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ARTICLE

Building an Empire and Bringing About a Famine: The Allied Economic Blockade of Spain during the Second World War (1939–1945)

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This article focuses on the Francoist 'New State's' foreign policy as a means of explaining the failure in food supplies which led to 'Franco's famine' in the early 1940s. It contends that eschewing strict neutrality in favour of pro-Axis policies after the outbreak of the Second World War contributed to creating the famine. Faced with Spain's Germanophile stance, first Britain, and later the United States, took a series of measures aimed at preventing any form of Spanish participation in the war. Most significant among these was the strictly managed economic blockade of Spain, which exacerbated problems of basic supply that had already been created by the dictatorship's policy of autarky. The result was the aggravation of famine conditions. The article will further demonstrate that the dictatorship was perfectly aware of the blockade's effect on the population and the suffering it caused.

> If one looked at Spain as a whole, what did one see? Starving cities with industries at a standstill for want of imported raw materials. Franco would soon learn that Germany could not offer him wheat, oil and cotton, whereas the British Commonwealth could.[1]

These words of David Eccles – Chief Economic Advisor in the British Embassy in Madrid after the Spanish Civil War – encapsulate the position of the Franco regime during the Second World War. They highlight both the regime's Germanophile stance and the reality of those first years of the dictatorship. For various reasons, Franco's regime required trade with Britain and its allies in order to survive in the years following the civil war.

Spain's conduct in the Second World War has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention. Historians have interrogated Franco's relations with the warring nations since the start of the civil war in July 1936, demonstrating his clear sympathies for the fascist powers, as well as active support for them.[2] Scholars have also focused on Spain's economic relations with the belligerents, showing their importance to the course of the war as well as internal conditions in Spain. The regime's extensive economic links with Nazi Germany – in part as repayment for the latter's decisive military assistance to Franco during the civil war – have long-since been demonstrated. Likewise, it is now clear that trade became a crucial factor as the global conflict became a total war.[3] As yet, however, little has been

[1] David Eccles, *By Safe Hand: Letters of Sybil & David Eccles: 1939–1942* (London: Bodley Head, 1983), 15.

[2] Among the more significant studies are: Enrique Moradiellos, *El reñidero de Europa: las dimensiones internacionales de la guerra civil Española* (Barcelona: Península, 2001); Christian Leitz and Joseph Dunthorne, eds., *Spain in International Context, 1936–1959* (New York: Berghahn, 1999); Sebastian Balfour and Paul Preston, eds., *Spain and the Great Powers in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1999); Norman J. W. Goda, *Y mañana … el mundo: Hitler, África noroccidental y el cambio hacia América* (Alianza: Madrid, 2002); David W. Pike, *Franco and the Axis Stigma* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014).

[3] See, *inter alia*: Ángel Viñas, Julio Viñuela, Fernando Eguidazu, Carlos Fernández Pulgar and Senen Florensa, *Política comercial exterior en España, 1931–1975, vol. 1* (Madrid: Banco Exterior de España, 1979), 248–50; Rafael García

said of how Spain's foreign policies (political and economic) impacted on the socio-economic situation in the country.

The existence of a 'Spanish famine' has recently been emphasised by scholars. It took place within a broader period known as the 'hunger years' (1939–52) and was particularly acute between 1939–42 and then again in 1946.[4] The famine exerted its grip most firmly across an arc stretching through southern Spain that included the regions of Murcia, Castilla La Mancha, Extremadura and Andalusia. The poorest sectors of society, many of whom had supported the defeated Second Republic against General Franco, suffered the most. They included rural and urban waged workers, women, the elderly, and children hailing from families impoverished and broken apart by the war or the dictatorship's programme of executions, incarcerations and purges. To understand this brutal famine, which claimed around 200,000 lives in the period 1939–42 alone, and which has been largely ignored until now, it is necessary to investigate its causes. To-date, and always acknowledging the important context of the global war, historians have tended to highlight the economic policy of autarky as key to explaining the famine. Several scholars have questioned the regime's explanations for the severe socio-economic crisis in these years, which included the legacy of destruction from the Spanish Civil War, enforced international isolation and the 'persistent drought'. As with other famines in the period between 1918 and 1945, however, the Spanish famine was man-made.[5] That is to say, it was created by the political policies of Franco's government, not least of all the economic policy of autarky. This ultra-nationalist policy aimed at the aggrandizement of Spain, but through the imposition of an irrational system of economic intervention instead produced economic stagnation, a fall in agricultural and industrial output, and severe problems of basic supply and the provision of necessary foodstuffs.[6]

Autarky also contained an international dimension. Inspired by inter-war fascism, its ultimate goal was not only the regeneration of Spain but also its expansion. Spain must close itself off in order to purge its sins and be born again, and in so doing strengthen the nation and refashion a new empire.[7] It is within this context that we can understand the expansionist and interventionist, rather than neutral, policies of the regime in the opening stages of the Second World War.[8] Within this framework, the present article focuses on the 'New State's' foreign policy as a means of helping to explain the failure in food supplies which led to 'Franco's famine'. It contends that eschewing strict neutrality in favour of pro-Axis policies was a significant factor in creating the famine. Franco's regime developed an entirely unequal and dependent economic relationship with Germany. Faced with Spain's Germanophile stance, first Britain, and later the United States, took a series of measures to limit imports to Spain, choking the country in a bid to prevent it from any form of participation in the war.

Pérez, *Franquismo y el Tercer Reich: las relaciones económicas hispano-alemanas durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Constitucionales, 1994); Jordi Catalán, *La economía Española y la II Guerra Mundial* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1995); Christian Leitz, *Economic Relations between Nazi Germany and Franco's Spain, 1939–1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

[4] Miguel Ángel del Arco Blanco, 'Famine in Spain during Franco's Dictatorship (1939–1952)', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 56, 1 (2021), 6; Miguel Ángel del Arco Blanco and Peter Anderson, eds., *Franco's Famine: Malnutrition, Disease and Starvation in Post-Civil War Spain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 6.

[5] Stephen Wheatcroft and Cormac Ó Gráda, 'The European Famines of World Wars I and II', in Guido Alfani and Cormac Ó Gráda, eds., *Famine in European History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 267–8.

[6] For example: Carlos Barciela, 'Los costes del franquismo en el sector agrario: la ruptura del proceso de transformaciones', in Ramón Garrabou, Carlos Barciela and José Ignacio Jiménez Blanco, eds., *Historia agraria de la España Contemporánea. 3. El fin de la agricultura tradicional (1900–1960)* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1986), 383–455. Albert Carreras, 'La producción industrial española, 1842–1981: construcción de un índice anual', *Revista de Historia Económica,* 2–1 (1984), 127–57. Pablo Martín Aceña and Elena Martínez Ruiz, *La economía de la Guerra Civil* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2006). Recently: Miguel Ángel del Arco Blanco, ed., *Los años del hambre. Historia y memoria de la posguerra franquista* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2020).

[7] Michael Richards, *Un tiempo de silencio. La guerra civil y la cultura de la represión en la España de Franco, 1936–1945* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1999), 21–3.

[8] Ángel Viñas, 'Autarquía y política exterior en el primer franquismo (1939–1959)', *Revista de Estudios Internacionales*, 1 (1980), 61–92.

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Britain and its allies had used blockade extensively during the First World War, although this time they would be used more extensively and with greater force.[9] In Greece, for example, Britain imposed a stringent blockade. Between February and April 1941, a complete economic blockade was enforced on a nation shortly to be occupied by Germany, Italy and Bulgaria. This indubitably contributed to a prolonged famine in Greece (1941–4), albeit one already created as a consequence of invasion and the plundering of the conquering forces.[10] In the case of Spain, as we shall see, the reaction of the Allies was prompted by the Franco regime's pro-German foreign policy. Here the economic blockade was much less strictly enforced than in Greece, but it nonetheless exacerbated problems of basic supply that had already been created by the dictatorship's policy of autarky. The result was the aggravation of the famine in Spain.[11] The article will further demonstrate that the dictatorship was perfectly aware of the blockade's effect on the population and the suffering it caused. For the 'Caudillo' and the regime leadership, however, policy always trumped the basic needs of ordinary Spaniards. While these men were receiving reports of shortages and devastating hunger, they were hosting meetings and drafting policies designed to bring about a new Spanish empire. It was not until 1942, when external factors indicated a shift in fortunes in favour of the Allies, that Spain started to shift from its Germanophile stance and improve relations with the Allies; something which also improved the supply of food for Spain's people. As with other European famines in the interwar period, the origins of Spain's famine were political.[12]

The article draws not only on the vast secondary literature on Spain in the Second World War but also a broad range of primary material. Of particular importance for understanding the international dimensions are the Foreign Office files at The National Archives (London, United Kingdom), the French Centre des Archives Diplomatiques (Nantes, France) and Spanish Foreign Office materials held at the Archivo General de la Administración. In relation to the famine in Spain and the results of Francoist autarky, the article draws upon documents and reports from provincial and national archives, as well as materials from the Fundación Nacional Francisco Franco. The article is further enriched through reports from Spanish newspapers of the period and the memoirs of several key actors.

The article is divided into three parts. First, it examines Franco's 'false neutrality' at the start of the Second World War (April 1939–June 1940) and Allied reactions to it, which included the establishment of an economic blockade, and which would have damaging repercussions for basic supply to Spain and the availability of food in the country. The second period (June 1940–December 1941) saw Spain closest to entering the war on the side of Germany, despite the worsening of the famine in the country. In the final phase covered in this article (December 1941–1943), the hesitant Franco regime steadily abandoned its pro-war leanings, always tempered by the persistent economic pressure of the Allies. As we investigate how the dictatorship's policies were anything but neutral, we can see the worsening economic situation that Spain endured, and how the authorities were fully aware of it.

