

100. The lecture ended with film footage of volunteers Tony Gilbert and Bob Cooney discussing the value of songs on morale, concluding with Cooney giving an emotional rendition of Jarama:

BC: Sometimes, things got too much for you. But if you could laugh about this and sing about this, then you didn't get demoralised about it.

TG: Oh, we were great singers. We sang everybody else's songs and we invented a hell of a lot of our own. The British sang the French songs, the German songs and, of course, every single nationality sang the one song which we all loved, which was 'The Battle of Jarama'.

BC: Shall I sing it? There was a time, just after we had come home from Spain that I couldn't even listen to this song you know, without becoming very emotionally overcome. [Sings]

Both interviews taken from 'A Cause...'

Albion's Perfidy: The British Government and the Spanish Civil War

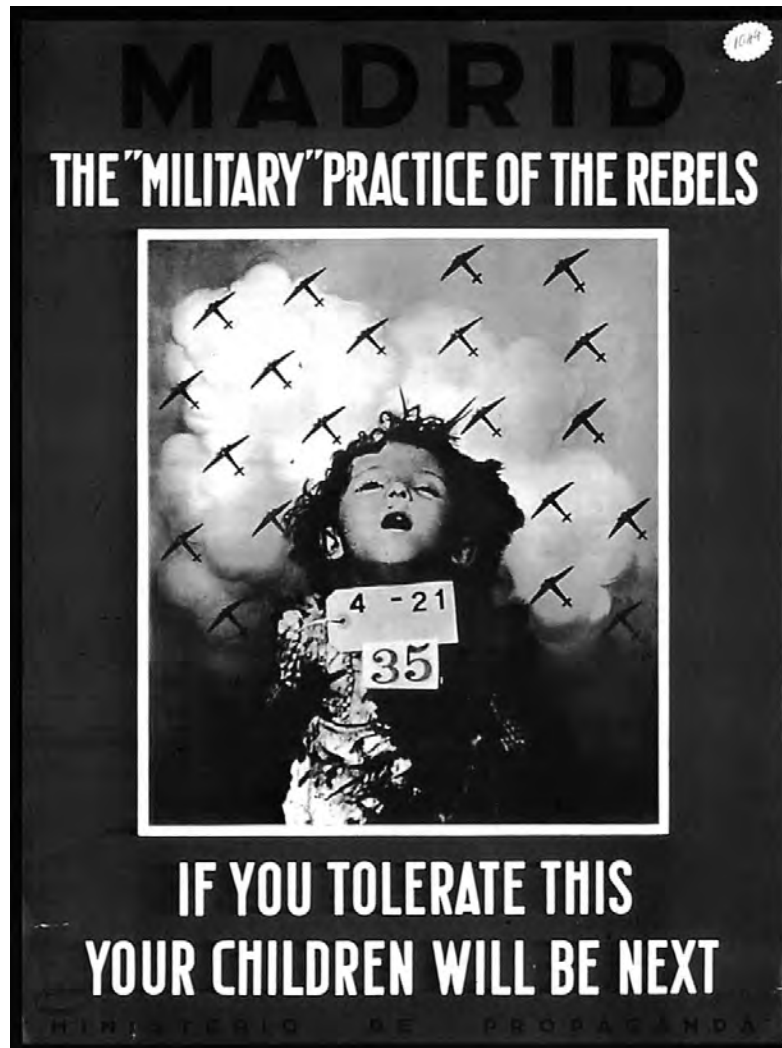
Enrique Moradiellos

The war which ravaged Spain for almost three years, between July 1936 and April 1939, was a foreign conflict which had an enormous impact on British political life and public opinion. This judgement was in fact already conveyed to General Franco by the Duke of Alba, his unofficial agent in London, during the course of the conflict: 'Our war has become the most passionate and divisive issue among politicians and public opinion in Great Britain'.¹ Twenty-five years later, the first academic study on the subject rightly reaffirmed the accuracy of that opinion: 'Probably not since the French Revolution had a 'foreign event' so bitterly divided the British people'.² And more recently, a comprehensive analysis of Britain and the Spanish Civil War opened its pages with these words:

The British have not always been as greatly moved by other people's wars as they were by the Spanish Civil War. Indeed, of all the foreign conflicts of the twentieth century in which Britain was not directly involved, the war in Spain made by far the greatest impact on British political, social, and cultural life.³

No doubt, the main reason for the strange and passionate British interest in this foreign conflict lies in two different but interconnected factors:

- 1 the presence of a clear analogy between the pre-war crisis in Spain and the general European (and British) crisis during the so-called 'inter-war period' (1919-1939);
- 2 the existence of a chronological parallel between the course of the Spanish war and the course of the continental crisis which preceded the onset of the Second World War in September 1939.



