

## Anglo-American Diplomacy to Prevent Franco's Spain from entering the War on the Axis Powers side and to neutralize its Colonial Ambition in North Africa: 1940-1942

### Résumé

The Anglo-American apprehension about the Spanish attitude, with respect to the landing in North Africa in 1942, was amply justified. Indeed, the strategic and commanding position of Spain over the Straits of Gibraltar made an attack by Franco against the Straits, with German assistance, feasible and likely. If such a move were to take place during the landing operations in Morocco and Algeria, the situation for the expeditionary forces would be disastrous with far reaching consequences. With the likelihood of such prospects, it became necessary to neutralize Spain. The neutralization of Spain was left to the British who had better relations with Spain than the United States. The present article attempts to shed light on the way the British conducted this mild approach in the midst of a totally torn Europe.

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### ملخص

كان التخوف الإنكليزي – الأمريكي من الموقف الإسباني مبررا للإنزال في شمال إفريقيا سنة 1942. في الحقيقة، الموقع الإستراتيجي والقيادي لأسبانيا حول مضيق جبل طارق جعل مهاجمة فرانكو للموقع، مدعوما من ألمانيا، أمرا سهلا المنال. لو كانت هذه العملية قد حدثت في عهد عمليات الإنزال في المغرب والجزائر لكانت المهمة شبه مستحيلة وذات نتائج وخيمة على جيوش الحلفاء. مع ورود هذا الاحتمال، أصبح إيقاف التحرك الإسباني أمرا حتميا. هذه المهمة أسندت إلى الإنكليز الذين كانت تربطهم بإسبانيا علاقات أكثر متانة من الولايات المتحدة. هذا المقال يسلط الضوء على الكيفية التي اعتمدها الإنكليز للحفاظ على إسبانيا في وضع عدم التدخل لكون أوروبا في حالة تمزق تام.

### British and American Worries over Spanish Readiness to Collaborate with Germany

The first months of World War Two demonstrated the smashing victory of Germany over its European enemies. Mussolini's Italy had joined Hitler. And now indications from various sources pointed out to the likelihood of Franco's Spain joining as well. In this context, in mid-September 1940, Serrano Suner still Spanish minister of the interior visited Berlin to discuss with the German authorities the conditions of Spain's entry into the war. At this meeting, the Spanish Minister reiterated the Spanish assurance of the previous June that Spain would enter the war on Germany's side when arms and grain supplies enabled her to defy the British blockade.<sup>1</sup> On June 13, 1940, Spain moved from the position of a neutral country to that of a non-belligerent one. The following day, the Spaniards occupied Tangier and stood waiting for a good opportunity to realize their colonial dream in North Africa, i.e., to occupy Gibraltar and most particularly

to enter French Morocco and the Oran region of Algeria. The Spanish territorial claims in North Africa coincided with the German plan to move southwest through the Straits of Gibraltar. The conjunction of Spanish and German interests in what would later be an essential part of 'Torch' landing area, strengthened the likelihood of a German action around the Straits to bring in Spain into the war on its side.

In this respect, the French as well became a great concern for the Anglo-Americans who had decided to approach them in order to avoid having them driven into the arms of Germany. This approach was left to the Americans owing to their maintaining and even reinforcing their presence in North Africa through influential members of French civilian and military circles.

The British, on the contrary, had become very unpopular with Vichy France following their attacks on Mers el Kebir and Dakar (1940) and had therefore, in this division of the tasks, taken responsibility of approaching Spain.<sup>2</sup> According to Sir Samuel Hoare, the British Ambassador in Madrid, it was preferable that Britain gave the necessary assurances to the Spanish authorities and inform them of its participation in 'Operation Torch.'<sup>1</sup>

### **Territorial Price of Franco's Spain Collaboration: French Morocco and the Oran Region of Algeria**

According to Samuel Hoare, such an approach was necessary because the Spaniards "disliked and distrusted the Americans and regarded America as a young inexperienced and strong head country."<sup>3</sup>

Portugal was added to the list and President Roosevelt agreed that the approach to Portugal should be left primarily to Britain whose traditional friendship with Lisbon would help attain the understanding of the Portuguese authorities with respect to the Allies' future intervention in North Africa.