False Neutrality and the Start of the Economic Blockade (April 1939–June 1940)

The 'New State's' pro-Axis position stemmed from the Spanish Civil War. Even before the Spanish military coup of July 1936, anti-Republican conspirators had made contacts with key figures in both Italy and Germany.[13] Italian and German assistance proved decisive within days of the military

[9] Wheatcroft and Ó Gráda, 'The European Famines', 243, 251–3.

[10] Violetta Hionidou, *Famine and Death in Occupied Greece, 1941–1944* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 10–20.

[11] By contrast, the classic study of the Allied economic blockade claims that the scarcity of basic goods in Spain was nothing to do with the policy of rationing imports but rather was due to a supposed 'Spanish inefficiency'. See William Norton Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade*, vol. 1 (London: HMSO, 1952), 532.

[12] Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Making Famine History', *Journal of Economic Literature*, 45, 1 (2007), 5–38; Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann, *State Food Crimes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 17–18.

[13] Ángel Viñas, *¿Quién quiso la guerra civil?: historia de una conspiración* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2019). Ángel Viñas and Carlos Collado Seidel, 'Franco's Request to the Third Reich for Military Assistance', *Contemporary European History*, 11, 2 (2002), 191–210.

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coup of 17–18 July. Hitler quickly grasped the strategic importance of Spain and sent thirty Junkers JU-52 transport planes, which proved key in transporting rebel troops in Morocco to the peninsula. Mussolini had supported the insurgents even before this, sending bombers and fighters to Spanish Morocco, a fact widely reported in the international press. Crucially, German and Italian aid to Franco would continue throughout the conflict, contributing to the Republic's suffering and eventual demise.[14]

With the war won, Franco's 'New State' openly displayed its friendship with the Axis. Notwithstanding Spain's declaration of neutrality at the start of the global war in September 1939, the Allies were in no doubt as to Franco's sympathies.[15] We have already noted the enormous economic and military assistance the Axis sent to Franco during the civil war. The signing of a cultural agreement with Germany (24 January 1939), Spain's adherence to the Anti-Comintern Pact (27 March 1939), and the Spanish-German treaty of friendship (31 March 1939) reciprocated this aid and offered beneficial conditions for Nazi Germany.[16] The continued presence of German and Italian troops in Spain after the end of the civil war (until May and June respectively), and Spain's withdrawal from the League of Nations (8 May 1939), continued a clear trend.[17]

Axis sympathies were also clear in the cultural field. From the start of the 1940s, Spanish academics and scientists were clearly linked to 'Axis internationalism', supporting the Germans in building a new international model of academic cooperation in what would become a European 'New Order'.[18] German influence was also very obvious in the press. After the invasion of Poland, the Third Reich's Ministry of Propaganda welcomed various Falangist journalists to Germany, who, in the pay of Goebbels' Ministry, sent consistently positive reports for publication in the Spanish dailies. In Spain, the Falangist press – with the consent of Ramón Serrano Súñer, at that time Minister of the Interior – launched a media campaign in favour of the Axis.[19]

Spain's pro-Axis stance, as well as its crucial strategic importance in any future war, were well understood in Britain. The very existence of naval or air bases on the Spanish Mediterranean coast or the Balearic Islands posed a threat to the passage of British military and commercial traffic through the Mediterranean, threatening supply routes to and from the colonies. The British position was clear: 'a friendly Spain is desirable, a neutral Spain is vital'.[20] To that end, and in a bid to keep Spain out of the approaching conflict, at the start of May 1939 the British government had begun to study the possibility of the imposition of a strictly managed economic blockade of Spain, a plan that was agreed the same month. A policy of 'carrot and stick' would be adopted to keep Spain out of the coming war and ensure that it could not supply Britain's enemies. This two-pronged strategy consisted, on the one hand, of rigid control of trade and, on the other, of extending to Spain the possibility of financial aid to support reconstruction and promote friendly relations.[21]

The strict British blockade arose from Spanish collaboration with Germany in the months leading to the Second World War. In the spring and summer of 1939, the British Ambassador in Havana

[14] Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War: Reaction, Revolution and Revenge* (London: Harper, 2006); Morten Heiberg, *Emperadores del Mediterráneo: Franco, Mussolini y la guerra civil española* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2003, ix, 45–88, 109–118; Paul Preston, *La República asediada: hostilidad internacional y conflictos internos durante la Guerra Civil* (Barcelona: Península, 2015).

[15] See, for example, David W. Pike, *Franco and the Axis Stigma* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014).

[16] José Alfonso Durango, 'España y la política internacional del fin de la guerra civil al comienzo de la mundial', *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma, Serie V, Historia Contemporánea*, 5 (1992), 261.

[17] David Jorge, *Inseguridad colectiva. La sociedad de naciones, la Guerra de España y el fin de la paz mundial* (Valencia: Tirant Humanidades, 2016), 712–13.

[18] David Brydan, *Franco's Internationalists: Social Experts and Spain's Search for Legitimacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 20–5.

[19] Wayne H. Bowen, *Spaniards and Nazi Germany: Collaboration in the New Order* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 67, 69–70.

[20] *Axis Plans in the Mediterranean. An Analysis of German Geopolitical Ideas on Italy, France, the Balearic Islands, Gibraltar, Catalonia and Spain, with a Preface by Captain Liddell Hart* (London: General Press, 1939), 3–4.

[21] Enrique Moradiellos, *Franco frente a Churchill: España y Gran Bretaña en la Segunda Guerra Mundial, 1939–1945* (Barcelona: Península, 2005), 71–75.

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(Cuba) was claiming that Spanish commercial interests were purchasing products in Cuba, but rather than sending them to a starving peninsula, they were being 'shipped on German vessels'.[22] By that point, collaboration also had a military dimension. On 27 April, 'the German cruiser Deutschland, 3 destroyers and 2 supply ships' had arrived at the port of Málaga and stayed for more than a week.[23]

While all of this was happening, the famine was beginning to make itself felt in Spain, with the first deaths from starvation recorded. A child had already 'died of hunger' in the town of Altorricón (Huesca), for example.[24] Madrid also saw supply problems, particularly of potatoes.[25] The only alternative appeared to be resorting to imports of foodstuffs from abroad. In May 1939, the International Red Cross sent a donation of 16 tonnes of aid provisions to Barcelona.[26] In November, a request was sent to the Italian government for 50,000 tonnes of wheat.[27]

The outbreak of war on 1 September 1939 starkly demonstrated Spain's pro-Axis stance. The (regime controlled) Spanish press was markedly pro-Hitler in response to the Germany invasion of Poland, which had started the conflict. Britain and France were blamed for not wanting to negotiate with the German dictator, who was presented almost as a pacifist.[28] Franco blamed Poland for the opening of hostilities and expressed his desire for a 'white peace' to be found once the country had been defeated.[29]

From the first months of the war, it was clear to the British and the French that Franco's regime was helping the Germans in any way that it could. As early as 12 September 1939, the naval attaché at the British Embassy in Madrid was refused permission by the Francoist authorities to visit the cities of Vigo and El Ferrol. The explanation for this was the presence of German officials in both places, which led the British to conclude that 'this attitude is bound to arouse the suspicion that Vigo and Ferrol are being used for un-neutral purposes'.[30] Meanwhile, Spain was one of the most important sources of raw materials and foodstuffs for Germany as repayment for the assistance offered during the Spanish Civil War. The Third Reich exponentially increased its demand for Spanish products following the outbreak of war, leading to an increasingly favourable balance of imports and exports *vis a vis* Germany. Nonetheless, this imbalance damaged Spain's post-civil war recovery and hampered the regime's ability to improve food supply for a starving population.[31]

From mid-August 1939, Franco also permitted the supply of German warships and submarines in Spain. This had massive consequences for the maritime war, helping to isolate France from Britain, and after the fall of France, exacerbating the blockade and harrying of the British Isles. After the outbreak of war, an active programme of cooperation was even established, through which twenty-three German submarines were refuelled in Vigo, El Ferrol, Cádiz and Las Palmas (Canary Islands) between 1940 and 1942.[32]

[22] The National Archives (hereafter, TNA), Foreign Office Files (hereafter FO) 371/22749/2925, Telegrams 12 Apr. 1939 & 28 Jun. 1939.

[23] TNA, FO 371/24161, 5 May 1939.

[24] Fundación Nacional Francisco Franco (hereafter FNFF), Documento 26028, 29 Aug. 1939.

[25] TNA, FO 371/23167/14860, A. Godden, 30 Sep. 1939.

[26] Archivo General de la Administración (hereafter AGA), Exteriores, Caja 82/3581, 11 May 1939.

[27] Javier Tusell and Genoveva G. Queipo de Llano, *Franco y Mussolini. La política Española durante la II Guerra Mundial* (Barcelona: Península, 2006), 111.

[28] *ABC*, 5 Sep. 1939, 'El jefe del estado español, generalísimo Franco, se dirigió el domingo al mundo', and 'Desde el domingo, Inglaterra y Francia están en guerra con Alemania', 7–8. *La Vanguardia Española*, 5 Sep. 1939, 'Cuatro proclamas de Hitler' and 'Francia e Inglaterra han roto las hostilidades con Alemania', 6 & 2 respectively.

[29] Javier Tusell, *Franco, España y la II Guerra Mundial: entre el eje y la neutralidad* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 1995), 45–7.

[30] TNA, FO 371/23167/14134, Allan Hillgarth, 12-9-1939.

[31] Ángel Viñas, *Guerra, dinero, dictadura. Ayuda fascista y autarquía en la España de Franco* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1984), 255–6; Rafael García Pérez, *Franquismo y tercer Reich. Las relaciones económicas hispano-alemanas durante la segunda guerra mundial* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Constitucionales, 1994); Rafael García Pérez, 'España en la Europa hitleriana', *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma, Serie V, Historia Contemporánea*, 7 (1994), 47–8.

