatta and Chief of German Intelligence [Wilhelm] Canaris, 6 December 1936. DDI, series 8, vol. 5, no. 546, pp. 607-11. Also, Memorandum by Acting State Secretary Dieckhoff, 11 December 1936. DGFP, series D, Vol. III, no. 151, p. 165. See also Höhne, *Canaris*, pp. 237-8.

<sup>39</sup> Memorandum by the Foreign Minister, 13 January 1937. DGFP, series D, vol. III, no. 200, p. 222.

<sup>40</sup> Conversation between the Duce and President Goering, in the presence of Count Ciano and Herr Schmidt, 23 January 1937. Muggeridge (ed.), *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, pp. 80-91. Bernardo Attolico, Italian Ambassador at Berlin to Ciano, 30 January 1937 transmitting copy of the record of the meeting of 23 January used by Schmidt for translation purposes. DDI, series 8, vol. VI, no.109, pp. 132-9.

<sup>41</sup> H. James Burgwyn, *Italian Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period, 1918-1940*, Westport, CN: Praeger, 1997, p. 153.

the German Chargé d’Affaires, soon to be Ambassador to Nationalist Spain, General Wilhelm Faupel, encapsulated this concern when he stressed that because of the ‘tremendous significance of the conduct of the war for the political attitude of the Nationalist Government’, it was to be expected that ‘the Italian commitment will result in a further increase in Italy’s political influence while...the Nationalist Government’s dependence on us will decrease’. The fear could not be dismissed that Germany’s political influence in Spain, which had been on a par with that of Italy, would ‘fall into second place’.<sup>42</sup>

## II

With regard to the conduct and progress of the war, both the Italians and the Germans experienced increasing exasperation with the attritional strategy of Franco and his military command.<sup>43</sup> After the debacle of Guadalajara in March 1937, contemptuously referred to as a ‘Spanish Caporetto’ by critics of the Fascist regime, Mussolini, in particular, was highly critical of Franco’s failure, as he saw it, to bring the Red forces in Spain to a decisive confrontation. He told Neurath during his visit to Rome, between 3-6 May 1937, that both Italy and Germany had made enough sacrifices for Franco and that he intended ‘to inform Franco at the beginning of June that he would withdraw the Italian militia if the war were not being prosecuted more energetically by that time’.<sup>44</sup> He did not carry out his intention and in late August he congratulated Franco on his capture of the Spanish port of Santander in northern Spain. Yet, in October he complained to the German Ambassador that while the Spaniards were very good soldiers they had no idea of modern warfare and were making ‘exceedingly slow progress’ on the Asturian Front. Ciano was equally critical of Franco’s military leadership accusing him in December 1937, in the knowledge of the Republican offensive to capture Teruel, of missing ‘the most opportune moments’ and of giving ‘the Reds the opportunity to rally again’.<sup>45</sup> The Italian Foreign Minister completely misunderstood Franco’s strategic leadership, claiming erroneously that his objective was ‘always ground, never the enemy’ and that he failed ‘to realize that it was by the destruction of the enemy that you win a war’.<sup>46</sup> It was precisely the destruction and annihilation of the Republican enemy that drove Franco’s strategy and not only militarily but politically and socially as well.

Despite their critical attitude and following a conference of military personnel including General Mario Berti, Commander of the Italian troops in Spain, the *Corpo di Truppe Volontarie* (CTV), it was decided at the end of 1937 to maintain solidarity with

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<sup>42</sup> General Wilhelm Faupel, Ambassador to the Nationalist Government, to the German Foreign Ministry, 12 January 1937. DGFP, series D, vol. III, no. 196, p. 219.

<sup>43</sup> As Paul Preston has shown, Franco’s slow and deliberate attritional strategy was based on his determination to conduct a war of annihilation, to ruthlessly crush for the foreseeable and even distant future all and any remnants of Republican Spain. ‘General Franco as military leader’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, vol. 4, 1994, pp. 21-41.

<sup>44</sup> State Secretary Hans Georg von Mackensen to the Embassy in France, 13 May 1937. DGFP, series D, vol. III, no. 255, pp. 286-7. See also meeting of the Head of Government, Mussolini, with the German Foreign Minister, von Neurath, 3 May 1937. DDI, series 8, vol. VI, no. 541, pp. 692-3.

<sup>45</sup> Hassell to the German Foreign Ministry, 19 October 1937. Hassell to the German Foreign Ministry, 20 December 1937. DGFP, series D, vol. III, nos. 444 and 489, pp. 468, 533.