However it was understood that the fate of 'Torch' would principally depend on the Spanish attitude in the early days of the operation. This contingency was summed up by Samuel Hoare in the following way:

The temptation to cut our lines of communications will be very great. We shall appear to have put our neck between two Spanish knives and Spanish knives are traditionally treacherous. The Germans will be on General Franco's back, dinning into his ears: "Now is your time. You Can cut the Allied throat, destroy the naval air bases at Gibraltar and win a dazzling reward for your country in North Africa."<sup>4</sup>

The danger of Spanish intervention on the Axis side was confirmed by Alvary Gascoigne, the British Consul General at Tangier, in a report dated September 1, 1942. The Consul General warned the Foreign Office that in the event of an Allied landing in North Africa, the Axis would undoubtedly exert pressure at once upon Spain for aid and assistance to repel the Anglo-Americans. Such an aid according to Gascoigne would "comprise ...the granting of air and submarine bases in Spanish Morocco and possibly the use of Spanish troops for the purpose of creating a diversion in French

Morocco, as well as the use of Spanish vessels for employment between the Peninsula and North Africa.”<sup>5</sup>

The British Government had been particularly attentive to the growing Spanish – German relations lest they result in a combined attack against Gibraltar and its vicinity. In this connection, Sir Samuel Hoare was sent to Madrid as ambassador to counter the German action and act on the Spanish authorities to the end of persuading them to maintain their non-belligerent position. The most alarming moment for the British came on October 23, 1940, when Hitler went to Hendaye, on the Franco-Spanish border, to convince Gen. Franco to join the Axis by opening Spanish territory to the German forces to move against Gibraltar. But the meeting was a failure. Hitler could not convince Franco. However, the latter reaffirmed his sympathy for the Axis Power though he neither joined them in the war nor allowed Germany to use the Spanish territory as long as his territorial claims in North Africa were not satisfied. Furthermore, Franco was asking for weapons, aircraft, economic aid and time to complete his military participation. The Caudillo had put an unacceptable price on Spanish participation. From the German point of view, Franco's territorial claims ran up against the German policy towards Vichy France, which Hitler did not want to alienate. Gen. Franco, for his part, was cautious enough not to engage his country in the war before the Germans had practically achieved complete victory.

However, there were some clear indications of Spanish preparations for the War. Thus besides demands for arms from the Axis, the Spanish authorities extended compulsory military service to two years and appointed Gen. Munoz Grandes, a former secretary of the Phalange and partisan of immediate action, to command the 22<sup>nd</sup> Division in the district facing Gibraltar. But Spanish ambitions were moderated by the state of Spain after three years of a civil war that had been extremely costly. More than 500,000 people were killed and the country was exhausted and ruined. Towns were devastated, villages razed to the ground and destitution spread all over the country. The railroad communication system was badly affected, which added more problems to the crippled Spanish economy. More than one third of the livestock was lost. Following the loss of a substantial part of the equipment, and changes in land ownership, Agriculture production had fallen dramatically.

Spain was in desperate need of stability “to recover,” as Franco put it, “from the effect of war and build up a strong force.”<sup>6</sup>

Hitler, for his part, did not halt his preparations for the westward move. The importance of Gibraltar for winning the war in the Mediterranean was underlined on December 27, 1940 by Admiral Erich Raeder, Commander –in-Chief of the German Navy, who said:

It would protect Italy; safeguard the Western Mediterranean; secure the supply lines to North Africa; close the British routes to Malta and Alexandria; restrict the freedom of the British fleet; complicate the British offensive action in Cyrenaica and Greece; eliminate an important link in the British convoy system.<sup>7</sup>

On January 8, 1941, Hitler was forced to admit that “there is for the time being no prospect of Spain becoming our ally. She is not willing to do so. This was made

perfectly clear by Franco's remark that he will not take part in the war until Britain is on the point of collapse."

On December 7, 1940, a day after the beginning of the British offensive in Libya, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, the Chief of Foreign and Counter Intelligence Branch, Abwehr, presented to the Spanish authorities the German proposal for a move on January 10, 1941, through Spain to undertake 'operation Felix' in order to occupy Gibraltar and move southward. The planning of this German move was made on the basis of the Spanish-German secret protocols drawn up at the Hendaye meeting and stating that Spain would intervene in the war at a date to be agreed upon. In exchange, Spain would receive equipment, foodstuffs, and later, would be granted some French colonial territories.<sup>9</sup>