[32] Charles B. Burdick, 'Moro: The Resupply of German Submarines in Spain, 1939–1942', *Central European History*, 3, 3 (1970), 267; Juan J. Díaz Benítez, 'The Etappe Kanaren: A Case Study of the Secret Supply of the German Navy in Spain

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Notwithstanding the 'New State's' ostensible neutrality, Spain's police, army, and intelligence services offered every assistance to their old friends during the new global conflict. Germany was thus able to establish its most significant foreign espionage network in Spain (*KO-Spanien*), which boasted 220 agents and operated with every facility throughout Spanish territory. Indeed, the Germans even worked alongside Spanish intelligence services in espionage. Operations included obtaining information on the enemy, infiltration of the most important economic interests relating to the war (such as mining concerns) and sabotage.[33] In response to active and persistent sabotage operations by German and Italian agents against Allied interests, the Spanish authorities turned a blind eye and conducted no investigations.[34] Spanish collaboration with Nazism even extended abroad. During 1940 and 1941, for example, the regime spied for the Führer in Britain under the cover of the Spanish Embassy in London and under the coordination of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[35]

During the so-called 'Phoney War' (September 1939–May 1940), there were few direct engagements between the major participants, and Britain and France limited themselves largely to establishing a strict economic blockade to strangle Germany. The Royal Navy played a crucial role in engaging the German merchant fleet and stopping third countries from supplying the Third Reich. In Britain, the Ministry of Economic Warfare was charged with controlling which merchant vessels arrived and departed the country, signing commercial agreements with neutral countries and issuing 'navicerts' (Navy certificates). The navicert system commenced on 1 December 1939 and was ostensibly voluntary. It consisted of a document approved by the British authorities which authorised exports and imports between neutral countries.[36]

Even this first phase of the Allied blockade would have damaging consequences for Spain's food supply, exacerbating the socio-economic problems that the country was already enduring. The Royal Navy blocked the arrival of vessels bound for Germany and detained any vessel travelling to Spain without a navicert until it could be inspected. Spain's ambassador in London, the Duke of Alba, wrote to the Foreign Ministry in Madrid on 30 October 1939 that Britain had '[presently] more than 700 vessels under detention'. Alba feared that if the information required by the British for the passage of vessels were not submitted in advance, imports of cotton could be hampered still further, paralysing Catalan industry, in particular if Spanish cotton was transported to the Americas 'with cargo bound for other countries'.[37] The blockade exacerbated the disastrous economic legacies of the Spanish Civil War, to say nothing of Franco's calamitous economic policy of autarky, devastating Spain's poorest and most isolated provinces in particular. In the town of Níjar (Almería), for example, it was reported at the end of September 1939 that five people had died of hunger, three over the age of sixty, one of sixteen years age and the other a child just six months old. Such was the despair that certain suicides were attributed to being 'overwhelmed by economic hopelessness'.[38] As winter approached on an ever-more-desperate nation, Britain showed itself open to a trade agreement with Spain, hoping in this way to distance it from Germany and ensure its neutrality. The country was

during the Second World War', *The International Journal of Maritime History*, 30, 3 (2018), 477–8; Manuel Ros Agudo, *La guerra secreta de Franco, 1939–1945* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2002), 72–117.

[33] Stanley G. Payne, *Franco and Hitler: Spain, Germany, and World War II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 114–17; Javier Rodríguez González, 'Los servicios secretos en el Norte de España durante la II Guerra Mundial: el Abwehr alemán y el SOE inglés', *Revista Universitaria de Historia Militar*, 4, 8 (2015), 75–100. For a case study of Axis and Spanish cooperation in intelligence and sabotage operations against Gibraltar, see Gareth Stockey, *Gibraltar: 'A Dagger in the Spine of Spain?'* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press), 146–58.

[34] Manuel Ros Agudo and Morten Heiberg, *La trama oculta de la guerra civil. Los servicios secretos de Franco, 1936–1945* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2006), 221–3, 242–9. See also Moradiellos, *Franco frente a Churchill*, 88.

[35] Ros Agudo and Heiberg, *La trama oculta de la guerra civil*, 228–32.

[36] For the blockade, see Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade*, *vol. 1*, 94–101.

[37] AGA, Asuntos Exteriores, 82/5692, 30 Oct. 1939.

[38] AGA, Presidencia del Gobierno, Delegación Nacional de Provincias, Caja 20495, Jefe Provincial del Movimiento a Secretario General del Movimiento, 20 Sep. 1939; Jefe Local del Movimiento de Níjar a Secretario General del Movimiento, 5 Feb. 1940.

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dying of hunger. David Eccles offered a grim and detailed picture of the situation and Spanish requirements:

> The situation here is very bad as regards food, much worse than in March, the poor people are starving, eggs 8*d*. each, no meat, no olive oil and some days not enough bread. We ought to be able to make a treaty with people in this condition.[39]

Spain initially proved reluctant to negotiate, but Britain applied pressure by detaining merchant vessels, thus restricting supplies.[40] Begrudgingly, and facing an exhausted economy, Franco authorised negotiations. Even though talks began in November 1939, the Anglo-Spanish Clearing Agreement was not signed until 18 March 1940. Britain offered a loan of £2 million which had to be used to purchase British goods. Britain would also allow the passage of essential goods to Spain (foodstuffs and raw materials) in exchange for not allowing their re-export to the enemy and providing detailed reports to Britain of all exports and imports from Spain each month. Spain, meanwhile, began to export goods to Britain that it sought, increasing the value of exports to £2.5 million in 1940.[41] Britain had achieved its objectives. It had reduced Spanish exports to Germany, it had tied Spain's fate to that of Britain, and above all it had maintained Spain in its forced neutrality, notwithstanding its sympathy for the German cause.[42]

Spain's economic dependency was enormous. As the dictatorship's own officials conceded, at the start of the Second World War Spain was importing 45 per cent of its goods from the area covered by the navicerts.[43] Britain was Spain's most important trading partner, and if anything the war had exacerbated this dependency. A report of Spanish agricultural engineers, for example, warned of the situation in regards to oranges, one of Spain's leading agricultural exports. After November 1939, with shipments to Germany made impossible by the Anglo-French blockade, and in the absence of a commercial treaty with France, the British market was now the only truly significant market for Spanish oranges.[44] If the British government refused to purchase them, there would be little chance of obtaining foreign currencies and using them to purchase foodstuffs.

Reduced exports in turn worsened the Spanish famine. Between 1939 and 1945 exports of almost all of the major Spanish processed foods were lower in real terms than in 1935. In the case of oranges, total exports in 1940 were just 48 per cent of those in 1935.[45] As noted above, the Allies reduced their imports of Spanish oranges. Meanwhile, exports to the continent (Germany, France or Scandinavia) did not cover the harvest produced. The most damning statistic is that not even a third of the production left over could be used for internal consumption 'owing to transport difficulties' and given the scarcity of fuel. In the Levant, a report of December 1941 warned of the 'economic ruin' of the entire area. From a production of 600,000 tonnes of oranges, only 75,000 were due for export and only 150,000 were being consumed internally. In the midst of a famine, 75 per cent of the produce was

[39] Eccles, *By Safe Hand*, 24.

[40] See, for example, the detention of a fishing boat off Ceuta. AGA, Asuntos Exteriores, 82/03975, Carpeta 1, nota 12 Dec. 1939.

[41] Richard Wigg, *Churchill and Spain: The Survival of the Franco Regime, 1940–1945* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 9–10; Moradiellos, *Franco frente a Churchill*, 104–6. Viñas, *Política comercial exterior*, 328–30. In Jan. 1940, a Franco-Spanish treaty had been signed, which allowed for the Spanish purchase of wheat, fertilisers and capital goods in exchange for pyrites and other primary materials for France.

[42] Figures for exports to Germany and Britain respectively in this period bear this out. See Viñas, *Política comercial exterior*, 427.

[43] Víctor Morales Lezcano, *Historia de la no-beligerancia española durante la segunda guerra mundial* (Las Palmas: Mancomunidad de Cabildos de Las Palmas, 1980), 128.

[44] Carlos García Gisbert, *Estudio sobre la exportación y venta de la naranja española en el Reino Unido* (Valencia: Ministerio de Agricultura, Industria y Comercio, 1940).

[45] Catalán, *La economía española*, 188–90.

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still in the hands of the producers. It was neither exported to obtain foreign currency nor used for internal consumption.[46]

The blockade also impacted upon Spanish agricultural production and food supply. The Spanish Ambassador to the United Kingdom, the Duke of Alba, made numerous pleas to the British authorities to release ships which were transporting wheat from Argentina to Spain for 'urgent necessities of the country'. On 30 April 1940, acknowledging Spain's 'great need for fertilisers' in the present circumstances, Alba wrote to request the release of a ship carrying a cargo of ammonium chloride and sulphate (soil fertilisers).[47]

Inside Spain, the effects of the blockade were becoming all too apparent. During the first months of 1940, the ration in many provinces could no longer include bread. In the wheat-growing province of Jaén, one report acknowledged that large villages like Andújar, Linares or Úbeda were not receiving bread 'for more than 20 days a month'.[48] Several months earlier, the Francoist authorities of Alcalá la Real, a village in the province of Jaén, had urgently sought the supply of chemical fertilisers, which were required in advance of sowing and 'an indispensable element' for a successful harvest. Ultimately, the fertilisers either did not arrive, or else arrived in insufficient quantity. By September 1941, the local authorities had to concede that the wheat harvest for that year had been 'forty per cent of normal', 'no doubt due to a lack of fertilisers'.[49]

Given this bleak picture for Spain's economy and its people, it is all the more surprising that the regime showed clear hostility towards foreign humanitarian workers who were trying to help the starving country. Combined with an equally hostile attitude from the regime's social organisations such as *Auxilio Social*, this prompted most humanitarian workers and organisations that had been providing services in Spain since the civil war to withdraw from the country between 1939 and 1941. Once again, the political goals of the dictatorship exacerbated an already devastating situation of hunger.[50]

Towards Belligerence and the Worsening of the Spanish Famine (June 1940–December 1941)

After the fall of France and Italy's entry into the war in June 1940, a six-month period began in which Spain was tempted to join the war on the Axis side. Despite the terrible state of the country, Franco and his most loyal acolytes toyed with the idea of entering the war at the last moment, hoping to benefit from the victors after the victory of Nazism. Accordingly, Spanish propaganda became even more belligerent. Inspired by Serrano Súñer and the Ministry of the Interior that he led, government pamphlets and newspapers such as *Arriba* and *Ya* began to speak of a 'vigilant neutrality' for Spain whilst listing the country's territorial claims, not least Gibraltar.[51] On 12 June 1940 Spain moved from 'neutrality' to 'non-belligerence', imitating the moves of Italy and hinting at its future entry into the world war.[52] The following day, taking advantage of the Nazi entry into Paris, Spain occupied the international city of Tangier.[53]

[46] AGA, Presidencia del Gobierno, Movimiento Nacional. Delegación Nacional de Provincias, caja 20562, Nota informativa, 15 Dec. 1941.