Poster produced in 1937 by the Republic's Ministry of Propaganda in Valencia; there were also versions in Spanish and French.

As regards the first factor, the struggle in Spain between the reformist and revolutionary forces fighting for the Republic against an insurgent army of reactionary persuasion seemed to duplicate on a smaller scale the increasing triangular tension in Europe between the Western democracies (Britain and France), with or without the support of the Soviet Union, and the Axis of fascist powers (Germany and Italy). As regards the second factor, the timing of the outbreak of the struggle in Spain was of particular importance, occurring in parallel, and in close connection, with the final descent of Europe into World War Two. For that same reason, the policy followed by the Conservative-dominated British government towards the civil war has been and continues to be the subject of acute political and historiographical controversy.⁴

The starting point of any interpretation of British policy in the Spanish conflict would have to be the one fact on which all historians agree: British policy had a crucial influence on the course and final outcome of the Spanish Civil War. In particular, it was very favourable to the insurgent army led by General Francisco Franco in practical terms, and it was a serious obstacle to the war effort of the Republican government. Certainly, such was the effect of the policy of collective non-intervention promoted by the French and British governments from August 1936, and officially adopted by all European governments when they subscribed to the Non-Intervention Agreement and agreed to participate in its London committee of supervision.

Non-intervention worked against the Spanish Republic in two basic ways. In the first place, it meant the imposition of an embargo on arms and munitions to both sides without a parallel recognition of their belligerent rights, thus putting the legitimate Republican government and the military rebels on the same footing in this key respect of war supplies. Secondly, the embargo was applied mainly against the Republic, because Germany and Italy continued their vital support to the insurgents despite signing the pact, while Britain nevertheless upheld the embargo up to the end, and was followed under duress by France and other European governments. So a system of aids and inhibitions was created which was fatal for the Republic in the long term and could never be counteracted by Soviet help. To prove beyond reasonable doubt this essential point, it might be enough to quote the final words of a confidential report by the assistant British military attaché in Republican Spain. At the end of

the conflict, Major EC Richards wrote to the War Office the following clever, confidential and impartial assessment:

It has become almost superfluous to recapitulate the reasons [for Franco's victory]. They are, firstly, the material superiority throughout the war of the Nationalist forces on land and in the air, and, secondly, the qualitative superiority of all their cadres up to nine months or possibly a year ago ... This material inferiority [of the Republican forces] is not only quantitative but qualitative as well, being also the result of multiplicity of types. However impartial and benevolent the aims of the Non-Intervention Agreement, its repercussions on the armament problem of the Republican forces have been, to say the least of it, unfortunate ... The material aid of Russia, Mexico and Czechoslovakia [to the Republic] has never equalled in quantity or quality that of Germany and Italy [to General Franco]. Other nations, whatever their sympathies, have been restrained by the attitude of Great Britain.⁵

The crucial importance of the United Kingdom's attitude to the Spanish conflict derived from its large economic and strategic interests in Spain, and from its position as a leading European and imperial power in the 1930s.

As regards British interests in Spain, three basic points should be borne in mind:

- 1 The naval base in Gibraltar was crucial to British control of the Mediterranean and communications with India; its security was essential for imperial strategy and depended on Spanish goodwill.
- 2 Great Britain was Spain's most important trading partner, accounting for 25 per cent of Spanish exports and providing 10 per cent of its imports.
- 3 British capital accounted for 40 per cent of foreign investments in Spain, largely concentrated in the iron and pyrite mining industries.

