

# Spain at the Beginning of the Second World War: A Reaction to the German Invasion of Poland. International Relations and the Press of a Neutral Country

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## Abstract

During the Spanish Civil War, the victorious government of Francisco Franco established close political and military co-operation with Nazi Germany with the objective of combatting Communist influence. This alliance was to be furthered by the establishment and active development of cultural and scientific collaboration between the two countries, and a Spanish-German cultural agreement was elaborated for this specific purpose. However, the draft of the document caused great anxiety amongst Spanish conservatives and the Catholic hierarchy. The agreement was due to have been ratified in September 1939, but following Hitler's aggression against Poland the Spanish government refused. This proved to be the first step towards a gradual weakening of ties between Madrid and Berlin, and indeed towards Hitler's alliance with Stalin (the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact); ultimately, the Third Reich's invasion of predominantly Catholic Poland caused General Franco's cabinet to establish closer relations with the Anglo-Saxon powers. For Franco, these developments became a decisive argument against involving Spain in the Second World War, which fact was of importance for the final result of the conflict.

The Spanish Civil War came to an end in April 1939. While authoritarian, the new national state, which gathered together various right-wing political groupings, was not Fascist. The formation of the National Government, broadly represented by the entirety of political milieus that had been integrated by decree into the National Movement, reinforced the image of General Franco as the sole political leader of Spain and at once eliminated the air of transience and uncertainty with which existing state bodies had been beset. The organizations established in 1938 and later years in order to help form and then support the National Government were flexible enough to evolve and adapt more or less independently to future political developments.

However, the sole holder of the key to the new political building was General Francisco Franco. Francisco Franco Bahamonde, born in El Ferrol in 1892, had entered the Toledo Infantry Academy in 1907 in the wake of the temporary closure of the Naval Academy, where he had initially enrolled following a family tradition. Sent to fight in the African colony of Morocco, he embarked on a meteoric career, becoming captain in 1915, major in 1916, lieutenant-colonel in 1922, colonel in 1925, and brigadier-general in 1926. His youth stands out among an old-fashioned generalcy, for at thirty he was appointed head of the newly formed Spanish Foreign Legion, while three years later he became the youngest general in Europe. By then, this Galician officer was a role model for many of the younger military cadre. In 1923, king Alfonso XIII made him a Gentleman of the Royal Chamber, while in 1928 General Miguel Primo de Rivera, then Prime Minister, appointed him director of the newly created General Military Academy in Zaragoza, which post he held until its dissolution by the Minister of War, Manuel Azaña.<sup>1</sup>

Initially, his career during the Second Republic progressed slowly. In 1932, he was made commander of the garrison in A Coruña, and in 1933 he was given military command of the Balearic Islands. However, in 1934, with the center-right back in power, his luck changed. Promotion to the rank of major-general was followed by appointment as an advisor to José María Gil Robles, the Minister of War and leader of the CEDA, the main formation of the right. When the socialist revolution broke out in Asturias, Franco was charged with its suppression using the Spanish Army. Although he was successful in his task, the experience marked him, for he had never before participated in a war in which ideas were the key to

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<sup>1</sup> Readers who would like to deepen their knowledge of General Franco have numerous books and studies at their disposal, however the most extensive and detailed, complete with a comprehensive archive, is the monumental work by Luis Suárez (Suárez, 1997). A more critical view has been presented by Juan Pablo Fusi (Fusi, 1985). There are fewer writings devoted to exclusively military aspects; some were authored by the general himself, while a new book has recently been published by General Salvador Fontenla (Fontenla, 2019; Casas de la Vega, 1998).

the struggle. Socialism and Communism were now viewed as enemies of Christian Civilization – which he, meanwhile, was invariably ready to defend. His victory over the revolutionaries was rewarded with the position of Chief of the General Staff. However, following the elections of February 1936 and the left's ascension to power, Franco was appointed commander of the Canary Islands, far from the centers of power. It was there that he was surprised by news of the military coup, which he joined at the last minute. Franco duly flew to North Africa, where he took command of the local troops and, following the death of General Sanjurjo, the anticipated leader of the uprising, in a plane crash, became the leader of the Nationalists.<sup>2</sup>

Although during its first two decades in power the single party exercised both military and political leadership, it was subordinate to the interests of the Army and the authorities of the State – completely unlike its counterparts in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. During the Civil War, political parties in the national zone had no influence on the direction of military operations – this sphere was the exclusive preserve of the Army. At the time, the standing of the various political groups depended on the strength of the volunteer militias that they raised, which gave them some influence in contacts with the military authorities. The Falangists and Carlists had thousands of volunteers and readily made them available for combat, while the rest of the right-wing political forces steadily lost their social support. This process culminated in the Decree of 19 April 1937, whereby the two major forces, the Falange and the traditionalist Communion, were unified. This new entity, which was the brainchild of Ramón Serrano Suñer, Franco's brother-in-law and the former deputy head of the CEDA, deferred to the leadership of General Franco and duly dissolved all independent bodies of both movements. Days later, the remaining political groups, including the CEDA, the Renovación Española (Spanish Renewal) and the Asociación cultural de Acción Española (Think Tank "Spanish Action") Spanish Action Cultural Society, which had been largely lethargic throughout the war to date, sent statements of support for the unification process. However, although an attempt was made to ensure equal treatment for the two main groups, the perceived "modernity" of the Falange prevailed.