[47] AGA, Asuntos Exteriores, 54/7679, 1 Feb. 1940, 7 Feb. 1940, 30 Apr. 1940.

[48] AGA, Presidencia del Gobierno. Movimiento Nacional. Delegación Nacional de Provincias, caja 20519e.

[49] Archivo Municipal de Alcalá la Real, Agricultura. Junta Local Agrícola, 16 Oct. 1939; Junta Local de Información Agrícola: campaña de cereales y leguminosas, years 1939–1946, 16 Sep. 1941.

[50] David Brydan, 'Starving Spain: International Humanitarian Responses to Franco's Famine', in Arco Blanco and Anderson, eds., *Franco's Famine* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 138–9.

[51] Tusell, *Franco, España y la II Guerra Mundial*, 71–2; Chris Grocott and Gareth Stockey, *Gibraltar: a Modern History* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), 95. For a more detailed account of Spanish intentions towards Gibraltar in the war see Stockey, *Gibraltar*, 137–80.

[52] *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, 13 Jun. 1940.

[53] Miguel Hernando de Larramendi, 'Tánger durante la ocupación española, 1940–1945', in Eduardo Ripoll Perelló, ed., *El Estrecho de Gibraltar Actas del Congreso Internacional, vol. 3* (Madrid: UNED, 1987), 573–84. Bernabé López García, *El frente de Tánger (1936–1940): crónica de la Guerra Civil Española en la ciudad internacional* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2021).

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Collaboration with the Axis also accelerated within Spain. The highest rate of refuelling Nazi submarines from Spanish ports took place between June 1940 and July 1941, for example, including the provision of food supplies and water.[54] Between 18 July 1940 and 3 June 1943, Italian warplanes made fifteen air raids on Gibraltar, departing from Sardinia with Spanish cooperation. At least five Italian submarines were also refuelled in Spanish ports during the course of the war. The Spanish authorities also collaborated with the Italians in sabotage operations and the sinking of ships in Gibraltar from 1940 onwards.[55] The fact that the Germans were controlling France and that it now shared a frontier with Spain at the Pyrenees meant that the Iberian Peninsula became a major conduit of non-European supplies for the Axis.

A beleaguered Britain did not take long to react to the prospect of an Axis victory. It tightened the economic pressure on Spain by reducing deliveries, thus limiting the chance of re-exporting to its enemies, and insisted that Spain step back from its belligerent intentions. On 17 June, in agreement with the United States, Britain suspended the supply of petroleum to Spain. Even more important was the intensification of the economic blockade. Given the political situation and the steady increase in smuggling of goods to the Axis powers, on 30 July 1940 it was announced in the British parliament that navicerts would be obligatory for any commerce with the 'neutral' countries, among them Spain. The system enabled London to know exactly how much each of the countries involved were importing, imposing trimestral quotas to ensure their economies could function but blocking as much as possible re-export to enemy powers, or stockpiling in order to enter the war at a later date, as Italy had done.[56]

The impact on Spanish imports was immediate. As British searches and detentions of vessels increased in June 1940, the Spanish Foreign Minister Beigbeder pointed out to the British Ambassador, Sir Samuel Hoare, 'the inconvenience caused . . . through the continual stopping by the Allied fleets of Spanish vessels between one Spanish port and another, and whose cargoes consist chiefly of food and other supplies, the arrival of which at their destination is in most cases of vital importance'.[57] The Duke of Alba also directed a missive towards Lord Halifax, complaining about the difficulties that the system was creating for supply.[58]

There began a gruelling Spanish diplomatic campaign in London to obtain navicerts that would avoid the detention of merchant shipping and to promote the British purchase of Spanish goods. Examples are legion. Spanish diplomats repeatedly stressed that supplies were solely for internal Spanish use or consumption. On 27 August 1940, for example, the Duke of Alba sought the granting of a navicert from the Ministry of Economic Warfare for a vessel in Buenos Aires, which was set to bring 5943 tonnes of wheat to Spain.[59] Navicerts had already been requested the previous month for two vessels travelling from Egypt with 10,000 tonnes of wheat, 'given that wheat is urgently required in Spain for consumption'.[60]

All of this coincided with the arrival of a new British Ambassador in Madrid in June 1940, the ex-minister and Conservative MP Sir Samuel Hoare. The so-called 'special mission' for which he was sent entailed improving relations with Franco, counteracting Italian and German influence over him and preventing Spain from entering the war.[61] Hoare described what he found on his arrival in Madrid in a letter to Churchill. Madrid had 'no food, fantastic prices, quantities of troops and police at every street corner'.[62]

[54] For a case study in the Canary Islands see Díaz Benítez, 'The Etappe Kanaren', 477–82.
[55] Moradiellos, *Franco frente a Churchill*, 117; Tusell, *Franco, España y la II Guerra Mundial*, 237–9.
[56] Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade*, *vol. 1*, 96, 431–4, 436–7, 509–10; Viñas, *Política comercial exterior*, 331; Moradiellos, *Franco frente a Churchill*, 153–4.
[57] AGA, Asuntos Exteriores, 54/7293, 4 Jun. 1940.
[58] AGA, Asuntos Exteriores, 54/7293, 9 Aug. 1940.
[59] AGA, Asuntos Exteriores, 54/6709, Correspondencia con Ministerio de Guerra Económica, 1940, 27 Aug. 1940.
[60] AGA, Asuntos Exteriores, 54/6709, Correspondencia con Ministerio de Guerra Económica, 1940, 1 Jul. 1940. Moradiellos, *Franco frente a Churchill*, 153–4.
[61] Ibid., 136–7.
[62] Samuel Hoare, *Ambassador on a Special Mission* (London: Collins, 1946), 35. The letter was dated 12 Jun. 1940.

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Hoare would give a good account of the hunger and misery in his reports, using them as an important weapon to justify his policy. He was convinced that Spain would continue to remain neutral if she was supplied with just enough economic assistance and foodstuffs.[63] For this reason he also explored the possibility of imperial guarantees – accepting certain Spanish claims in North Africa, or even over Gibraltar – and of course to well-known bribing of Francoist generals to make their views more favourable towards British interests.[64] The British understood quickly that supplies were their best weapon in keeping Spain out of the war. Winston Churchill confessed as much to Arthur Hinsley, the Catholic Archbishop of Winchester, on 3 November 1940:

> We have in our hands a very powerful lever in the form of our economic blockade and I think that Spain's desire to obtain provisions from the United States and from this country will be the most powerful factor in keeping them out of the war.[65]

At the same time, the British were conscious of the danger that food shortages could pose to their own interests. A desperate and starving Spain could throw in its lot definitively with the Axis, or its instability might be used as a pretext for a German occupation. Hoare conceded as much in a report of October 1940, stating that 'The economic situation of Spain is desperate. Without our food and raw materials, without in particular the wheat from the US and our Navicerts for such necessities as phosphates, there will be famine and revolution in the next few months.'[66] As Lord Halifax had warned the Foreign Office in June that year, if Spain were choked too strongly the blockade could be counterproductive: 'If we are not careful, the hunger cry, fomented by German propaganda, will be turned entirely against us.'[67] Accordingly, Hoare advocated a watchful policy towards Spain, tied to short periods of time to weigh-up the attitudes of the dictatorship to international affairs, stating: 'I would apply it over comparatively short periods of time so that any Spanish lapses can be met with their just retribution.'[68]

The ramifications of the disastrous policy of autarky were felt keenly in that summer of 1940, now exacerbated by the blockade. In Murcia, one Falange report sent in July termed the situation 'very grave'. In that month alone, the ration had been 'shared out twice over'. The amounts were 'so meagre and so partial' that it was almost impossible to feed the population of the province.[69] The situation was no better in Valencia. A report of the French consul in the city stated that rural areas had gone two months without receiving any bread. It gave abundant detail on the supply problems. In two months, 250 ml of oil and 500 g of rice had been distributed per person. The only meat that could be found outside the black market was chicken. Economic paralysis and inequality sent unemployment rocketing, with 60,000 unemployed in the city of Valencia alone, and paltry wages ('no more than 6 or 7 pesetas a day') for those in work: 'you cannot imagine the misery of the working class, whose physiological state is frightening, above all among the children'.[70] Shortages also affected fuel, and as a result the distribution of foodstuffs. In July 1940, for example, *Auxilio Social* was forced to concede in a report that its activity for the entire month had been paralysed due to the 'absolute lack of petrol'.[71]

[63] See, for example, TNA, FO 371/24508, Memorandum, 9 Sep. 1940.

[64] Moradiellos, *Franco frente a Churchill*, 145–9; Ángel Viñas, *Sobornos: de cómo Churchill y March compraron a los generales de Franco* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2021).

[65] Enrique Moradiellos, *Quo vadis, Hispania? Winston Churchill y la guerra civil española (1936–1939)* (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 2021), 164.