Given the extent of those interests, the British Foreign Office followed with close attention the critical situation that developed in Spain from 1931, when the oligarchic monarchy was peacefully toppled by a democratic Republic bent on a programme of political and social reform at a time of deep economic recession. The consequent persistence of social and political upheavals, particularly after the

narrow electoral victory of the Popular Front coalition in February 1936, convinced the British authorities that Spain had entered a process of revolutionary crisis, most probably fostered by the Comintern, which the Republican government was unable to resolve or to contain. In their view, 1936 Spain was experiencing a sort of re-enactment of 1917 Russia, with a Kerensky government clearing the way for an impending Bolshevik (or anarchist) take-over. So, by June 1936, the Foreign Office had all but given up any hope of a constitutional solution in Spain, and expected either a military intervention to restore order and avoid anarchy or some sort of leftist social revolution.⁶

The final crystallisation of this image of the Spanish crisis occurred in parallel to the beginning of the British policy of rapprochement towards Italy, as part of the so-called 'general policy of appeasement in Europe'. The British authorities were at the time confronting a difficult dilemma in their strategic and diplomatic planning. Since the start of the economic depression in 1929, an overextended British Empire was threatened at three different points by powers hostile to the status quo: Japan in the Far East, Nazi Germany in central Europe, and Fascist Italy in the Mediterranean. Britain had neither the economic nor the military resources, nor the political will, to confront the three dangers at the same time, either alone or with the help of its traditional French ally. This was mostly because, contrary to the experience of the First World War, the two European democracies could not now count on the vital help of the United States (which had withdrawn into complete isolationism), nor on the support of Russia (which had become a suspicious and threatening Soviet Union). Therefore, from June 1936, the main objective of British diplomacy was to restore harmonious relations with Italy (radically altered by the earlier Italian conquest of Abyssinia) in order to stabilise the Mediterranean situation and to avoid an Italian alignment with a potentially hostile Germany and Japan. Strategic considerations alone seemed to require such a course, but there was also the strong desire to prevent an arms race whose financial demands would endanger the economic recovery and the social and political stability of Britain and its empire. In addition to these two factors, there was also British suspicion of hidden Soviet intentions, and the conviction that any future war between capitalist powers would provide ample opportunities for the renewed expansion of communism. The Russian crisis of 1917 had proved

beyond reasonable doubt that total war would again become the harbinger of social revolution.⁷

It is clear, then, that prior to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, anti-revolutionary preoccupations about Spain and the search for a Mediterranean entente with Italy were twin considerations at the Foreign Office and in the British cabinet. In fact, both factors were to establish the essential framework for the British reaction to the Spanish conflict, which began on 17 July 1936 with a large military insurrection against the Republican government.

Due to the internal divisions within the army and to the strong reaction of the working class, the military coup was doomed to failure in many important and populated areas, including Madrid and Barcelona. As a consequence, the coup was transformed overnight into a bloody civil war.⁸ Since neither side had the means and equipment to wage a full-scale war, both were immediately obliged to look for foreign support to start military operations. From Spanish Morocco, General Franco, soon to be head of the insurgent army, asked Mussolini and Hitler for direct help, which secretly began to arrive by late July 1936. The Republican cabinet sought support from the newly elected Popular Front government in France. And both sides tried to gain the indirect help of the British government. These developments forced the British cabinet to respond urgently to the crisis; most of all because the whole policy of appeasement would be endangered if their French ally were to help the Spanish Republic while Italy and Germany were supporting General Franco.⁹

The British response was to adopt a policy of tacit neutrality (that is, never formally and publicly proclaimed), a neutrality which was nevertheless clearly benevolent towards the military insurgents. The essential aims of that policy were to avoid giving any direct or indirect help to a government side, whose legality concealed a repulsive revolutionary nature, and to avert any possibility of confrontation with rebel forces of mere counter-revolutionary persuasion. Not in vain had British diplomats in Spain warned the Foreign Office from the very beginning of the coup that 'no government existed today', and that 'there were military forces in operation on the one hand, opposed by a virtual Soviet on the other'. The extent of the anti-revolutionary feeling created by the Spanish crisis among the British authorities is clearly revealed by this private statement by Sir Maurice Hankey, the cabinet secretary: 'In the present state of Europe, with

France and Spain menaced by Bolshevism, it is not inconceivable that before long it might pay us to throw in our lot with Germany and Italy.'¹⁰

The British policy of tacit and benevolent neutrality was immediately implemented in four key aspects:

- 1 by the rejection of the Republican fleet in Gibraltar, which was neutralised for the rest of the war;
- 2 by the imposition of a secret embargo on arms to the Republic (the only side who could legally buy arms in the British market until the formal proclamation of neutrality);
- 3 by pressure on the French government in order to prevent it giving any help to the Republic;
- 4 by the avoidance of any confrontation with Germany and Italy over their military support for Franco.