#### **British and American Economic Aid for Spanish Neutrality**

However, the military situation in the Eastern Mediterranean had compelled Hitler to shift his war effort to that area, and brought serious doubts as to the capability of the Axis Powers to achieve a rapid victory over Great Britain. This made Franco more cautious than ever. Despite his declared sympathy for the Axis, he was forced to maintain diplomatic and trade relations with Great Britain which could threaten Spain with economic blockade. The Spanish need for economic assistance gave Great Britain and the United States the opportunity to negotiate the neutrality of Spain. The British Ambassador in Madrid was of the opinion that providing Spain with basic oil would help avoid the total collapse of the Spanish regime and its economy which in turn would help give Spaniards some independence vis-à-vis the Axis Powers and bring them to adopt a less hostile attitude towards Great Britain and the United States. To counter this development, the German Ambassador in Madrid, Baron von Strohrer proposed that Germany should reinforce its action in this direction by providing Spain with substantial support in order to relieve the famine from which Spaniards were suffering and consequently "eliminate the reasons which have impelled Franco to the refusal."<sup>10</sup> On January 8, 1941, the German Ambassador reported to Berlin that Serrano Suner, the new Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs, had told the Italian Ambassador, Francesco Lequis, that Spain would enter the war immediately if she were supplied with grain to prevent famine.<sup>11</sup> Together with his approach to the German authorities for obtaining foodstuffs for the Spaniards, Baron von Stohrer tried to impress upon Gen. Franco that the Anglo-American overtures, and promises for economic aid were merely meant to buy them time. Moreover, the German Ambassador, acting in accordance with his official instructions from Berlin, took a very firm line in demanding that as a payment, for German aid, Franco should give "the assurance in advance that Spain would enter the war at a time to be determined by us."<sup>12</sup> Then warned Franco that "if Spain held back at the present moment, her national aspirations might be jeopardized. Further attempts were made by the Germans in January 1941, to induce Franco to enter the war immediately. But Franco's hesitation, genuinely motivated by Spain's objective conditions, prevented the execution of the German strategy aiming at closing the Straits of Gibraltar; this hesitation also opened the way for action by Great Britain and the United States to modify the Spanish attitude and eventually neutralize Spain.

If the Anglo-American approach were successful, Hitler would lose his chance to occupy a key position for the closure of the western Mediterranean gateway and a "reliable bridge to North Africa."<sup>14</sup>

However, it was during the early phase of preparations for the invasion of North Africa by the Allies that the importance of keeping Spain neutral acquired its full significance. To that end, Sir Samuel Hoare recommended the following course of action:

Economically and politically they [the Allies] must accumulate the maximum of Spanish good will....The economic programme on which we and the United States government are now practically agreed, must be brought into action with the least possible delay. Spanish ships, for instance, must not be held up in American ports as a result of administrative friction and confusion. We on our side must appear forthcoming with our part of the programme. On the political side, we must avoid incidents of all kinds that are likely to inflame the Spanish Government. Our intelligence organisations must be particularly cautious, and we must keep off provocative action that, whilst defensible in itself, may stimulate dangerous counterattack and excite the atmosphere when we want it particularly calm.<sup>14</sup>

#### **Juan Negrin Lopez, Proposed to be part of the Package to gain the Good will of Franco**

However, since these economic and political measures might not prove sufficient to keep Spain neutral, the Allies had to make military provisions for action against Spaniards on both sides of the Straits of Gibraltar. In the hope of improving the political atmosphere, Sir Samuel Hoare had also advised that the presence in England of Juan Negrin Lopez, the last Spanish Republican Prime Minister, was resented in Madrid. In a message to Lord Halifax, the then British Foreign Secretary, he requested that Negrin be expelled in order to help Great Britain gain the good will of Spain<sup>15</sup> and recommended that:

If we are to stimulate a national movement of resistance in the [Spanish] Army it is essential to get Negrin out of England. As long as he is there even our best friends will distrust our intentions. I do hope therefore that you will consider the question as now of high politics upon the settlement of which may depend very big issues.<sup>16</sup>

The attempt of the British Ambassador supported by the Foreign Secretary was, however of no avail, principally because it was opposed in the Parliament. The issue was not pressed too hard lest it brings discord into the War Cabinet. However, assurances were given to the Spaniards that Great Britain would not permit Negrin to engage in any hostile political action against the Spanish regime. And Negrin was kept under close surveillance.