[66] TNA, FO 371/24508, c 11259, 18 Oct.r 1940. Cited in Wigg, *Churchill and Spain*, 17.

[67] Hoare, *Ambassador*, 37.

[68] Cited in Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade, vol. 1*, 531.

[69] AGA, Presidencia del Gobierno, Movimiento Nacional. Delegación Nacional de Provincias, caja 20557, *Informe de la Secretaría Local de FET y de las JONS*, June 1940.

[70] Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN), Madrid, Ambassade, 396PO/C/1/131. Consul Valencia to Ambassador in Madrid, 5 Sep. 1940.

[71] AGA, Cultura, Auxilio Social, Correspondencia, Jaén, 2 Jul. 1940 and 20 Jul. 1940.

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Spain faced a dilemma: food or empire. Spain could ask for assistance from the hated Britain to guarantee the survival of the population, or enter the war alongside Germany to achieve its territorial claims on Gibraltar, Oran and French Morocco. Facing an exhausted nation, Franco authorised renewed negotiations with the British.[72]

The mechanism of the British policy of economic appeasement resumed. On 30 August 1940 the British made their offer. The supply of petroleum would be renewed, a monthly quota of imports would be agreed for a couple of months, and Spain would agree not to re-export goods to enemy countries. Furthermore, on 7 September an Anglo-Spanish Oil Agreement was signed. To ensure its operation, Spain would inform the British Embassy in a timely fashion and the agreement would be reviewed four months later. The same month a programme for imports was also agreed.[73] In this way, Spain and Franco gained a lifeline for a few months, without allowing them to prepare for war and always subject to their conduct in regards to belligerence.

In spite of the critical socio-economic situation of the country and the worsening of the famine among the poorest classes, Franco time and again continued to make his support for the Axis cause very clear. In October 1940, the Italian intelligence services (*Servizio Informazione Militari;* SIM) reported that 'notwithstanding its purported non-belligerence, Spain is offering a greater level of cooperation to the Axis powers'.[74] On 3 June, Franco had sent an adulatory letter to Hitler, in which he offered 'services which you regard as most valuable'. The letter was presented personally by General Vigón, Chief of the General Staff, who even met with Hitler and his Foreign Minister, Von Ribbentrop, offering Spain's entry into the war in return for economic and territorial claims.[75] Spanish belligerence moved a step closer in the following months. On 16 September, Serrano Súñer visited Berlin. Despite being the Minister of the Interior at that time, he was sent by Franco to meet the Führer and negotiate Spain's entry into the war. The hand of Franco's brother-in-law, and that of the Falange, was strengthened on 17 October. Franco undertook a cabinet reshuffle in which Serrano replaced Colonel Beigbeder – increasingly coming to support Spanish neutrality – as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Meanwhile, just days later, Heinrich Himmler visited Spain with the aim of promoting cooperation between the Spanish police and the Gestapo.[76]

While the country was dying of hunger, the corollary of this pro-Axis escalation came on 23 October 1940 with the meeting between the Führer and the Caudillo in Hendaye (France). The aim was to remove stumbling blocks in the negotiations for Spain's entry into the war. After the fact, the Franco regime would construct a myth in which Franco, making a show of his 'astute caution', 'tricked' Hitler and stalled the entry of Spain into the war. The reality was very different. Hitler sought the immediate participation of Spain in the war through a joint offensive against Gibraltar (Operation Felix). Franco showed a willingness to fight alongside the Nazis, but pointed to difficulties in food supplies and fuel at that time, and sought German economic support to break away from Britain and enter the war in exchange for Gibraltar, all of French Morocco, and even Oran. Hitler promised that Spain would receive all the economic and material support it required from Germany, but only after it had entered the war, and not before. In truth, the key question centred on Spanish claims in North Africa, since it could pose a problem for Germany in its alliance with Vichy France and Fascist Italy. Spain was, in short, asking for too much in exchange for too little. As Enrique Moradiellos has stated, a starving Spain was showing 'an excessive imperial appetite for someone with so few teeth'. Spain's lack of entry into the war did not owe to the dire socio-economic situation, nor to Franco or his wishes, but in truth to the imperial ambitions of Nazi Germany which were incompatible with Spanish claims in North Africa. With Operation Felix already drawn up and 10 January 1941 set

[72] A tripartite Anglo-Spanish-Portuguese agreement had been signed on 24 July which would somewhat alleviate the situation in Spain. As part of this, various basic products were made available to buy from Portugal for internal Spanish consumption, to the value of £728,000. See Moradiellos, *Franco frente a Churchill*, 159.

[73] Ibid., 164–7.

[74] Heiberg, *Emperadores del Mediterráneo*, 205.

[75] Tusell, *Franco, España y la II Guerra Mundial*, 85–9.

[76] Paul Preston, *Franco: Caudillo de España* (Barcelona: Grijalbo, 1994), 487–90.

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for its execution, Franco postponed it in a meeting with Admiral Canaris (Head of the German Abwehr) on 7 December 1940.[77]

The Francoist authorities blamed the dire socio-economic situation on the appalling state of trade relations between Spain and Britain. In December 1940, a pessimistic report from the Spanish consul in London offered an assessment of this for the year that was ending. Trade was classified as 'disastrous' owing to the difficulties imposed by the British.[78] The same diagnosis was being made from the British side. A report on trade relations between the two countries confirmed the decline in bilateral trade since the start of the war. It was admitted that 'the country is exhausted and there are practically no raw materials or essential goods', which made the 'anti-British positions' of Franco's Spain in the war even more surprising.[79]

Certainly, the Francoist authorities were fully aware of how critical the food situation in Spain had become. It is difficult to say with certainty, however, the extent to which their stated concerns over the situation were motivated by the humanitarian catastrophe confronting the population, or rather by their worries over the future of the regime itself. From the British Embassy in Madrid, David Eccles warned in the autumn of 1940 that there was great nervousness among ministers in the capital because they knew that 'another bread-less period will see the end of this regime with one sure result, a short period of chaos followed by an Axis occupation [of Spain]'.[80] This picture was mirrored in the internal communications of the regime. In the municipal sphere, for example, Francoist officials vied between concerns over the dangers that hunger posed to public order, and bluntly describing the misery of the people. In 1940, the *Auxilio Social* delegation of the province of Córdoba begged Madrid to send food for the village of Añora, 'given the great need that exists here, which is a continuing source of serious and shameful incidents stemming from hunger and desperation'. In the village of Benalcázar, it was bluntly stated that 'the humble families . . . spend the whole day without food, and just a few days ago a member of one of these families died of starvation'.[81]

Within the highest reaches of the dictatorship there were differing views on how to proceed. For Serrano Súñer – at that time perhaps the most powerful voice after that of the Caudillo – imperial political objectives would always be prioritised ahead of the supply of food to the population. This helps explain why he worked to spurn opportunities for better economic relations with the Allies. Hoare considered him to be the true leader of the Falange, someone who longed for Spain to enter the war, and someone who, in the autumn of 1940, was opposed to the economic negotiations offered by the Allies.[82] In sharp contrast was the more pragmatic behaviour and attitude of Demetrio Carceller, Minister of Industry and Commerce. Despite being a Falangist, he was always aware of the socio-economic problems facing the country and was sufficiently astute to negotiate simultaneously with the Allies and with Germany, gaining the confidence of the former and signing economic agreements with them.[83] He and his subordinates made no secret of their pro-Axis sympathies, but at the same time economic necessity forced them to leave them to one side in order to secure imports of wheat.[84]

Facing a clear intensification of belligerence from the Franco regime, the Allies reacted with prudence and returned to the policy of carrot and stick. In light of the possibility of Spain entering the

[77] Paul Preston, 'Franco and Hitler: The Myth of Hendaye 1940', *Contemporary European History*, 1, 1 (1992), 1–16; Goda, *Y mañana … el mundo*, 129–34, 149–56, 201–2 y 206–8; Moradiellos, *Franco frente a Churchill*, 123–34 and 177–81. For the quotation, see 126. On 18 Nov. 1940, a meeting was held between Serrano Súñer and Hitler in Berchtesgarden, where the latter made German imperial plans in North Africa very clear.

[78] AGA, Asuntos Exteriores, 54/6942, 'Memoria comercial y financiera elaborada por el consulado general en Londres', Dec. 1940.

[79] AGA, Asuntos Exteriores, 54/6943, 'Memorandum on the development of trade relations with Spain', undated.

[80] TNA, FO 371/24502 c 9630, 6 Sep. 1940. Cited in Wigg, *Churchill and Spain*, 18.

[81] AGA, Cultura, 33/09735, Correspondencia Auxilio Social, Feb. 1940 and Jun. 1940.

[82] Hoare, *Ambassador*, 56–60, 96.

[83] Enrique Faes, *Demetrio Carceller (1894–1968): un empresario en el gobierno* (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2020), 149–55.

[84] Hoare, *Ambassador*, 99; Eccles, *By Safe Hand*, 180; William N. Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade, vol. 2*. (London: HMSO, 1959), 286, 92.