Awareness of the British position and consequent fears contributed significantly to the French reluctance to support the Republic, and convinced Hitler and Mussolini that limited and covert aid to Franco would not provoke energetic opposition from Britain, and might bring political and even strategic advantages to their respective expansionist foreign policies.¹¹

In this context, the European non-intervention pact proposed by the British and French governments and signed in August 1936 by all the continental governments provided the necessary diplomatic cloak and shelter required by the British policy of tacit neutrality. Moreover, by its mere existence and apparent efficacy, the pact and its London committee of supervision were essential for the safeguarding of the diplomatic aims established by the Foreign Office: to confine the war within Spain, and at the same time to restrain the intervention of its French ally, while avoiding any alignment with the Soviet Union or any confrontation with Germany and Italy over their support for Franco. In this respect, Stanley Baldwin, the Prime Minister, had given a clear-cut directive to Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary: 'On no account, French or other, must [you] bring us into the fight on the side of the Russians.'¹²

Thus, for the British authorities, from the very beginning, the collective policy of non-intervention contained an element of fraudulence, in that its real aim was not the one declared (the prevention of foreign intervention) but rather the safeguarding of the

political aims indicated above. It was perceived as the ideal means to carry out a policy clearly defined by Winston Churchill in a private letter to Eden:

*It seems to me most important to make Blum [the French socialist premier] stay with us strictly neutral, even if Germany and Italy continue to back the rebels and Russia sends money to the government. If the French government takes sides against the rebels it will be a godsend to the Germans and pro-Germans.*¹³

The political strategy gradually formulated by the Foreign Office in late July and August 1936 was based on two conditioning factors, which mutually reinforced one another.¹⁴

The first factor was the clear preference for a victory of the military insurgents, who seemed to be less dangerous for British interests in Spain and Europe than the victory of a government perceived as presiding over a process of Bolshevisation. The following judgement by a Foreign Office official in a confidential memorandum encapsulated the general impression within official and Conservative circles:

*Our reports [from Spain] show quite clearly that the alternative to Franco is communism tempered by anarchy; and I further believed that if this last regime is triumphant in Spain it will spread to other countries, and notably to France.*¹⁵

The second factor was the need to preserve a high degree of social and political consensus in Britain, where the trade union strength of Labour, along with growing popular and intellectual support for the Republic, precluded policies more favourable to the insurgents (such as immediate official neutrality or direct assistance). On 22 July, Salazar, who was already secretly supporting the military rebels, ordered the Portuguese representative in London to ask the Foreign Office what it would do to avoid 'the establishment of a communist regime in Spain'. The official reply received was this:

*England would not intervene militarily in Spain, whatever the situation developed in that country. The British government would not have the support of public opinion.*¹⁶

That the Conservative cabinet had reason to be worried about popular attitudes towards the Spanish conflict is shown by the fact that public opinion polls systematically gave a significant majority of sympathy for the Republic: on average, 58 per cent of those questioned declared themselves in favour of the Republic, against 8 per cent in favour of Franco, and 34 per cent who did not answer.¹⁷ The importance of both conditioning factors was summed up in the words of David Margesson, the Conservative Chief Whip. At the end of July 1936, he confessed in private to the Italian representative in London:

*Our interests, our desire is that the [military] revolution should triumph and Communism be crushed, but on the other hand, we do not wish to emerge from our neutrality ... This is the only possible way of counteracting labour agitation.*¹⁸

Parallel to those conditioning factors, the British political strategy for Spain was constructed on two implicit assumptions.