With regard to economic aid, Sir Samuel Hoare worked to revive trade relations between Great Britain and Spain. After the outbreak of war, the trade agreement of March 18, 1940 was the first major British trade offensive directed against the German

monopoly in Spain. By this agreement, Spain was granted a loan of £2 million for purchasing in the British Empire.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Samuel Hoare attempted to commit the American authorities to this same course of action towards Spain. In February 1941, in Madrid, he met Col. William Donovan, head of the American O.S.S., and requested that President Roosevelt should take Spain and the coast of North-West Africa under his special protection.

#### **Spanish Claims for Spain Neutrality**

The direct approach to President Roosevelt was made necessary because the latter was opposed to any form of assistance to “those who play with Herr Hitler,”<sup>18</sup> as President Roosevelt put it in a declaration following the Caudillo’s meeting with the German Furher, at Hendaye. The American Ambassador in Madrid, Alexander Weddell also made an urgent appeal to the Secretary of State, on January 29, 1941, with the aim of providing Spain with economic assistance. This economic aid, as the Ambassador put, “would not be appeasement but a calculated policy of supporting the Spanish government to resist German pressure in its efforts to continue as a non-belligerent and to create a popular attitude likely to provoke at least passive resistance should the Germans invade” Spain.<sup>19</sup> These pressing appeals were made at the very time when the USA Government was making overtures to French Gen. Weygand and had seriously started envisaging an operation to occupy North Africa. The German Ambassador was also reporting on the extremely worrying conditions in Spain, the gloomy prospects for the country, and the danger facing the government. Stohrer indicated that:

The scarcity of food will grow still more acute. Hunger revolts  
Are expected .... Even though the army, too, is to some extent  
underfed and ill-clad....The situation is today so tense that  
attempts to overthrow the government are not out of the question.<sup>20</sup>

As the strategic value of Spain was becoming more and more obvious for the continuation of the war, the contest for winning the favour of the Spanish authorities entered a decisive stage. The British, for whom the future depended much on the Straits of Gibraltar and on the Spanish attitude, multiplied their appeals to the American ally to authorize and speed up the delivery of foodstuffs to Spain in order to counter the Axis. On March 20, 1941, the British Ambassador in Washington, Lord Halifax, forwarded a message from London to the American Government in which the British authorities requested the Americans to make a “public declaration that the United States Government are ready to join His Majesty’s Government in making food and raw materials available for Spain.”<sup>21</sup> The British request also aimed at obtaining credits for Spain to finance its purchases in the United States, and at making available for her 100,000 tons of wheat and up to 200,000 tons of ammonia indispensable for Spanish agriculture. But the American authorities had adopted a comparatively harder line towards the Spaniards. As a prerequisite to economic aid to Spain, they wanted Franco to commit Spain firmly to neutrality. Furthermore, they wanted the request for Spain’s economic assistance to come from the Spanish authorities and not from Great Britain so as to bring Franco to make a formal commitment not to act against American interests<sup>2</sup>. In addition to these considerations which brought about delay, Franco made matters worse by refusing to receive the American Ambassador throughout the spring and

summer of 1941; he explained that in the European war the die was cast. The German victory would be final; the American and British attempts to use economic means to manoeuvre him and deprive Spain of her sovereignty would be of no avail<sup>22</sup>. However, with the German attack on the Soviet Union, on June 22, 1941 and the inability of the German forces to crush the determined Russian resistance in the summer of 1941, the war acquired new dimensions. During this period, Hitler's attention mostly shifted to the eastern front. After these new military developments in the east, the Caudillo eventually received the American Ambassador on October 6, 1941, but only after much insistence by the American authorities and a personal appeal to Franco by Juan Francisco de Cardenas, the Spanish Ambassador in Washington. However, this meeting did not bring the expected settlement. Franco maintained his relations with the Axis; and the United States kept in force its embargo on exports especially of oil products to Spain. The scarcity of these products in Spain and the threat which this situation represented to the entire Spanish economic structure induced John Weddell to make further appeals to the Secretary of States to the effect of allowing at least 1 or 2 oil tankers to Spain. According to the Ambassador, this would help prevent the collapse of the Spanish Government and avoid any adverse effect on the American strategic approach in the whole area.

In the meantime, however, the United States Government had made a breakthrough in this field, principally by dealing with the Spanish Minister of Commerce. But as long as Serrano Suner the pro-German Minister of Foreign Affairs was in power, the Anglo-Americans stood on the defensive. Until the United States entered the war, the Spaniards remained openly hostile to them.