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war, they made military preparations and suspended deliveries of cereals. Serrano Súñer cynically pointed to this reaction in his memoirs:

> When speaking with the British and American ambassadors after returning from the meeting at Hendaye, I told them that it had been a meeting based upon friendship, and that was enough for them to suspend the delivery of 30,000 tonnes of wheat that we were loading in America.[85]

Once again, the principal victims of the belligerent whims of the 'New State' would be the Spanish people. Nonetheless, after the punishment came the carrot. With Britain increasingly exhausted, it turned to the United States and convinced them to supply Spain with raw materials and foodstuffs, resulting in the signing of new agreements in the autumn of 1940.[86] After various reservations in regard to Spain's conduct, the American ambassador Alexander Weddell confirmed at the end of November 1940 that his government would extend credits only if certain conditions were met, and at the end of the year it was agreed to send humanitarian deliveries to Spain. On 29 November the Anglo-Spanish Agreement on Morocco was signed and on 2 December a new Anglo-Spanish Credit Agreement. Meanwhile, in the third week of January 1941 the British government offered 65,000 tonnes of wheat to Spain from its own reserves. This came on top of the approval of delivery of Canadian grain (agreed in January) as well as 120,000 bales of cotton and 1500 tonnes of Argentinean meat. For his part, Ambassador Hoare made clear that his government was disposed to authorise navicerts to import up to 1 million tonnes of wheat, as well as renewing the loan, something which would happen on 7 April 1941, despite the reluctance and delays occasioned by Serrano Súñer.[87]

This back and forth between Franco's belligerent policies and the tightening or relaxation of Spanish imports by the British was going to have internal consequences for the regime. Facing a situation of economy scarcity, fearful of the political instability resulting from Axis collaboration and its attendant damage to Spain's socio-economic situation, and influenced in no small part by British bribes, many Francoist generals were turning towards neutrality by the end of 1941.[88]

Nonetheless, even now the Franco regime was far from embracing strict neutrality. On 12 February 1941 Franco had met with Mussolini in Bordighera (Italy), the latter dictator prodded by Hitler to see if he could convince Spain to enter the war. The Spanish press continued its pro-Axis and anti-British campaigns, whilst Spanish logistical support, espionage and exports to Germany also continued. German victories in the Balkans, Greece, Crete and North Africa emboldened the Falangists even more, which was highlighted by Germanophile tracts in the press. The German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, which at first achieved remarkable advances, was also a key moment. The discourse in Spain was further inflamed, baying against the Soviet enemy, which in theory had been fought against during the civil war. On 24 June, Serrano Súñer delivered an impassioned speech in Madrid before a feverous crowd, concluding with the claim that 'Russia is to blame'. The Falangist crowd moved off to the British Embassy, where they threw rocks at the building and shouted 'Gibraltar for Spain. British assassins' in front of authorities who barely reacted.[89] Amid this feverish atmosphere, Franco approved the creation of the *División Azul* (Blue Division), a body of 18,800 volunteers under

[85] Ramón Serrano Súñer, *Entre Hendaya y Gibraltar. Noticia y reflexión, frente a una leyenda, sobre nuestra política en dos guerras* (Barcelona: Planeta, 2011), 205.

[86] Hoare, *Ambassador*, 63–4. On the agreements of autumn 1940, see Carlton J. Hayes, *Misión de guerra en España* (Zaragoza: Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza, 2018), 103.

[87] Viñas, *Política comercial exterior*, 334–5; Moradiellos, *Franco frente a Churchill*, 196–8, 215–16; Wigg, *Churchill and Spain*, 20–1; Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade, vol. 2*, 285–7; Joan Maria Thomàs, *Roosevelt y Franco: de la Guerra Civil española a Pearl Harbor* (Barcelona: Edhasa, 2007), 348–51; Tusell, *Franco, España y la II Guerra Mundial*, 182–4. On 2 Jul. 1941, with the approval of Britain, the Spanish-Portuguese Agreement was signed, which would offer a credit of 50 million escudos to purchase Portuguese colonial products. See Tusell, *Franco, España y la II Guerra Mundial*, 228. Shipments from Canada and Argentina are mentioned in Luis Suárez Fernández, *Francisco Franco y su tiempo, tomo III* (Madrid: Fundación Nacional Francisco Franco, 1984), 230.

[88] Moradiellos, *Franco frente a Churchill*, 204–6; Tusell, *Franco, España y la II Guerra Mundial*, 178–9.

[89] Hoare, *Ambassador*, 114–15.

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Army command, which would go off 'to fight against Communism'. The grand finale to all of this was a markedly Falangist-sounding speech by Franco on 17 July in front of the *Consejo Nacional* of the Falange, in which he placed himself explicitly on the side of the Axis. Franco declared that 'The Allies are on the wrong side in this war and they have lost it'. He added that the 'plutocratic democracies' had been outsmarted, and he linked democracy to communism by stating that 'Stalin, the criminal Red dictator, is now an ally of the democracies!'.[90]

Once again, the British response did not take long. As well as an energetic protest to Franco, plans were finalised for a preventative occupation of the Canary Islands. In the economic sphere, the steps were familiar. The naval blockade was strengthened with a corresponding interruption of deliveries of foodstuffs and fuels. In response to Spain moving closer to the Axis in the spring of 1941, detention of Spanish merchant vessels lacking navicerts was renewed, as well as those vessels suspected of carrying goods to the Germans or belonging to companies on the 'black lists'. In May 1941, for example, the Duke of Alba informed Madrid that the captain of the vessel *Diana* had communicated to him that he had 'been boarded by a British patrol and taken to a control base at Kirkwall', about as far from Spain as possible, in the Orkney Islands.[91] On 7 June the Spanish Ambassador to Portugal, the dictator's brother Nicolás Franco, reported that the 'steamer *Victorioso II*' had been seized. It had been carrying cereals to a Spanish Mediterranean port, but also 'contraband weaponry'.[92]

As the summer commenced, the belligerent attitude of the Spanish government would lead to further consequences. Until then, Spain had been able to source wheat from Argentina to ameliorate the country's dire situation. Now, the British decided to exert more pressure, which was intensified still further after the entry of the United States into the war in December 1941. From 1 August 1941, the navicerts system was expanded yet again, this time to include shipments of wheat from Argentina, which led to further reductions in imports.[93] From that point, the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs – while still showing its Germanophile and belligerent caprice – devoted itself to obtaining navicerts for shipments from Argentina and hoping to ensure a minimum supply. On 3 October 1941, Serrano Súñer wrote a revealing note to the ambassador in London. He conceded that 'this year we will need to import 1 million tonnes of wheat – 60,000 tonnes a month – 15,000 tonnes of vegetables per month from October to January and 10,000' in the eight months thereafter, 'not including frozen meat from Buenos Aires'. For this, he needed Alba to urgently seek navicerts, because the 'delay would lead to serious damage [to] national supplies'.[94] Spain was reaping the rewards for its false neutrality in the war.

The impact of the blockade was felt elsewhere in the Spanish economy. Concerning agriculture, the Provincial Head of Falange of Zaragoza reported that the peasantry was very worried due to the lack of fertilisers, seeds and pesticides (ammonium sulphate, wheat seeds and copper sulphate).[95] Owing to a lack of fodder, there were also serious problems in regard to livestock, which was not only essential for feeding the population but also for agricultural labour.[96] In August 1941, Serrano Súñer acknowledged that limitations on fuel imports were creating a 'critical situation' for Spain's economy. In September, he warned about the 'danger of the paralysation of national industry' due to reduced imports of industrial goods.[97] Food supply was limited both by the scarcity of foodstuffs and lack of petrol. In October

[90] *La Vanguardia Española*, 18 Jul. 1941, 'El Caudillo pronuncia ante el Consejo Nacional del Movimiento Nacional un importante discurso', 5 and 6.

[91] AGA, Asuntos Exteriores, 82/05445 (1794, 11–22), carpeta 22, Gran Bretaña, 19 May 1941.

[92] AGA, Asuntos Exteriores, 82/05445 (1794, 11–22), carpeta 17, Portugal, 7 Jun. 1941.

[93] Viñas, *Política comercial exterior*, 332.

[94] AGA, Asuntos Exteriores, 82/05444, Expediente 6, Gran Bretaña, salidas 1941, 3 Oct. 1941. Serrano's insistence did not let up in the following months. On 20 Dec., he sent a new telegram to Alba to obtain navicerts to bring 40,000 tonnes of wheat from Buenos Aires. See AGA, Asuntos Exteriores, 82/05444, 20 Dec. 1941.

[95] AGA, Presidencia del Gobierno. Delegación Nacional de Provincias. Caja 20579, 11 Oct. 1941.

[96] AGA, Presidencia del Gobierno. Delegación Nacional de Provincias. Caja 20579, Sindicato Nacional de Ganadería, 19 Sep. 1941.

[97] AGA, Asuntos Exteriores, 82/05444, Expediente 7, Estados Unidos. Salida, 1941, 18 Aug. 1941, 5 Sep. 1941.

1941, for example, the Civil Governor of Toledo declared that the transport problems in the province were now critical, affecting not only the availability of foodstuffs to make up the ration but also its transport to many villages in the province.[98]

As 1941 went on, it became increasingly clear that Britain could not continue with the policy of blockade and economic assistance to Spain without the financial and material support of the United States.[99] The latter coordinated its efforts with Britain, pushing for the end of fuel deliveries without explicitly calling for it.[100] Serrano Súñer was reduced to complaining to the Spanish Ambassador in Washington, Juan Francisco de Cárdenas, about the delays in permits for the export of petroleum, which was creating a 'critical situation' and which he believed to be 'deliberate'.[101] The United States was now involved in this policy of economic appeasement, but they were always harsher and more distrustful than their British ally. On numerous occasions, the United States would not hesitate to cut the supply of petroleum to Spain, something which never appealed to British diplomats.[102] US public opinion was set against establishing economic relations with a Francoist Spain born in a civil war thanks to fascist support. Churchill's position towards Franco and his dictatorship was always more permissive than that of the United States. During the Spanish Civil War he had argued strongly for non-intervention, always making clear his concerns about Republican Spain, in which he saw the danger of revolution and which he likened to Russia before the Bolshevik Revolution. Throughout the Second World War, Churchill was always pragmatic towards Spain, convinced that the economic blockade and the resulting socio-economic difficulties would keep Spain out of the war. To achieve this, US help was essential, and he used his personal relationship with President Roosevelt on several occasions to intervene with the State Department to relax US policy towards Spain.[103] At the end of 1941, the United States informed the Spanish government that they were willing to supply petroleum, but only in quantities essential for subsistence and with a guarantee (and constant supervision) that they would not be sent to the Axis. The Unted States also agreed to purchase foodstuffs and raw materials from Spain, particularly olive oil and metals.[104]

Spain's Foreign Minister, Serrano Súñer, however, continued to prioritise politics over the needs of the population. His disagreements with the US Ambassador in Madrid, Alexander Weddell, are well-known. After a heated conversation with him, Serrano refused to receive him and even blocked and delayed a meeting for Weddell with Franco to pass on a message of friendship from President Roosevelt and to propose a programme for supply deliveries.[105] This was something that was picked up by key figures in the dictatorship. Demetrio Carceller, Minister of Industry and Commerce, for example, admitted to the Germans that the constant criticism of the Allies in the Spanish press was standing in the way of receiving supplies from the United States. Carceller was also adamant that if Franco could grant fifteen minutes to the US Ambassador then Spain's supply problems would improve.[106]

Serrano's stance would only further intensify. While the United States was increasing its pressure over supplies and the Spanish people were left feeling the harsh consequences of this, Serrano found time to prepare a campaign in the United States and the Americas to promote the Falange. Spain's

[98] AGA, Presidencia del Gobierno. Movimiento Nacional. Delegación Nacional de Provincias, caja 20557, Parte mensual, Oct. 1941.