<sup>46</sup> Muggeridge (ed.), *Ciano’s Hidden Diary*, diary entry, 20 December 1937, p. 46.



Franco and remain in Spain until a complete victory had been achieved.<sup>47</sup> With news that following the northern campaign which had ended in victory in December a further Nationalist offensive would not be launched until Teruel was recaptured Mussolini was moved at the beginning of February 1938 to send a personal letter to Franco, using Berti as the messenger, in which he urged a more energetic conduct of the war.<sup>48</sup> Franco, whose victory meanwhile at Teruel had inflicted severe losses on the Republicans, reflected for a fortnight before sending a long reply in which he defended his cautious strategy as the appropriate way of defeating and destroying the enemy without undue risk.<sup>49</sup> Mussolini remained unconvinced and instructed the Italian troops in Spain and the air units in the Balearic Islands to stand down pending Franco's decision concerning the future conduct of the war.<sup>50</sup> The decision was not long in coming as the Nationalist forces on 9 March launched a massive offensive through Aragón aimed at cutting off Catalonia from Valencia and the central Republican zone. The CTV took part in this offensive which was supported by almost 1,000 Italian and German aircraft and 200 tanks and when it started to flag in June it was revived by further Italian aid, including 6,000 new troops and large numbers of aircraft.<sup>51</sup>

Although less critical during the first part of the civil war, the German military authorities eventually came to sympathize more with the Italian view of Franco's military leadership and to agree that the Nationalist war effort could be conducted more energetically and more effectively, particularly during 1938 as the war seemed to drag on endlessly. In February 1938, for example, prior to the big Aragón offensive and in concert with Italian demands, the German Embassy in Nationalist Spain was instructed to ascertain Franco's further military plans and to impress on him the need for a 'speedy decisive military blow' and to warn him not to take German material assistance for granted, not to 'be misled, by confidence in our continued armed assistance into regarding the heretofore rather one-sided performance in the relations between Germany and Nationalist Spain as a permanent condition'.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, by the spring of 1938 Hitler had become anxious to withdraw German forces from Spain though he acknowledged that there would first have to be an understanding with the Italians. He was particularly concerned about the German air forces in Spain which, he argued, following the Austrian annexation a few weeks previously, were needed for 'rebuilding the air force in Austria'.

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<sup>47</sup> Ciano to the Chargé d'Affaires at Berlin, Massimo Magistrati, 28 December 1937. DDI, series 8, Vol. VII, no. 750, pp. 853-4. See also Muggeridge (ed.), *Ciano's Hidden Diary*, diary entries 28 and 29 December 1937, pp. 50-1.

<sup>48</sup> Head of Government, Mussolini, to Head of the Spanish State, Franco, 2 February 1938. DDI, series 8, vol. VIII, no. 87, p. 99. See also General Eberhard von Stohrer, German Ambassador at Salamanca, 7 February 1938. DGFP, series D, vol. III, no. 521, pp. 581-2. See also Muggeridge, *Ciano's Hidden Diary*, diary entries 29, 31 January 1938 and 2 February 1938, pp. 67-8.

<sup>49</sup> Franco to Mussolini, 16 February 1938. DDI, series 8, vol. VIII, no. 164, p. 193. For the Battle of Teruel which inflicted 60,000 casualties on the Republicans see Anthony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain: The Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2006, pp. 315-22.

<sup>50</sup> Ciano to Berti, 26 February 1938. DDI, series 8, Vol. VIII, no. 231, p. 277. See also Memorandum by Weizsäcker, 26 February 1938. DGFP, series D, vol. III, no. 537, pp. 607-8. Muggeridge (ed.), *Ciano's Hidden Diary*, diary entry 26 February 1938, p. 81.

<sup>51</sup> Stone, *Spain, Portugal and the Great Powers*, pp. 3-4. See also Beevor, *The Battle for Spain*, pp. 323-7.

<sup>52</sup> State Secretary Mackensen to the German Embassy in Spain, 28 February 1938. DGFP, series D, vol. III, no. 539, p. 611.