The first assumption was the expectation that the war would be short, given that the inexperienced and badly supplied workers' militias fighting for the Republic would not be able to contain the advance of an experienced regular army supplied by two European military powers. Therefore, the conquest of Madrid was thought to be a matter of weeks away, and a suitable political occasion for the public declaration of neutrality or the recognition of the new military government. British military intelligence had predicted by mid-August 1936 that 'prolonged resistance [in Madrid] is therefore unlikely', while the Foreign Office maintained 'the hope that the civil war would be of short duration'.¹⁹

The second assumption was that the 'diplomacy of pound sterling' would be enough to recover the good will of a future military regime, because such a regime would have to seek help in the City of London in order to finance the post-war economic reconstruction of Spain. An early report by the commercial secretary at the Madrid embassy confirmed this long-standing premise:

The natural tendency is to use up all available stocks of consumption goods in Spain such as oil, coal, motor cars etc, with the result that when the war is over Spain will be in need of imports considerably above her normal requirements. At the same time the war will have seriously dislocated the country's export trade. The result will be a strong tendency

*towards an unfavourable balance of trade. The country will be short of foreign exchange and there will be a grave need for extensive foreign credits ... In any case the obvious country in which to obtain such foreign credits will be Great Britain. The inference is that we shall, in the future, be in a very strong position for negotiating any commercial agreements with the new Spanish government, even though we may have offended them in the course of the war.*²⁰

Moreover, if the power of attraction of the 'diplomacy of pound sterling' should fail, there still remained in full operation the power of deterrence of gunboat diplomacy: the great superiority of the Royal Navy and its capacity to implement an economic blockade against a hostile or unfriendly Spain.

Only within the framework of the political strategy just outlined can a crucial and often overlooked aspect of British policy towards the Spanish Civil War be best appreciated: that it represented a specific and regional version of the general policy of appeasement in Europe. The fact is that British non-intervention conformed systematically to the parameters established by that policy.

Until December 1936, there was total agreement in the Foreign Office and the cabinet as regards the profile of British policy in Spain. Open criticism of non-intervention was confined to small sections of public opinion – to the vacillating Labour opposition and smaller left-wing parties (notably the active Communist Party). Towards the end of the year, however, the international and domestic situation began to change dramatically.

In the first place, the Republicans were able to hold on in Madrid in late November 1936, resisting the Nationalist military assault. Such an unexpected defensive victory was possible thanks mostly to substantial Soviet military aid, which began to arrive in early October, and to the entry into action of the first units of the International Brigades (whose numbers reached a total of 35,000 over the course of the war).

Secondly, to counteract this failure in Madrid, Hitler and Mussolini decided to intensify their material and diplomatic support for Franco. By the end of 1936, they had both concluded that Franco's victory could not be achieved merely by sending war materiel and a few technicians, but demanded full-scale army corps deployment. The result was the dispatch of the 5000-strong German Condor Legion and the 40,000 men of the Italian Corpo di Truppe Volontarie. By the

end of the war around 20,000 Germans and 80,000 Italians had fought in those two corps.

Thirdly, the blatant intervention by the Axis powers strengthened public sympathy in Britain for the Republic and forced Labour demands for strong action and cessation of the arms embargo on the Spanish government.²¹

These developments clearly implied the partial breakdown of the British political strategy, for they destroyed the assumption of a short war and undermined the confinement of the struggle that the non-intervention system had achieved to some extent. The British government was therefore obliged to readjust its Spanish policy to the new conditions of a long war and massive intervention by the Axis powers. It was in this process of analysis and reappraisal that the first splits appeared in the cabinet and the Foreign Office, giving rise to two distinct phases of British policy between 1937 and the end of the war in 1939.

The first phase lasted from January 1937 to February 1938. In this period, the Spanish policy of the British government reflected a precarious balance between the views of Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary, and the majority of the cabinet, led by the new Prime Minister (from May 1937) Neville Chamberlain.

Eden was increasingly worried by the growing expansionism of the Axis powers and their potential threat to British interests in Europe and the Mediterranean. He therefore favoured a firm policy of non-intervention in order to confine the Spanish war, and to foster international mediation which would prevent the establishment in Spain of a regime closely connected to the Axis and potentially hostile to Britain. He came to consider Spain as the touchstone of the policy of rapprochement with Italy. Consequently, he thought that any Anglo-Italian agreement would have to be conditional upon Italian proof of goodwill in Spain (by withdrawing Italian troops or by supporting mediation). Failing such proof, Eden thought that a prolongation of the conflict was in British interests in order to exhaust Italian resources and to debilitate Franco's military capabilities. In September 1937 (at the same time as Mussolini was in Berlin to sign with Hitler the final Italo-German alliance), Eden specifically gave the cabinet a strong warning in this respect:

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that until recently the Foreign Office had cherished the hope that the victory of one side or the

other would be purely Spanish. That view was no longer held. With the duration of the civil war General Franco's dependence upon Italy had increased. It was felt that after the civil war ended Franco would be unable to control the situation without Italian assistance. Consequently that Italians were likely to stay for a year, or even longer. He did not believe that Signor Mussolini's motives were purely ideological, or for prestige. He agreed with what he understood to be the view of the French General Staff, that the Italians sought submarine bases in Spain to be used for bargaining purposes or pressure on other nations in case of war. British interests would therefore best be served by a stalemate leading to a compromise solution, and it would be against British interests that Franco should win in Spain so long as he was dependent on foreign aid. Above all, it was against our interests that he should win during the present year. Prolongation of the war for another six months would increase the strain on Italy, and if and when Franco should win, Italy would be less able to exploit his success and there would be slightly better prospects of Franco ridding himself of the Italians. On the other hand, an early victory would create a third Dictator State, this time in Spain, and this development, making for France a third frontier to be defended, would increase the likelihood of some early adventure elsewhere by the Dictator States.²²

Contrary to Eden, the Prime Minister and the majority of the cabinet thought that there was a real possibility of splitting Italy from Germany due to their latent antagonism over Austria and the Balkans. And they considered that this strategic and diplomatic aim was (in Chamberlain's own words) 'so important to peace that it was worth running some risks' (for the sake of it in Spain). In Chamberlain's view, Italian help to Franco could be tacitly tolerated and condoned because Spain was a marginal affair in the European context, and there remained for Britain the lever of sterling diplomacy for post-war reconstruction (or, in the worst case, of gunboat diplomacy to secure Spanish good will by force). For this double reason, he thought that it was in British interests to help to shorten the civil war by a quick victory for Franco's forces. In a heated cabinet meeting of March 1937, the Prime Minister had already dismissed Eden's considerations and proposals with the following words:

It had to be remembered that we were dealing not only with the Spanish insurgents, but, behind them, with the Germans and Italians. General

Franco was not a free agent. No doubt he hoped to win, but hardly without assistance from the Germans and Italians. Consequently he was unlikely to agree to any undertaking which was unacceptable to the Germans and Italians unless we were able to do something disagreeable to him in return. The Germans and Italians would not allow him to do so. To insist up to the point proposed in the Secretary of State's Memorandum therefore, was not only useless but must lead to a very serious situation with Germany and Italy. If and when General Franco had won the civil war, however, the situation would be very different, and no doubt he would be looking round for help from other countries besides Germany and Italy. That would be the moment at which to put strong pressure upon him ... that would be the time for action.²³

By February 1938, with the Nazi *Anschluss* of Austria on the horizon and Mussolini offering to negotiate an Anglo-Italian agreement, the difference of opinion between Eden and Chamberlain reached a climax. The result was the resignation of Eden, who was replaced by Lord Halifax at the Foreign Office. This crucial ministerial change opened the way for the second phase of British policy towards the Spanish Civil War, which lasted from February 1938 to the very end of the conflict in April 1939.

After Eden's resignation, any idea of mediation or effective non-intervention in Spain was abandoned in favour of quick reconciliation with Italy. Clear proof of this was given by the fact that there was only one plenary meeting of the Non-Intervention Committee during the whole year (against fifteen in 1937). In order to facilitate an agreement with Italy, the British cabinet actively promoted the end of the civil war with a victory for Franco, primarily by pressing the French government to close the Hispano-French frontier to the transit of Soviet war materiel for the Republic. As the private secretary of Lord Halifax stated in his diary on 5 June 1938: 'In Spain the government is praying for Franco's victory and bringing all the influence they can bear on France to stop the inflow of munitions to Barcelona [then capital of the Spanish Republic].'²⁴

In fact, two days later, the British ambassador in Paris told the French Foreign Secretary that his government was:

... unable to appreciate why the French government are unable to carry out their undertakings under the non-intervention scheme and prevent the passage of munitions across the French frontier to Barcelona. It would

*be most unfortunate if sympathy with France in this country were on that account to decline. On the other hand it will be most regrettable if we cannot reap the fruits of our agreement with Italy, and this cannot take place until some settlement has been achieved in Spain.*²⁵

Mostly as a result of this unrelenting pressure, by mid-June 1938 France closed its southern frontier with Republican Spain to the supply of Soviet arms. This signified the blockage of the last and only channel open for the importation of war supplies to the Republican army.