[99] Christian Leitz. 'More Carrot than Stick: British Economic Warfare and Spain, 1941–1944', *Twentieth Century British History*, 9, 2 (1998), 255. Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade, vol. 2*, 285.

[100] Moradiellos, *Franco frente a Churchill*, 237–9.

[101] AGA, Asuntos Exteriores, 82/05444, Expediente 7, Estados Unidos, Salida, 1941, 18 Aug. 1941.

[102] Carlos Collado Seidel, '¿De Hendaya a San Francisco? Londres y Washington contra Franco y la Falange (1942–1945)', *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma. Serie V, Hª Contemporánea*, 7 (1994), 51–84; Massimiliano Guderzo, 'Un'amicizia interessata. Stati Uniti e Spagna franchista dal 1939 al 1942', *Spagna Contempomporanea*, 4 (1993), 93.

[103] Moradiellos, *Quo vadis, Hispania?*, 88–97 and 163–167.

[104] Herbert Feis, *The Spanish Story: Franco and the Nations at War* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1966), 149, 160–1; Wigg, *Churchill and Spain*, 46–8; Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade, vol. 2*, 288.

[105] Hoare, *Ambassador*, 106. Thomàs, *Roosevelt y Franco*, 357–62.

[106] Franco did not meet Weddell until 6 Oct. 1941. Tusell and Queipo de Llano, *Franco y Mussolini*, 259–60.

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Ambassador, Cárdenas, prepared a note for Serrano at the end of November 1941 in which he made clear the highly unfavourable impression the campaign was generating in the American press, which regarded the Spanish single party as 'an advance party for Hitlerism'. He advised ceasing the organising of the Falange in the United States, given 'the risks we are running', since 'it could lead to the removal of American supplies that we need so desperately'.[107] The warning was sent less than two weeks before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December and the entry of the United States into the war the following day.

Responsibility for this situation was not Serrano's alone. While all of this was taking place, the dictatorship continued to allow the export of goods and raw materials to Germany. In the summer of 1941, Germany sped up the import of Spanish goods to the Reich through an organisation called SOFINDUS (*Sociedad Financiera e Insustria*; Financial and Industrial Society). The Allies understood all-too-well that SOFINDUS was the official German state trading organisation in Spain. It was responsible for the organisation of carriage and enormous purchases of zinc sphalerite, iron ore, leather, boots, tropical tents and cotton goods, all of which were prohibited as part of the Anglo-Spanish commercial agreements. In addition, however, shipments of military supplies were also leaving Spain for use by German and Italian troops in North Africa, sent via Naples. In August 1941, three Spanish ships were intercepted in transit with cargoes of pyrites for the enemy, leaving Serrano to complain bitterly about their detention.[108]

As before, the dictatorship's interventionist whims and resultant 'Allied punishment' hit the Spanish population hardest throughout 1941. It is not difficult to find examples of deaths through starvation, owing to the absence of foodstuffs or the astronomical prices for goods on the black market. The head of the Falange in Córdoba province, for example, admitted that in the first four months of 1941 alone, sixty-six people had died of hunger in the province.[109] In May, the Francoist authorities in Cádiz conceded that 'the number of deaths in recent months has increased in this city as well as in the towns of the Province', owing to the 'lack of food or [the] worsening of sickness resulting from this'.[110] The reason for these tragic deaths was a problem of supply. In Granada, the Civil Governor admitted at the end of July that despite being 'in the middle of the harvest […] most towns in the province find themselves without supplies of bread'.[111] The problem was not only the scarcity of foodstuffs but the impossibility for working-class Spaniards on miserable wages to access them at the astronomical prices prevailing on the black market

The Slow Road towards Neutrality (December 1941–1943)

By the end of 1941 there were at least three factors that could change the mind of Franco and modify his Germanophilia. First, a monarchist opposition in favour of neutrality had begun to emerge among regime generals in the summer of 1941. Second, on 18 December 1941 two Royal Navy destroyers had sunk one German submarine and captured a second. In both cases the crew had admitted that they had resupplied in the port of Vigo, which would put an end to this type of assistance from the regime. Third, and perhaps most important, on 7 December Japan had attacked the American naval base at Pearl Harbor, which had brought the United States into the war.[112]

[107] AGA, Asuntos Exteriores, 82/3697 (R1083, E9-16), carpeta 16, 26 Nov. 1941.

[108] Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade*, *vol. 2*, 289–90; AGA, Asuntos Exteriores, 82/05444, Expediente 5, Gibraltar, salida 1941, 12 Sep. 1941.

[109] AGA, Presidencia del Gobierno. Movimiento Nacional, Delegación Nacional de Provincias, caja 20548, Informe de la Jefatura Provincial de Córdoba, 7 Apr. 1941.

[110] AGA, Presidencia del Gobierno, Movimiento Nacional. Delegación Nacional de Provincias, caja 20658, Jefe Provincial de FET-JONS a Jefe de Abastecimiento de región sur, 5 May 1941.

[111] AGA, Presidencia del Gobierno, Delegación Nacional de Provincias. Caja 20569, Parte mensual Granada (July 1941), abastos.

[112] Burdick, 'Moro', 267 and footnotes; Moradiellos, *Franco frente a Churchill*, 244–5, 253–4.

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The new context hardened the stance of the Allies towards Spain, with the United States consistently advocating harsher measures with Franco's Spain than the British. Just three weeks later, after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Spanish commercial attaché in Havana complained about the 'spate of detentions' of vessels destined for Spain, citing a steamer loaded with sugar that had been detained for '[carrying] suspected contraband of war'.[113]

The detention of Spanish boats was indeed sped up. Gibraltar – the Mediterranean port held by the British and ever-present in Franco's negotiations to enter the war – was a key site in this process. Various vessels were stopped at Gibraltar while destined for Mediterranean ports, whether they be Spanish, French or Italian. Serrano Súner threw himself into showing his displeasure with the British and seeking the liberation of the vessels. On 28 December 1941, for example, he intervened in the case of the *Monte Contes*, detained with 72 tonnes of tinned fish. In theory, the ship was headed from Vigo to Barcelona to supply the Catalan market. As such he considered that the 'detention is absolutely unjustified' and gave full guarantees there would be 'no re-export' to other countries.[114] The same thing happened with vessels loaded with sweet potatoes, flour, wheat and pyrites.[115]

US entry into the war thus plagued Spanish trade still further, stretching the nation's supply problems to their limit. Fuel scarcity affected many provinces. In Jaén, for example, the leaders of the Falange could not access transport for their activities for over a month, which also stymied the operation of the soup kitchens organised by *Auxilio Social*.[116] Meanwhile, in the provinces of Cácares and Valladolid, it was reported that petrol shortages had damaged the economy and curtailed food distribution.[117]

Nonetheless, the British were always willing to leave the door open for cooperation in exchange for Spanish good conduct. Most of the Spanish diplomatic corps understood this, and they prepared numerous memoranda for their superiors pointing out that if proof could be offered, as well as a promise not to re-export products to Axis countries or their allies in the Eastern theatre, Britain would be prepared to offer navicerts. On 15 December 1941, for example, the chief negotiator in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported in a note that the British would provide a navicert to transport barley 'for the brewing industry' if Spain committed 'not to export malt to the European market'.[118]

The entry of the United States into the war saw the return of a previously used and now powerful tool. On top of blockade and trade restrictions, a massive programme of pre-emptive purchases began of Spanish products that had wartime value (such as wolfram, iron, mercury, cork), with the aim of preventing them from reaching the Third Reich. In January 1942, a desperate Spain accepted the conditions imposed by the Allies. Spain agreed to send coveted products in exchange for inspection of supplies of petroleum and prohibition of its re-export to Germany, Italy, Japan or occupied nations. As part of this, the dictatorship was forced to accept the presence of American and British observers. In spite of his lasting sympathies for the Axis, Franco began to understand that the entry of the United States had signalled an important change in the fortunes of the conflict. In a bitter irony, the eager pursuit of autarky in the hopes of independence had turned into a form of economic tutelage before the Allies.[119]

Nonetheless, the regime's journey towards 'neutrality' remained slow and winding, as was seen in the first six months of 1942. On 12 February, Franco met the Portuguese dictator António de Oliveira Salazar in Seville, where they agreed upon the Iberian Pact (which was formally signed in December 1942). The

[113] AGA, Asuntos Exteriores, 82/05444, Expediente 4, América, entrada, telegrama, 21 Dec. 1941.
[114] AGA, Asuntos Exteriores, 82/05444, Expediente 5, Gibraltar, salida 1941, 28 Dec. 1941.
[115] See, respectively, AGA, Asuntos Exteriores, 82/05444, Expediente 5, Gibraltar, salida 1941, 8 Dec. 1941, 13 Nov. 1941, 22 Apr. 1941 & 12 Dec. 1941.
[116] AGA, Presidencia del Gobierno. Movimiento Nacional. Delegación Nacional de Provincias. Caja 20591, Parte mensual Jaén (Jan. 1942).
[117] FNFF, Documento 27197, Informe secreto del Servicio de Información de la Dirección General de Seguridad, 5 Feb. 1942.
[118] AGA, Asuntos Exteriores, 82/05445 (1794, 11–22), carpeta 22, Gran Bretaña, 15 Dec. 1941.
[119] Moradiellos, *Franco frente a Churchill*, 259–61.