He believed that since the war appeared to be drawing to a close in view of Nationalist successes in the Aragón offensive there was little more to be learned militarily by keeping German forces in Spain.<sup>53</sup>

Despite the Führer's wishes which were undermined by continued Republican resistance, German forces remained in Spain and Franco continued to make slow progress with a military stalemate developing on the Ebro front in the summer and autumn of 1938. The decision whether to keep the Condor Legion in Spain fully re-equipped or to withdraw it was Hitler's to take. But he was not prepared to make a final decision without ascertaining Italian intentions with regard to their forces in Spain. Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, Chief of the *Ober Kommando der Wehrmacht* (Armed Forces High Command) were instructed to liaise on the issue.<sup>54</sup> For their part the Foreign Ministry was insistent that the withdrawal of Italian and German forces from Spain would be interpreted by Franco and 'also by the world outside' as 'a political retreat and would give an undue lift to the cause of the Reds'.<sup>55</sup> The leading military authorities concurred and advised that no reduction in the combat strength of the Condor Legion could be considered. As a result of this 'concurrence of opinions', Ribbentrop proposed to Hitler on 11 June 1938 that the Condor Legion be replenished 'to the extent necessary for maintaining its fighting strength' on the grounds that a complete withdrawal 'would be inadvisable at the present time for political and military considerations and would, moreover, not be in agreement with the Italian view'.<sup>56</sup> The Führer agreed and the Condor Legion remained in Spain.

Franco's failure to break the stubborn resistance of the Republicans on the Ebro during the summer of 1938 was a source of increasing concern to the Axis powers, particularly Italy. According to Ciano, Mussolini used violent language about Franco for 'his flabby conduct of the war' and letting victory slip when he already had it in his grasp. He accused the Spanish leader of 'serene optimism' in the way he conducted the war and advised that serene optimists 'find themselves under a tram as soon as they leave home'.<sup>57</sup> At one point Mussolini was inclined to withdraw all his ground forces but with Franco's agreement arrangements were begun to withdraw 10,000 Italian infantrymen from Spain; a decision made easier by the withdrawal of the International Brigades on the Republican side during September 1938.<sup>58</sup> At this time, Germany's attention was too fully engaged with the developing crisis over Czechoslovakia to be unduly concerned about events in Spain. But, following the settlement of the crisis at Munich in September 1938, the German and Italian authorities agreed that the Rome-Berlin Axis should aim at a speedy and victorious conclusion to the civil war in Spain as soon as possible and to approve no further shipments to Franco until agreement had been reached with him as to the means of achieving such a victory. It was also agreed to promote the reconstruction of

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<sup>53</sup> Memorandum by an Official of the Foreign Minister's Secretariat, 6 April 1938. DGFP, series D, vol. III, no. 559, p. 635.

<sup>54</sup> Memorandum by Berndt Otto von Heyden-Rynsch of Political Division I of the German Foreign Ministry, 2 June 1938. DGFP, series D, Vol. III, no. 592, pp. 670-1.

<sup>55</sup> Memorandum by State Secretary Ernst von Weizsäcker, 4 June 1938. DGFP, series D, vol. III, no. 593, p. 671.

<sup>56</sup> Memorandum by Weizsäcker, 11 June 1938. DGFP, series D, vol. III, no. 606, p. 691.

<sup>57</sup> Muggerridge (ed.), *Ciano's Hidden Diary*, diary entries, 24, 26 and 29 August 1938, pp. 146-8.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, diary entries 3, 7, 9 and 11 September 1938, pp. 150-4.

Spain and seek to bring about its close dependence on the Axis.<sup>59</sup> Eventually, an understanding was reached between Rome and Berlin to restore the German and Italian troop units in Spain to full strength by sending the necessary supplies and material though Hitler rejected the suggestion of the Commander of the Condor Legion, Baron Wolfram von Richthofen, that it be tripled.<sup>60</sup> The substantial arms deliveries provided by Germany in late 1938 along with further Italian reinforcements during the winter of 1938-1939 contributed to Franco's victory in Catalonia, and the capture of Barcelona in January 1939 and eventually the fall of Madrid at the end of March.<sup>61</sup>

During the civil war the Italians and Germans kept each other well informed as to their military intentions but they did not always agree on military issues. The Germans, for example, until the spring of 1938 were less critical of Franco's leadership. When, as part of the pressure on Franco to speed up his military campaigns Mussolini, in late December 1937, demanded that the Generalissimo should seek a military decision by all available means, and that this required a unified high command over the Spanish, Italian and German troops,<sup>62</sup> the Germans refused to support him. The German military authorities, including Blomberg and Keitel, believed that there already was a unified high command in the person of Franco whose place, after all, could not be taken by anyone else. Rather than aim at greater influence in the Supreme Command of the Nationalist forces, they emphasized the need for a greater mobilization of the war potential of Nationalist Spain in manpower to be achieved with Italian and German help.<sup>63</sup>