In late September 1938, after the settlement of the Czech crisis by the Munich agreement, the Anglo-French abandonment of the Spanish Republic was sealed. In particular, the offer of neutrality made by General Franco during that diplomatic crisis helped to calm any British and French anxieties regarding the future foreign policy of Spain. In fact, Franco's move had been a desperate attempt to separate the Spanish war from the Czech question and Nazi expansionism for obvious reasons:

*It is enough to open an atlas to convince oneself of this. In a war against the Franco-English group one can say, without exaggerating at all, that we would be surrounded by enemies. From the first moment they would be surrounding us, on all our coasts and all our borders. We could contain them in the Pyrenees, but it would be nigh impossible to prevent an invasion across the Portuguese frontier ... Germany and Italy would only be able to offer insufficient aid to a weak Spain, and nothing they could offer us would make up for the risk of fighting on their side.*²⁶

At the beginning of October 1938, the Duke of Alba, General Franco's representative in London, telegraphed 'literally' the following declaration made by Lord Hailsham, Lord President of the Council: 'Offer of neutrality was received with great satisfaction ... Cabinet would love to see the earliest possible victory for General Franco, it would round off peace in Europe.'²⁷ In November, Lord Halifax implicitly recognised this in the House of Lords when he said:

It has never been true, and it is not true today, that the Anglo-Italian Agreement had the lever value that some think to make Italy desist from supporting General Franco and his fortunes. Signor Mussolini has always made it plain from the time of the first conversations between His

*Majesty's Government and the Italian government that, for reasons known to us all – whether we approve of them or not – he was not prepared to see General Franco defeated.*²⁸

Against this background, the British cabinet approved the legal recognition of Franco's government on 27 February 1939, more than a month before the actual ending of the war by the total defeat of the besieged Republic. At that particular moment, Sir Robert Vansittart, chief diplomatic adviser to the Foreign Office, wrote a confidential assessment which may be regarded as more than appropriate:

*... the whole course of our policy of non-intervention – which has effectively, as we all know, worked in an entirely one-sided manner – has been putting a premium on Franco's victory.*²⁹

It was a judgement clearly accepted within Francoist ruling circles, however strong the public animosity towards Britain and its so-called hypocritical position of non-intervention, wholly consonant with the traditional image of 'Perfidious Albion'. Pedro Sainz Rodríguez, a prominent monarchist and Catholic who was the Minister of Education in the first Franco government, wrote in his memoirs:

*Many Spaniards, disorientated by the anti-English propaganda of the Franco regime, honestly believe that we gained our victory exclusively through Italian and German aid; I am convinced that, though this did contribute, the fundamental reason for our winning the war was the English diplomatic position opposing intervention in Spain.*³⁰

In conclusion, the evidence clearly suggests that long before the *Anschluss* of Austria and the Munich agreement, the Spanish Civil War had served as a crucial stage for the implementation of the policy of appeasement, and, by the same token, had developed into the main argument as to its viability. The only essential difference from their stance on the *Anschluss* and Munich was that an anti-revolutionary preoccupation remained part of the analysis and decisions of the British authorities. Were it not for this political-ideological element, carefully concealed in official circles, it would be impossible to understand the policy of inactivity in the face of the increasing strategic risks to the security of an area that was vital to the defence of the empire. It seems clear that the sacrifice of a so-called Red Spain

was deemed a reasonable price to pay for Italian good will and the hope of preserving European peace; and as a result the British government washed its hands of the Spanish Civil War.

This lecture was delivered on 8 March 2006 at the Imperial War Museum, London.