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agreement committed both countries to mutual non-aggression, although it represented a tacit offer of neutrality by Franco and his agreement to respect the frontiers of Spain.[120] Even so, the regime's Germanophilia continued to find expression in the Spanish press in these months, as well as in Franco's speeches.

Meanwhile, internal tensions within the regime were increasing. The army appeared to be moving towards a preference for neutrality and monarchy. The Falange (and Serrano) were increasingly in favour of intervention in the war and the fascistisation of the dictatorship. Meanwhile, faced with mass shortages, Demetrio Carceller was ordered by Serrano, with the agreement of Franco, to negotiate the trade of two products that were essential to the survival of the dictatorship, namely the import of American petroleum and the export of wolfram. For this reason, relations between Spain and the Allies began to improve in the summer of 1942. In August, a further commercial agreement was signed. Strategic raw materials for the war would be exported in return for imports of raw materials essential to Spanish industry and for foodstuffs for the Spanish population. The petroleum quota assigned to Spain would allow its economy to function, but not to accumulate reserves. In terms of wolfram, meanwhile, which was vital for the armour in war vehicles and planes, the Allies threw themselves into buying it from Spain in the hope of choking its supply to the Germans, flooding the Spanish economy with foreign currency.[121]

Only the emergence of an internal crisis within the regime could definitively distance it from its belligerent ambitions, and consequently improve the supply of food to the population. On 16 August 1942, at the basilica in Begoña, Falangists threw two grenades into a crowd attending a Mass in honour of Carlists who had fallen in the civil war. On 2 September, Franco reshuffled his cabinet, dismissing Serrano Súñer and replacing him with the ex-minister (and general) Gómez Jordana, who favoured neutrality.[122]

From September 1942, while the soldiers of the *Wehrmacht* were clashing with the Soviets in Stalingrad, and with Germany and its allies in retreat in North Africa following the Allied landings of Operation Torch (November 1942), Spain began to shift its political posture. With trade relations controlled by the Allies but starting to normalise, the economy also improved, particularly in relation to fuel products. Early 1943 saw the fall of Mussolini's fascist regime, while the Italian Ambassador in Madrid noted the steady distancing of Franco from the Axis cause.[123]

In this new context, 1943 proved to be a good year for Spain in terms of foreign trade. The momentum in the war had shifted, and so did the Franco regime's explicit political position in favour of the Axis. Spain officially declared its neutrality on 1 October. Accordingly, the supply of food to the country, although far from ideal, improved. In July 1943, the Duke of Alba delivered a speech in London. He acknowledged that trade had improved significantly and that 'it will not be long before a return to business as usual in trade relations'. This matched what was happening in Spain, which in his opinion was 'much better than the novelists and journalists are saying', denying that Spain was 'starving and panicked'.[124] The ambassador was at least partly right. Food supply had indeed improved by this point and the socio-economic situation was no longer one of famine. Conditions were still far from normal, however. In May 1943, for example, it was reported from the city of Málaga that:

[120] Preston, *Franco*, 714. Juan Carlos Jiménez Redondo, 'La política del bloque ibérico. Las relaciones hispano-portuguesas (1936–1949)', *Melanges de la Casa de Velázquez*, 29, 3 (1993), 175–201; Esther Sacristán and María Soledad Gómez de las Heras, 'España y Portugal durante la segunda guerra mundial', *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma. Serie V, Historia Contemporánea*, 2 (1989), 209–26; Antonio José Telo, 'La estrategia de Portugal y sus relaciones con España', in Stanley Payne and Delia Contreras García, eds., *España y la II Guerra Mundial* (Madrid: Editorial Complutense, 1996), 131–44.

[121] Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade, vol. 2*, 294–305, 308–13.

[122] Further dismissals balanced the government between its various political tendencies, with the removal of monarchist Colonel Valentín Galarza as Minister of the Interior and the resignation of General José Varela as Minister for the Army.

[123] Manuel Peña Díaz and Francisco Contreras Pérez, 'Carceller Segura y el origen del sector petrolero español', in Raúl Molina Recio, ed., *Pioneros. Empresas y empresarios en el primer tercio del siglo XX en España* (Granada: Comares, 2019), 93–4; Tusell and Queipo de Llano, *Franco y Mussolini*, 342–5.

[124] AGA, Asuntos Exteriores, 54/6940, N8B, Cámara de Comercio Española en Londres, Discurso del Duque de Alba, Jun. 1943.

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> The situation is approaching normality, although in the last few days it has been necessary to dole out rations of alternative types of bread, since the wheat for making bread failed to arrive on time. It is becoming very scarce and insufficient in the province.[125]

The situation might have been improving, but the effects of autarky were still being felt in the Spanish economy. Over the course of 1943 the worst of the famine had passed, even if Spain would continue to be plagued by scarcity, rationing and deprivation throughout the rest of the 'hunger years'. By April, the situation had improved in the province of Jaén. Supply 'was proceeding satisfactorily, with quotas of oil and soap being distributed normally', and the food ration had been increased – it had even been possible to hand out 'condensed milk for the young children'. In May, the ration for the province of Málaga was at last back 'to normal', although 'in the past few days it has been necessary to distribute rations of different types of bread, owing to flour for baking not arriving in time'.[126]

Tensions over Spanish neutrality in the Second World War and its collaboration with the Axis did not end until the closing stages of the conflict. The favourable progress of the war for the Allies in 1943 prompted increased pressure on the Franco regime in the 'battle for wolfram'. After the Quebec Conference (August 1943), the United States pushed for a change in economic relations with Spain. If the export of this vital mineral to Germany did not cease, an economic embargo would be placed on Spain. Indeed, a complete embargo on petroleum to Spain began in January 1944.[127] This threat also included the end of preventative purchases of raw materials from Spain, with which the latter had settled its trade balance.[128] Even so, the British again diverged from their American friends in this extreme course, signing an agreement over wolfram in May 1944. Churchill's indulgence towards Franco was again decisive.[129] In exchange for a relative normalisation of supply and trade relations with Spain, the latter would considerably limit its exports of wolfram to Germany.[130] Thanks to the coveted mineral and the new military context, Spain's socio-economic situation would improve relative to earlier years.

Between 1943 and 1945 the worst of the rigid economic blockade was over, but the economic policy of autarky would be retained for the rest of the decade, prolonging socio-economic difficulties. In 1946, with both the war and the economic blockade at an end, Spain experienced a second period of famine. Autarky continued to leave Spain mired in socio-economic hardship, and just one year of poor agricultural harvests, owing largely to insufficient rainfall (1944–5), had seen famine return. A British annual report on 1946 stated that the low cereal harvest, a very small olive stock and a sharp fall in livestock population 'has caused such a shortage of food during the first half of 1946 that some sections of the population suffered from semi-starvation'.[131] For the *Daily Telegraph* 'starvation' was then 'a real factor in the lives of the poor of Southern Spain'. Once again, famine affected the working classes most harshly. In the city of Córdoba, for example, a British observer wrote that 'in the maze of poor, mean little streets that I have visited, men, women and children are dying of hunger or from diseases resulting from malnutrition.'[132]

Conclusions

Historians have long poured over Spain's political and economic relations with the belligerents during the Second World War. Nonetheless, Spain's internal economic situation has remained largely absent

[125] AGA, Presidencia del Gobierno. Movimiento Nacional. Delegación Nacional de Provincias. Caja 20618, Parte mensual Málaga (May 1943).

[126] See, respectively, AGA, Presidencia del Gobierno, Delegación Nacional de Provincias, Caja 20614, Parte mensual Jaén (April 1943); Caja 20618, Parte mensual Málaga (May 1943).

[127] Carlos Collado Seidel, '¿De Hendaya a San Francisco?..', 57.

[128] Hayes, *Misión de guerra*, 227–30

[129] Moradiellos, *Franco frente a Churchill*, 352, 360–1.

[130] Joan Maria Thomàs, *La batalla del wolframio. Estados Unidos y España de Pearl Harbor a la guerra fría, 1941–1947* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2010), 75–77, 84–100, 177–200; Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade, vol. 2*, 567–76.

[131] TNA, FO 498/1, Spain. Annual Report, 1946, 19–23.

[132] TNA, FO 371/60412, 'Starvation in South Spain', 26-9-1946.

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from such analyses. Today, with a greater understanding and awareness of the existence of a Spanish famine (1939–42), as well as studies of European famines more broadly in this period, it is important to introduce this factor into analyses of those years, which proved so crucial both to Spain and to Europe as a whole.

Franco's famine was the result of various factors. Most important was the economic policy of autarky, adopted voluntarily by the 'New State' and clearly inspired by fascist ideas. The legacies of the destruction of the Spanish Civil War must also be taken into account. Nonetheless, as the present article has demonstrated, the strictly managed economic blockade that the Allies imposed upon Spain was also a key factor to take into consideration. The restrictive trade policies of Britain and the United States resulted from a manifestly belligerent and pro-Axis stance on the part of Franco's Spain. For three years (1939–42), the dictatorship tried to be an active player on the European political chessboard, showing its sympathy for the Nazi and fascist causes and collaborating actively with them. In those three years, the men at the top of the dictatorship were fully aware how these belligerent inclinations were affecting the population, especially the Spanish working classes. It was in these three years that the Spanish famine unfolded. As with other famines in interwar Europe, political causes played a decisive role in bringing about Spain's famine.

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