### III

In the diplomatic sphere there was considerable consultation and coordination throughout the civil war between the two foreign ministries and their various representatives including those who served on the Non-Intervention Committee in London. Admittedly, the Italian and German governments did not coordinate their responses to the Anglo-French exchange of notes of 15 August 1936 which formed the basis of the Non-Intervention Agreement with regard to the civil war in Spain and Germany chose to delay its membership of the Non-Intervention Committee beyond Italy's acceptance. But thereafter, there was a quite remarkable degree of cooperation between the two powers within the Committee where Italy was represented, throughout the Spanish conflict, by their Ambassador at London, Dino Grandi, and Germany by Ambassador Joachim von Ribbentrop, until his elevation as Foreign Minister in early 1938, and thereafter by his successor, Herbert von Dirksen. Although both Rome and Berlin were extremely sceptical not to say disdainful of the work of the Non-Intervention Committee, it suited Italian and German purposes to maintain their membership of it and to participate in its

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<sup>59</sup> Memoranda by Schwendemann, 5 and 7 October 1938. Under State Secretary Ernst Woermann to the German Embassy in Spain, 15 October 1938. DGFP, series D, Vol. III, nos. 674, 676 and 680, pp. 758-64, 768. Attolico to Ciano, 14 October 1938. DDI, series 8, vol. X, no. 276, pp. 278-9.

<sup>60</sup> Memorandum by Woermann, 13 November 1938. Minute by Schwendemann, 18 November 1938. DGFP, series D, vol. III, nos. 695 and 697, pp. 793, 795.

<sup>61</sup> For Italian reinforcements see Coverdale, *Italian Intervention*, pp. 374, 381.

<sup>62</sup> Memorandum by State Secretary Mackensen, 29 December 1937. DGFP, series D, vol III, no. 494, p. 543.

<sup>63</sup> Memorandum by the Director of the Political Department, Ernst von Weizäcker, 2 January 1938. Memorandum by State Secretary Mackensen, 10 January 1938. Memorandum by Schwendemann, 15 January 1938. DGFP, series D, vol. III, nos. 495, 498 and 502, pp. 544-5, 548, 557.

work because, as the German Foreign Ministry acknowledged as late as December 1938, it provided an instrument for giving Franco diplomatic support while tying down French and British policy with regard to Spain.<sup>64</sup> Throughout its existence, as Christian Leitz has observed, Germany and Italy had reacted in almost identical fashion to the efforts of the Committee, in rarely letting it disturb their interventionist activities.<sup>65</sup>

The continuing coordination and consultation of the Italian and German governments with regard to Spanish non-intervention diplomacy, conducted between the two foreign ministries, their embassies in Nationalist Spain, Rome, Berlin, Paris and London, and occasionally including the personal interventions of Hitler and Mussolini, took in a range of issues including arms embargoes, the limitation and withdrawal of so called volunteers - which included German and Italian troops, the International Brigades and Soviet personnel – the granting of belligerent rights, plans for mediation and the prevention of the bombing of Spanish cities, such as Bilbao, Barcelona and Madrid. The two governments were rarely out of step in dealing with these issues and displayed close solidarity when either one or other was affected by developments in the Spanish arena or pressured by the British, French or Soviet representatives on the Non-Intervention Committee. When, for example, in late May 1937 the German battleship *Deutschland*, laying at anchor off Ibiza, was attacked by Spanish Republican bombers while on naval patrol in fulfilment of the Non-Intervention Committee's control scheme to enforce the embargo of arms and munitions to both sides in the Spanish struggle, the Germans withdrew from the patrol. The Italians immediately followed and withdrew. Both then announced that they would no longer participate in the work of the Non-Intervention Committee. Initially, the Germans had tried to persuade the Italians to remain in the Committee but they refused on the grounds that it would be interpreted internationally as evidence of a divergence of views between Berlin and Rome which was not the case.<sup>66</sup> When, shortly after, they rejoined the naval patrol and resumed their membership of the Committee they did so together only to withdraw from the patrol once more following exaggerated German claims on 19 June that their patrol ship, the cruiser *Leipzig*, had been attacked by Republican submarines, north of Oran on the African coast.<sup>67</sup> This joint action was taken despite enabling Republican ships and ports to escape naval supervision while those of Franco remained under the effective control of British and French patrol ships.<sup>68</sup> Earlier, at the time of the defeat of Italian forces at the Battle of Guadalajara in March 1937, Mussolini had been reassured that Hitler and 'everybody else in Berlin' were convinced of his firm determination to dissipate the effect of this reverse with a new victory.<sup>69</sup> Later, when the Nyon Conference was convened to deal with the crisis created

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<sup>64</sup> Memorandum by Schwendemann, 3 December 1938. DGFP, series D, vol. III, no. 701, pp. 803-4.