However, once the United States engaged in warfare, matters changed. On January, 1942, Cordell Hull, the Secretary of State produced a memorandum defining the conditions of American-Spanish trade relations. He wrote that Spain's needs:

“for oil and other products will be considered subject to supply conditions existing here and provided the Spanish Government will furnish satisfactory assurances that they will not be re-exported... [or] employed in a manner to benefit directly or indirectly the interests of Germany, Italy, or Japan”<sup>23</sup>.

In addition to these conditions, the Secretary of State required that (1) American agents should be allowed in Spain as in North-west Africa, to monitor what happened to American products reaching Spain; (2) the supply of petroleum products to Spain would be made on a reciprocal basis, i.e., that the Spaniards furnish the United States a number of products available in Spain<sup>24</sup>. On the other hand, the British Government continued to press Washington to speed up oil supplies to Spain in order “to keep the Spanish economic system operating sufficiently for the British to get out products which they badly needed”<sup>25</sup>. By the end of January 1942, the Spanish authorities, through their embassy in Washington, gave their approval to the conditions of “commercial Inter-exchange” as put forward by the American Secretary of State.

With the appointment of Carlton J. H. Hayes as the new American Ambassador in Madrid, and the dismissal of Serrano Suner, tension in the Spanish-American relations was eased providing the way for better trade relations between the two countries.

Apart from the economic agreement with Spain, the British and Americans discussed at length their reactions to Spain's territorial claims in North-west Africa, and what stand they would adopt should the Spaniards decide to use force to realise their colonial ambitions in the "Torch" area.

The British authorities were very aware of the importance of the colonial issue to Spain. In the Spanish dealings with Hitler, it was the latter's fear of alienating the French in Vichy and North Africa, should he agree to Spain's colonial claims, which finally decided Franco to stay out of the war. From the standpoint of Franco the game was not worth the candle.

The British, for their part, were ready to work for gaining the sympathy of the Spanish authorities. In October, 1941, the Defence Committee of the War Cabinet invited the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to put forward proposals for concessions to be made by France to Spain, so that, in the event of Gen. [Maxime] Weygand, [the newly appointed French Delegate General for North Africa,] asking for our assistance against the Germans, we could immediately place the proposals before him as our conditions for giving full support to the rehabilitation of the French nation."<sup>26</sup>

The British calculations aimed not only at maintaining Spain in a non-belligerent position but also at making preparations for colonial readjustments in North Africa "at some future date, possibly at the peace settlement"<sup>27</sup>.

During the final phase of preparation of operation "Torch", Sir Samuel Hoare reported to the Foreign Office that the French feared a Spanish move southward to the Sebou Line <sup>28</sup> in Morocco should the Allied forces enter Morocco<sup>29</sup>. Further reports from Gascoigne, the British Consul General at Tangier, pointed out that the Spaniards were likely to take action to secure their territorial claims. To avoid the complications which such a move would cause, Gascoigne suggested that Spain should be given satisfactory assurances at the appropriate time to the effect:

- a) that we shall respect the sanctity of the Spanish Zone of Tangier conditional on the maintenance of their neutrality but also;
- b) that we do not look unsympathetically upon the Spaniards' aspirations in North French Morocco<sup>30</sup>.

This sympathetic attitude to the Spanish claims was shared by Sir Samuel Hoare who recommended that the Allied forces should not interfere with the Spanish move to the Sebou Line nor consider it as a *casus belli*<sup>31</sup>. The British chiefs of staff agreed with the Ambassador's recommendation and informed Gen. Eisenhower, the then Commander in Chief of the Anglo-American expeditionary forces, of their view on October 18, 1942<sup>32</sup>.

However, contrary to the opinion of his representatives in Madrid and Tangier, Sir Anthony Eden advised against any promise of territorial concession to Spain as the United States "would never agree to any assurance involving a suggestion of handing over French territory to Spain"<sup>33</sup>.



Two weeks before the operation "Torch" was due to be launched, the Allies' views on this question were still unclear. The Foreign Office instructed Gascoigne to adopt the position of "wait and see how the Spaniards and the French behave, meanwhile avoiding any commitments to either side"<sup>34</sup>.