NOTES

1. Dispatch, 3 May 1938. Archivo del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Madrid (hereafter AMAE), file R833, dossier 18.
2. Kenneth W Watkins, *Britain Divided: The Effects of the Spanish Civil War on British Political Opinion* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1963), p.viii.
3. Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.1.
4. Enrique Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albión: el gobierno británico y la guerra civil española* (Madrid: Siglo XXI Editores, 1996). By the same author: 'The British Image of Spain and the Civil War', *International Journal of Iberian Studies*, vol.14, no.1, pp.4-13.
5. 'Report on Offensive Strategy in the Spanish War', 25 November 1938. Foreign Office Records, Confidential Prints (FO 425), vol.415, doc.W16269. All British sources used are in The National Archives (Kew, Surrey).
6. On Anglo-Spanish relations before and during the civil war, besides the studies already mentioned, we should consider as well: Jill Edwards, *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Macmillan, 1979); Douglas Little, *Malevolent Neutrality: The United States, Great Britain and the Origins of the Spanish Civil War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).
7. Gustav Schmidt, *The Policies and Economics of Appeasement: British Foreign Policy in the 1930s* (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1984); Paul Kennedy, *The Realities behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy* (London: Fontana, 1981); Lawrence R Pratt, *East of Malta, West of Suez: Britain's Mediterranean Crisis, 1936-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); RAC Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1993).
8. On the general course of the conflict, see: Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977); Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War: 1936-1939* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1986); Sheelagh Ellwood, *The Spanish Civil War* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Francisco J Romero Salvadó, *The Spanish Civil War: Origins, Course and Outcomes* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2005).
9. For a general and up-to-date survey of the international dimensions of the war, see Michael Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War* (London: Macmillan, 1994) and Moradiellos, *El reñidero de Europa: las dimensiones internacionales de la guerra civil española* (Barcelona: Península, 2001).
10. 'The future of the League of Nations', 20 July 1936. Foreign Office Records, General Correspondence (FO 371), vol.20475, doc.W11340. The previous quotation from a telegram sent by the commercial secretary at the Madrid embassy, 21 July 1936. FO 371/20523 W6575.
11. Pierre Renouvin, 'La politique extérieure du premier gouvernement Léon Blum', in *Léon Blum, chef de gouvernement, 1936-1937* (Paris: Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1967), pp.329-53; John E Dreifort, *Yvon Delbos at the Quai d'Orsay: French Foreign Policy During the Popular Front, 1936-1939* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1973); Martin Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement: Anglo-French Relations in the Popular Front Era* (Oxford: Berg, 1996); John F Coverdale, *Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Robert H Whealey, *Hitler and Spain: The Nazi Role in the Spanish Civil War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989).
12. Quoted in Thomas Jones (ex cabinet secretary), *A Diary with Letters, 1931-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), p.231.
13. Letter dated 7 August 1936. Foreign Office Records, Eden Papers (FO 954), vol.27.
14. E Moradiellos, 'British Political Strategy in the Face of the Military Rising of 1936 in Spain', *Contemporary European History*, vol.1, no.2, 1992, pp.123-37.
15. Minute by Gladwyn Jebb (Western Department), 25 November 1936. FO 371/20570 W15925.
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Beyond the Battlefield: A Cave Hospital in the Spanish Civil War

Angela Jackson

The improvised hospital that is the subject of this chapter was one of those under Len Crome's command. It was set up in a large cave near the mountain village of La Bisbal de Falset, and played an important role during the Battle of the Ebro in 1938 – the last great Republican military campaign attempting to drive back Franco's forces. Amongst the wounded Republican soldiers in the cave were International Brigade volunteers from many different countries. Volunteers such as these had come to fight for the Republic in the belief that, if fascism could be defeated on Spanish soil, another world war would be averted.

Injured prisoners of war were also receiving treatment in the cave, in this instance mainly men from the Italian divisions sent by Mussolini to support Franco. In nearby beds were local civilians, victims of the bombing raids that were providing the German airforce with a welcome opportunity to gain experience in action. The medical staff in the cave, striving to save lives despite adverse conditions, included men and women sent out by the Spanish Medical Aid Committee in Britain. This had been one of the first groups to send aid to the Republic, within about three weeks of the outbreak of war in 1936. After up to two years of working close to the front lines, the staff in the cave were well practised in the treatment of battlefield injuries.

A study of this particular hospital is rewarding for two main reasons. Firstly, there are exceptionally vivid accounts of what happened in the cave during the war – the moving narratives of nurses such as Patience Edney, who had worked there, and of women such as the former Labour MP Leah Manning, who had written about her memorable visit. This period of the war, in the latter half of 1938, was