<sup>65</sup> Christian Leitz, 'Nazi Germany and Francoist Spain', in Balfour and Preston (eds.), *Spain and the Great Powers*, p. 132.

<sup>66</sup> Neurath to the German Embassy at London, 30 May 1937. Memorandum by an Official of Neurath's Secretariat, 31 May 1937. DGFP, series D, vol III, nos. 268, 272, pp. 297, 299-300.

<sup>67</sup> For the *Leipzig* and *Deutschland* incidents see Stone, *Spain, Portugal and the Great Powers*, pp. 80-2.

<sup>68</sup> Memorandum by Weizsäcker, 19 June 1937. Joachim von Ribbentrop, Ambassador at London, to the German Foreign Ministry, 19 June 1937. Hassell to the German Foreign Ministry, 26 June 1937. DGFP, series D, vol. III, nos. 340, 341 and 360, pp. 356-8, 372-3. Attolico to Ciano, 19 June 1937. Meeting between Ciano and Hassell, 26 June 1937. DDI, series 8, vol. VI, nos. 764 and 803, pp. 1002-3, 1044-5.

<sup>69</sup> Hassell to the German Foreign Ministry, 25 March 1937. DGFP, series D, vol. III, no. 236, p. 259.

during August 1937 by the sinking of merchant ships destined for Republican Spain by Italian submarines, the German Government showed solidarity with the Italians by insisting that the Soviets should be excluded from the conference until they retracted their 'unproved accusations' concerning 'certain incidents in the Mediterranean' against the Italian Government. Moreover, they concurred with the Italian view that instead of calling a special conference the London Non-Intervention Committee should be authorized to handle the matter.<sup>70</sup> On this occasion Italo-German solidarity failed to achieve its aim because the Nyon Conference went ahead and instituted a revised patrol scheme in the Mediterranean which Italy joined shortly thereafter. But a few weeks later it was more successful when an attempt by the British and French Governments to discuss the issues of belligerent rights for both parties in Spain and the withdrawal of volunteers in tripartite talks with Italy outside of the Non-Intervention Committee was thwarted by Rome's insistence that any discussion without Germany's participation was out of the question.<sup>71</sup> As a result, discussion was remitted to the Non-Intervention Committee where it was stalled for many months until the summer of 1938, not least because of Italo-German delaying tactics which often included the Portuguese representative, Armindo Monteiro.<sup>72</sup> Even then there was no genuine progress on either withdrawal of volunteers or belligerent rights and although both Germany and Italy supported the mission of Frances Hemming, Secretary of the Non-Intervention Committee, to Spain in autumn of 1938, they remained determined to support Franco's position that there would be no further withdrawal of volunteers, other than the 10,000 Italian infantrymen withdrawn previously to fulfil the Anglo-Italian Agreement, unless belligerent rights were conceded to him in advance, which the British and French refused to do.<sup>73</sup>

Italo-German diplomacy was also focused on issues outside the Non-Intervention Committee, such as the decision in November 1936 to accord full *de jure* recognition to Franco's Nationalist regime, the issue of Franco's insistence on his neutrality at the height of the Czech crisis in late September 1938 and joint Italo-German pressure on Franco to adhere to the Anti-Comintern Pact before the end of the civil war in February-March 1939. In view of the rapid advance of the Nationalist forces towards Madrid in the autumn of 1936 the German authorities were ready to provide formal recognition of the Franco regime but only on the fall of the Spanish capital and the Italians concurred.<sup>74</sup> At the same time, Rome was less cautious about diplomatic protocol and wanted to establish open relations with Franco before the fall of Madrid through the appointment of delegates at Nationalist headquarters at Burgos who could quickly be replaced by official

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<sup>70</sup> Memorandum to the British and French Embassies, Berlin, 9 September 1937. DGFP, series D, vol III, no. 417, pp. 442-3.

<sup>71</sup> Memorandum by State Secretary Mackensen, 4 October 1937. DGFP, series D, vol. III, no. 428, p. 452.

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, Woermann's communication to the German Foreign Ministry, 20 January 1938 in which, as Chargé d'Affaires at London, he referred to 'the group formed by Germany Italy and Portugal' as presenting 'a more united front in the Non-Intervention Committee than ever before'. DGFP, series D, vol. III, no. 506, p. 562.