In the midst of these worries and uncertainties, some relief was found in reports from Sir Samuel Hoare about General Aranda's suggestion that in the event of the rumoured Allied landings in Casablanca taking place, the Allies should "make a specific declaration that they would respect Spanish Moroccan territory and interests to avert a Spanish intervention."<sup>35</sup> Further assurances were given by the Spanish General to the British Military Attaché in Madrid about the Spanish military manoeuvres then taking place in the Spanish zone of Morocco. Gen. Aranda described them as routine manoeuvres with no hostile intention towards the Allies and assured the Military Attaché that: "...neither the Spanish Government nor General Orgaz [Spanish Commander in Spanish Occupied Morocco] had any intention whatever of attacking the French [occupied] zone of Morocco either now or in the near future"<sup>36</sup>.

Despite the Foreign Office instructions not to make any promise to the Spaniards, Gascoigne, on the contrary, continued to press London to adopt and assure the Spanish authorities of the sympathetic British stand. He even approached the United States Chargé d'Affaires in Tangier with a view to co-ordinating their action for the purpose of getting authorisation from the British and American Governments to give reciprocal assurances to Gen. Orgaz to the effect that:

- 1) our Governments intend to respect the territorial integrity of Spanish Morocco provided Spain maintain a neutral status... and
- 2) that our Governments would give most sympathetic consideration to the Spanish claims to certain territories in French Morocco<sup>37</sup>.

However, this approach to Rives Childs, the American Chargé d'Affaires, was a failure, as the latter was not fully briefed about Torch. Furthermore, Washington rejected the proposal as being "contrary to the purposes of the United States Government of respecting the integrity of the French Empire."<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, the attitude of the American authorities in this matter did not appear to have been solely motivated by their concern for the French colonies. On the contrary, their preoccupations were for the safety of their troops, and the success of "Torch", for they feared their troops might be caught in a Franco-Spanish war in Morocco. While the Spaniards held military manoeuvres, the French massed three divisions on the Franco-Spanish border. In these conditions the Anglo-Americans felt strongly the urgent necessity of moderation, and appeasement in the area. To this end, Sir Samuel Hoare was instructed to do everything possible to dissuade the Spaniards from undertaking any action against the French in Morocco, and warn them in friendly terms that any move of this kind "would come up against French resistance"<sup>39</sup>. Matters would be far more complicated for the Allies if the French called upon the United States Government for assistance on the grounds that "Torch" was mounted primarily to safeguard the integrity of the French colonies of North Africa.

Should war break out between Spain and France in Morocco, the Anglo-Americans would be forced, at least for a few months, to divert substantial forces to put an end to it before making a steady and safe advance to the east. Such a turn of events would undoubtedly give the Axis enough time to mount a counterattack, either through Spain or Tunisia or through both of them.

In order to avert this danger, Sir Samuel Hoare proposed that the Allies appeal to the Brazilian authorities to associate themselves with the Anglo-American operation in North Africa. In this connection, General Marshall proposed that the United States Government should urge President Getulio Bergas, of Brazil "to send a communication immediately to the Spanish and Portuguese governments expressing full approval of the operation and emphasising its importance in forestalling the Axis threat to the Western Hemisphere."<sup>40</sup> A few days before the opening of operation "Torch", the United States Ambassador in Rio de Janeiro approached the Brazilian Government to this end. However, the recommendation that a Brazilian mission should be attached to the A.F.H.Q. was vetoed by Gen. Eisenhower on the grounds that his Headquarters were already full. The real reason for his objection, however, may well have been his deep concern for the security of "Torch", which he intended to ensure by keeping as small as possible the circle of those who knew of it.

Thus, the Allies' wish to curb Spanish ambition in North-west Africa necessitated a great deal of diplomatic activity particularly by Sir Samuel Hoare and Alvary Gascoigne who, it should be pointed out, both listened sympathetically to the Spaniard's territorial claims. This diplomatic approach by the Allies was backed up with a calculated programme of assistance, so that new channels of communication and information were established with Spain, and some fences mended without the Allies committing themselves to any territorial concessions to Spain.

In parallel with these approaches, the Allies also initiated a campaign of propaganda towards the Spanish and Portuguese Governments. The aim of this campaign was to assure the two governments that the Allies would respect their integrity and colonial possessions, and that any occupation by Allied troops of any bordering territory in North-west Africa would be of a temporary nature.

On August 29, 1942, Sir Samuel Hoare suggested that a carefully worded declaration should be made by the British and American Governments to the Spanish Government stating that "we shall respect the integrity of Spanish territory, metropolitan and overseas, and that nothing that is being done prejudices Spanish claims and aspirations in the future."<sup>41</sup>

The wording of these declarations to Spain and Portugal soon became a matter of intense discussion between American and British officials. And, in conjunction with these activities in London and Washington, the Anglo-American representatives in Madrid, Lisbon and Tangier were urged to use all available propaganda channels in the area to publicize the Allies' case<sup>42</sup>. As political considerations made it necessary for 'Torch' to be presented, in its first phase, as an American operation, the Foreign Office felt the need to assure the Spanish, and Portuguese authorities but also public opinion in the Peninsula of the British participation. It was proposed that the character of this participation should be made known on D-day by issuing a statement in London saying

that a communication had been made to both Governments. But the British proposal to disclose their participation in "Torch", at an early stage, was opposed by the Americans on the grounds that (1) it might have adverse effects on the landing forces by causing the French to oppose a more determined resistance out of their Anglophobia; and (2) it would constitute an embarrassment to the American Administration which had been presenting "Torch" as a United States enterprise.

On October 27, Sir Samuel Hoare was informed that President Roosevelt would never agree to the British proposal. Thus the British had to content themselves with communicating a declaration to Gen. Gomez Jordana, the new Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs, on D-day, November 8 1942. Furthermore, Samuel was requested to underline the confidential character of the British communication. Of no avail was Churchill's intervention with the President urging the benefit of making public the British participation "if only," as he put it, "to remove any suspicions about the object of our concentrations at Gibraltar and to lend force to the assurances we are giving them"<sup>44</sup>It is interesting to note, as pointed out by Historians Loewenheim F. L. et al.<sup>45</sup> that while the Prime Minister insisted on informing the Spaniards of the British participation, he informed the President on November 5, 1942 of his intention to tell de Gaulle on the eve of the landings, i.e., November 7, 1942 "the reason I have not mentioned 'Torch' to him is that it is a United States enterprise and a United States secret."<sup>46</sup> Finally it was decided that only the President's message to Franco would be published in full. This message was a justification of "Torch" as the only option left to the United States to protect the French colonies of North Africa from an imminent occupation by the Axis Powers which, if achieved, would seriously impair the security of North and South America. It further reiterated to Franco that these American "moves are in no shape, manner, or form directed against the Government or people of Spain or Spanish territory, metropolitan or overseas."<sup>47</sup> But the message did not make any reference to future Spanish interests in North Africa. However in both London and Washington it was thought foolish to rely on this soft approach to dissuade Spain from taking hostile action against the Allied expedition in the area around the Straits of Gibraltar and against the French in Morocco. The Commander-in-Chief was requested to make specific proposals for Allied action to meet any threat that might come from or through Spain.

As a result, on October 11, 1942, Eisenhower submitted the proposals of the A.F.H.Q. for action to be undertaken at various stages of "Torch" against Southern Spain, and Spanish Morocco if Spain were to go sour<sup>48</sup>

Sir Samuel Hoare recommended that the Allied be ready to strike back if Spain directly or indirectly attacked them. And the Joint Planning Staff pointed out that the intervention of Spain would mean that the Spanish airbases would be put at the disposal of Germany. This would permit the Luftwaffe to extend its air cover westward and consequently nullify the Allies' operations against the German naval bases in the Bay of Biscay<sup>49</sup>. Therefore, Gibraltar would be more difficult for Great Britain to hold with far reaching consequences for "Torch", and Malta. In the west, Portugal and the Azores would be within easy range of the German air force, which would jeopardise the very presence and supplies of Allied troops on the Atlantic coast of Morocco, not to mention the danger to those landing in Oran and Algiers.

Earlier on, however (October 6, 1942) the Joint Intelligence Committee expressed a rather optimistic opinion as to the attitude of Spain:

We remain of the opinion that if Spanish territory is not infringed, the Spanish Government will be unlikely to court and open breach with the Allies, even under pressure from Germany, unless they are satisfied that this pressure can be backed by force or are convinced of speedy German victory. Events during August and September militated against the Germans in both these aspects.<sup>50</sup>

Nevertheless, the British Chief of Staff agreed with Eisenhower's proposals: (1) to divert the Eastern Assault and Task Forces for action against the Tangier-Ceuta area should the Spaniards show hostility prior to the landing; and (2) to form a reserve force, code named Northern Task Force, for action against Spanish Morocco if Spain went "sour" between D-day and D-day + 60 days.