<sup>73</sup> Memorandum by Schwendemann, 3 December 1938. DGFP, series D, vol. III, no. 701. See also Stone, *Spain, Portugal and the Great Powers*, pp. 91-2.

<sup>74</sup> Meeting between Ciano and Neurath in Berlin, 21 October 1936. DDI, series 8, vol. V, no. 256, pp. 287-8.

diplomats when the Spanish capital fell.<sup>75</sup> The Germans continued to insist on delaying recognition until the conquest of Madrid had been completed and, at the end of October, deemed it inexpedient to send delegates to Burgos beforehand ‘if for no other reason than that General Franco might thereby possibly be confirmed in his delaying tactics’.<sup>76</sup> However, confronted by a stiffening of Republican resistance in the Spanish capital with the arrival of Soviet aid and the International Brigades, they changed their minds on 16 November and with Italian approval and support both Governments extended formal recognition and established embassies at Burgos, the designated Spanish Nationalist capital.<sup>77</sup>

The German and Italian Governments certainly intended to do everything they could to draw Franco’s regime into a Rome-Berlin-Madrid axis and the first substantial test of this relationship took place in September 1938 during the Czechoslovak crisis. The Italians were informed on 16 September that the Nationalist Government was very concerned that in a conflict between the western democracies and the fascist powers, arising out of the crisis in central Europe, Republican Spain would be allied with Britain and France with extremely grave consequences for the Nationalist struggle in Spain and the Mediterranean balance of power.<sup>78</sup> At this stage there was no hint of Nationalist Spain declaring neutrality. But between 26-28 September, with war between the western democracies and the fascist powers seemingly imminent, the real prospect of such a move was raised by the Spanish Ambassador at Berlin, Marquis Antonio Magaz, and belatedly and less directly by the Ambassador at Rome, Pedro Garcia Conde.<sup>79</sup> Franco was convinced that his belligerency on the side of Germany and Italy in a war with Britain and France would result in these two powers allying with the Spanish Republicans with the result that France would occupy the entire eastern coast of Spain in order to safeguard her troop transports from North Africa, Spain’s overseas possessions would be lost and Minorca occupied by French forces. He was also compelled to recognize Nationalist powerlessness in the face of Anglo-French military action which would cut his supply lines through Portugal when they had only six weeks ammunition left and only a remote prospect of Germany, confronted by an allied blockade, continuing to supply.<sup>80</sup> Despite Göring’s annoyance with the ungrateful Franco, Mussolini’s disgust at the news about

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<sup>75</sup> Neurath to the German Embassy in Italy, 27 October 1936. Hassell to the German Foreign Ministry, 28 and 29 October 1936. DGFP, series D, vol. III, nos. 109, 110 and 111, pp. 121-3.

<sup>76</sup> Neurath to Hassell, 30 October 1936. DGFP, series D, Vol. III, no. 113, pp. 123-4.

<sup>77</sup> The Foreign Ministry to the German Embassy in Italy, 16 November 1936. Memorandum by the Head of Political Division III, Karl Dumont, 17 November 1936. DGFP, series D, vol. III, nos. 119 and 121, pp. 123-4, 128-9, 131.

<sup>78</sup> The Director General of European and Mediterranean Affairs in the Italian Foreign Ministry, Gino Buti, to Ciano, 16 September 1938. DDI, series 8, vol. X, no. 54, p. 48.

<sup>79</sup> Belatedly and less directly because as Ciano noted in his diary on 26 September having already learned of the *démarche* in Berlin from Mackensen: ‘Nothing has yet been announced to us by Conde. Disgusting! Enough to make our dead in Spain turn in their graves’. Later: ‘The Spaniard has made the *démarche* about neutrality to Buti [of the Italian Foreign Ministry]. But in a modified form. He did not dare come to me about it’. Muggerridge (ed.), *Ciano’s Hidden Diary*, pp. 162-3.

<sup>80</sup> Minutes by Woermann for Foreign Minister Ribbentrop, 26, 27 and 28 September 1938. Mackensen, Ambassador at Rome, to the German Foreign Ministry, 27 September 1938. DGFP, series D, vol. II, nos. 622, 638, 641 and 659, pp. 950-1, 969-70, 972-3, 991. See also Manfred Merkes, *Die Deutsche Politik gegenüber dem Spanischen Bürgerkrieg, 1936-1939*, Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid, 1969, p. 328.