#### **American Pressure to Avert French Action against any Spanish Move**

Furthermore, Eisenhower brought pressure to bear upon the French to avert a war with the Spaniards in Morocco. In this connection, he requested from Washington, that French Gen. Mast be "advised through [Robert] Murphy to instruct French commanders that incidents, however provocative, must not repeat not be permitted to lead to retaliatory action on the part of the French. No repeat no development in this area, including even an advance by Spanish forces into French territory, will justify action by French forces that might bring Spain into active collaboration with the Axis at this time."<sup>51</sup> In conjunction with this approach to the French, and in view of the difficulties that would face the Allies in the early phase of "Torch", Eisenhower stressed that the success of the Allied enterprise would largely depend upon the action of the British and American diplomats in Spain<sup>52</sup>.

The United States Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed this soft stand on the ground that from the Sebou Line, the Spanish would be in a position to interfere with the Allies' line of communication from Casablanca to the eastward. In this respect, Eisenhower and the British Chiefs of Staff appeared to agree in finding unrealistic the American Joint Chiefs of Staff's view of advocating action against the Spaniards in Morocco should the latter attack the French, as the Allies did not have the necessary forces to oppose the Spaniards. Eisenhower insisted at Washington that the Allies should maintain their soft approach till they could back their words with force.

Finally, the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed that necessity might impel the Command-in-Chief to overlook a Spanish move to the Sebou Line, and informed him that:

"As the man on the ground you are authorized to make such decisions in this matter as may be unavoidably necessary to contribute to the success of your operations."<sup>53</sup>

The hand of Eisenhower was further strengthened by the unexpected attitude of Gen. Giraud who "alarmed at the prospect of a winter campaign in the Riff Mountains, urged the Allies to go as far as possible in placating the Spaniards, even if need be, by cession of territory", in French Morocco<sup>54</sup>.

On November 5, 1942, General Asensio, the Spanish Minister of War informed the British Military Attaché of his extreme worry at the British “major concentration” of naval, land and air forces at Gibraltar. The Spanish Press was already reporting it. The arrival of Admiral Darlan in Algiers, not a matter of sheer coincidence according to the General Asensio, led the Spaniards to conclude that the Allies would strike in the French colonies of North or West Africa. The concern of the Spanish Minister of War was for French Morocco which, if attacked, would bring about an uprising of Moroccans all over Morocco<sup>55</sup>.

On the morning of D-day, November 8, 1942, shortly after the initiation of the Anglo-American landings, Gen. Franco ordered Gen. Asensio, according to the latter, “to proceed by air to Morocco, to take command of the Spanish army there...” The minister of War refused to do so on the ground that it should be madness to have the Allies against Spain.<sup>56</sup>

However, later in the day after the delivery of the United States and British messages to the Spanish authorities, the tension fell considerably, and none of the real or imagined threats were carried out either by the Spaniards or by the Germans through Spain.

On November 27, 1942, Eden could write to Sir Samuel Hoare:

I think... the Spanish reactions so far as satisfactory. For this we owe most to the victory of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army and to the efficiency with which the landings in North Africa were carried out. But even our military success would not have had such a healthy influence upon Spanish policy, had it not been for the patient, skilful and often up-hill work, which you and your staff have done during the past two years.<sup>57</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The early British apprehension with respect to Franco's Spain position in the war proved totally justified not only because of the pressure put on Spain by Germany to side with the Axis Powers but also because of her colonial pretensions in North Africa which, given the French impotence, looked within hand reach. However, Hitler could not approve Franco's colonial claims because the satisfaction of the Spaniards would totally alienate the French. In addition, the Spanish socio-economic situation following the Civil War was another hurdle on the way of Franco's colonial ambition. These inhibiting factors played together in favour of the Anglo-Americans who could act diplomatically, through a series of promises, to discourage Franco from entering any active collaboration with Germany or making any move alone or in association with Germany to close the Straits of Gibraltar. Finally, the Status quo in the area was successfully maintained and the Anglo-American invasion of North Africa could take place without much trouble from any quarter.

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25. The American list included: tungsten, tin Lead, zinc concentrates, mercury, fluorspar, olive oil, olives, etc.
26. Ibid., p.254
27. F.O. 371/31289, C 10742 "Spanish Claims to Territory in French Morocco."
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