Spain and Ciano's outrage at what he considered to be Franco's betrayal of the common cause, the Spanish intention to declare neutrality was accepted by both the Italian and German Governments provided that Nationalist Spain would not negotiate with Britain and France and would exercise neutrality in a way 'entirely benevolently to Germany and Italy'. Hitler himself had to admit that in view of the continuing civil war Franco was left with little choice and, on reflection, Ciano saw that neutrality was 'the only way in which he could fight'.<sup>81</sup>

While the Munich Conference and Settlement rendered the issue of Spanish neutrality as academic the episode had revealed an attempt by the Franco regime to compliment the Germans at the expense of Italy when Magaz told Woermann that Germany's reaction to Spanish neutrality had been more cordial than that of Rome. The State Under-Secretary defended the Italian Government insisting that according to his information it had expressed itself to the Spanish Ambassador in Rome in similar fashion.<sup>82</sup> The tendency to resist Spanish Nationalist attempts to divide and rule their respective German and Italian partners was a consistent feature of Italo-German diplomacy and both certainly were not averse to applying pressure diplomatically as well as militarily to achieve common objectives, as exemplified in their ultimately successful attempt to persuade Franco to adhere to the Anti-Comintern Pact in February-March 1939.

At the beginning of February, identical instructions were issued to the Italian and German Ambassadors at Burgos to invite Franco to join the Anti-Comintern Pact and gradually the stubborn resistance of the Generalissimo, who wished to delay accession until after the civil war was concluded for fear of delaying Franco-British recognition of his regime or worse provoking their late intervention on the side of the Republic, was worn away.<sup>83</sup> At one point encouraged by Ciano's intervention with the German Foreign Minister, Ribbentrop, Eberhard von Stohrer, who had succeeded General von Faupel as Ambassador at Burgos, was instructed to tell Franco that as far as the importance of his Government's accession to the Anti-Comintern Pact was concerned both Hitler and Mussolini personally attributed to the act 'eminent significance for the future development of our relations with Spain'.<sup>84</sup> Later, after the civil war was over, in May 1939 Ribbentrop confirmed to Ciano in Milan that it was necessary for Germany to work together with Italy to 'strengthen still further the bonds between the Axis and Spain'.<sup>85</sup>

#### IV

The collaboration and solidarity, which existed between the two Axis powers, was quite remarkable, but this did not mean that their relations were devoid of suspicion of the

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<sup>81</sup> For Göring and Hitler see Christian Leitz, *Nazi Germany and Neutral Europe during the Second World War*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 116. For Ciano see Mackensen to the German Foreign Ministry, 27 September 1938. DGFP, series D, vol. II, no. 641, p. 972. See also, Muggeridge (ed.), *Ciano's Hidden Diary*, diary entry 26 September 1938, p. 163.

<sup>82</sup> Woermann to the Embassy in Spain, 28 September 1938. DGFP, series III, no. 669, p. 752.

<sup>83</sup> State Secretary Weizsäcker to the Embassy in Spain, 1 February 1939. DGFP, series D, vol. III, no. 723, p. 830. Abendroth, *Hitler in der Spanischen Arena*, p. 231.

<sup>84</sup> Weizsäcker to Hassell, 22 February 1939. Weizsäcker to the Embassy in Spain, 23 February 1939. DGFP, series D, vol. III, nos. 742 and 743, pp. 852-3.

<sup>85</sup> Conversation between Ciano and Ribbentrop at Milan, 6-7 May 1939. Muggeridge (ed.), *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, p. 285. The German Foreign Minister was responding to a memorandum drawn up by Mussolini.

other's motives and intentions. Each of them negotiated separate agreements with the Franco regime: the Italo-Spanish Agreement of 28 November 1936 according to which Franco pledged to adopt an attitude of benevolent neutrality and to put at Italy's disposal 'all facilities, the use of ports, of air-lines, of railways and roads';<sup>86</sup> and the German-Spanish Treaty of Friendship of 31 March 1939 in which both sides pledged to avoid 'anything in the political, military and economic fields that might be disadvantageous to its treaty partner or of advantage to its opponent'.<sup>87</sup>

From the economic point of view, the Germans were far more successful in ensuring repayment for all the war material supplied by them in the form of raw materials vital for their second Four Year Plan, including copper, pyrites, iron ore and sulphur and in compelling the Franco regime to allow the creation, under the Montana project, of a German owned network of enterprises to extract and acquire Spanish raw materials.<sup>88</sup> In the autumn of 1938 Berlin deliberately exploited Franco's need of further German war material, in order to break the developing stalemate between his forces and those of the Republicans on the Ebro front, to wrest concessions from the Nationalist authorities to fulfil the Montana project.<sup>89</sup> In contrast, the Italians were less ruthless and failed to exploit Franco's dependency on Italian war material and even allowed postponement of repayment of a substantial proportion of Nationalist debts for the duration of the civil war. Later, the Italians lamented their generosity. On 26 August 1939 Mussolini complained to the German Ambassador, Hans Georg von Mackensen, that his country had been 'bled white' by the Spanish Civil War which had made enormous inroads on Italian foreign exchange reserves, thereby greatly increasing the problem of obtaining raw materials.<sup>90</sup>

The Italians were also less successful in absorbing the salient military lessons of the civil war despite their more extensive intervention, such as the superiority of more heavily armoured though less manoeuvrable tanks over lighter models and the coordination of air and ground forces, both of which were absorbed and developed by the Germans.<sup>91</sup> None the less, the successful collaboration with Germany and the complete victory of the Franco regime created unrealistic expectations on the part of Rome. Ciano and Mussolini were both culpable in this respect. The Duce presented a memorandum to the Fascist Grand Council on 4 February proclaiming the necessity of a 'march to the oceans' at Gibraltar and Suez to 'break Italy's imprisonment in the Mediterranean' and

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<sup>86</sup> For the full text of the Italo-Spanish Treaty see Coverdale, *Italian Intervention*, pp. 413-14. It was assumed that these facilities would include the Balearics and other Spanish islands. See conversation between Göring and Mussolini in the presence of Ciano in Rome, 16 April 1939. DGFP, series D, vol. VI, no. 211, p.261.

<sup>87</sup> For the full text of the German-Spanish Treaty of Friendship see DGFP, series D, vol. III, no. 773, pp. 884-6.

<sup>88</sup> For full details of Germany's economic intervention in Spain during the civil war, including the Montana project, see Christian Leitz, *Economic Relations between Nazi Germany and Franco's Spain, 1936-1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 8-90.

<sup>89</sup> Memorandum by Woermann, 21 November 1938. DGFP, series D, vol. III, no. 700, p. 802. Leitz, *Economic Relations*, pp. 85-9.

<sup>90</sup> Mackensen to German Foreign Ministry, 26 August 1939. DGFP, series D, vol. VII, no. 329, p. 325. See also Angel Viñas, 'The financing of the Spanish Civil War' in Preston (ed.), *Revolution and War in Spain*, pp. 273-7.

<sup>91</sup> See Stone, *Spain, Portugal and the Great Powers*, pp. 33-5



achieve true great power status in the conflict with the western powers. It was Italy's successful contribution to Franco's victory which probably encouraged Mussolini to think that a break out into the Atlantic via the Straits of Gibraltar was a real possibility.<sup>92</sup> Ciano certainly thought so when he noted in his diary on 22 February 1939: 'Those silly people who tried so hard to criticize our intervention in Spain will one day perhaps understand that on the Ebro, at Barcelona, and at Malaga the foundations of the Roman Mediterranean Empire were laid'.<sup>93</sup> The power calculus suggested that Italy lacked the credible military resources to achieve such an ambitious goal. But Hitler and his military leaders overlooked Italian shortcomings in the military sphere. Undoubtedly, their shared collaboration and cooperation with Fascist Italy in Spain contributed significantly to the eventual military alliance, the Pact of Steel of May 1939, which the Germans no less than the Italians pursued, but when it was finally tested after June 1940 it was found to be wanting in the highest degree. The common experience of intervention and victory in the civil war in Spain by contributing to the Italo-German alliance of the Second World War played its own part in the eventual defeat and destruction of Nazi Germany and of Italian fascism.

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<sup>92</sup> MacGregor Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed, 1939-1941: Politics and Strategy in Fascist Italy's Last War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 40. MacGregor Knox, 'The Fascist regime, its foreign policy and its wars: "an anti-Fascist" orthodoxy?', *Contemporary European History*, vol. 4, 1995, p. 359. Alan Cassels, 'Reluctant neutral: Italy and the strategic balance in 1939' in Brian McKercher and Roch Legault (eds.), *Military Planning and the Origins of the Second World War in Europe*, Westport, CN: Praeger, 2001, p. 38.

<sup>93</sup> Malcolm Muggeridge (ed.), *Ciano's Diary, 1939-1943*, London: Heinemann, 1947, p. 33.