Significantly, the Catholic Church was one of the most important factors that prevented the fascization of the regime, especially when, shortly after the end of the Civil War, the Primate of Spain, Cardinal Isidro

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<sup>2</sup> General José Sanjurjo had made a name for himself during the Rif War, where he met Frank Francisco, a subordinate. During the Second Republic he led a coup in 1932 and was sentenced to death, however this was commuted to deportation in Dueso. He was subsequently amnestied by the government of Alejandro Lerroux and went into exile in Oliveira Salazar's Portugal.

Gomá, published his pastoral “Christianity and the Homeland,” in which he outlined the key social tenets that the new state should keep in mind:

- The family was established through the indissoluble union of marriage.
- The Church and State had to engage in fluent collaboration, as Catholicism was the religion of the nation.
- Laws had to be subservient to moral principles, which constituted the framework of natural human rights.
- Social relations were to be founded in a deep sense of justice and love of one’s neighbor, without which social peace was unattainable.

In this way, the Church made known its objective of avoiding, insofar as possible, the totalitarian influences demonstrated by German National Socialism, which was most feared for its racist paganism. Re-Christianization was the only means of achieving peace, focused around religious unity, in a totally Menendezpelayian concept.<sup>3</sup> The main institution tasked with implementing this policy would be the Society of Jesus, which was reinstated and received back its assets, previously seized by the Republican government in 1932. Through their schools – the University of Deusto, the University Pontifical of Comillas, the Institute of Sarriá, and the numerous apostolic youth organizations espousing the Ignatian spirit – the Jesuits would be responsible for the intense evangelization of Spanish society; we should also mention in this context the role of the Gregorian University of Rome, which exerted a strong formative influence on the future members of the Spanish episcopate. The development achieved by the Catholic Action, and particularly its specialized apostolic organizations, would help counteract the foreign political influences of the times, and also serve as a counterweight to the prevailing neo-Falangism of Ramón Serrano Suñer. To disseminate its alternate discourse, the Catholic Publishing House resurfaced with a broad network of regional newspapers, and evening *YA* (young adult) titles gained widespread influence.

The above notwithstanding the Falangists were opposed to being classified as Fascists, which could suggest that their movement was a mimicry of the Italian. Also, there was the real possibility of being accused of totalitarianism, of supporting Hegelian ideas, and thus being condemned by the Catholic Church. In a country such as Spain, where the ecclesiastical institution maintained a great influence over the vital discourse of the traditional right, national trade unionism sought to find its intellectual niche in Europe’s progressive leaning, modernizing debate

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<sup>3</sup> The historian Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo (1856–1912) would equate Catholicism with the essence of Spanishness, disregarding the different heterodoxies developed in Spain as “anti-Spanish.” He was active in the Catholic Union of Alejandro Pidal y Mon, and became a conservative deputy for Zaragoza in 1891.

first and foremost through its renowned authors, recognized for their secularism: Miguel de Unamuno, Pio Baroja, and José Ortega y Gasset. Counteracting this – to give but one example – Cardinal Segura, the former Primate of Spain, returned from exile and occupied the vacant archbishopric of Seville, where he maintained an attitude of radical opposition to the ideas emanating from national trade unionism.

The Falange of the National Movement, although pressured by Franco's brother-in-law, Ramón Serrano Suñer, to support the more technical measures, had a clash of interests with the former conservative classes, with which Suñer maintained a precarious balance of power, with the ultimate arbitrator being General Franco. The single party was controlled by Serrano Falangists, but the government was the result of the confluence of various political factions, with no predominance of one over the others. For this reason, neither a national trade union revolution nor the fascization of the regime were possible.

### Spain's International Relations

The main countries that assisted in the triumph of the national side were, in order of importance, Italy, Germany, Portugal and Ireland, while the Soviet Union and France were the leading supporters of the Republicans. Italy provided weapons, supplies, and a body of tens of thousands of volunteers. Whereas Germany sent the Condor Legion, a specialized aviation and armored corps which, however, never had more than 5,500 soldiers on Spanish territory at any one time. Portugal played a decisive role in securing aid for the Nationalists, and also provided a few thousand voluntary combatants, while the Irish formed a battalion-sized unit. As regards the Republicans, France helped deliver key assistance and supplies, and essentially made possible the arrival of the International Brigades which, although organized by the Communist International (the Comintern), brought together tens of thousands of anti-Fascist fighters. In exchange for the gold reserves of the Bank of Spain, the USSR furnished much of the armament of the Republican "Popular Army," and also sent several thousand specialists.<sup>4</sup> The Civil War ended in April 1939, and in September the Second World War broke out.

The German-Soviet alliance surprised the Spanish government, which had only recently signed the Anti-Comintern Pact (8 April 1939), and it started to consider suspending ties with Germany. The German Ambassador, Eberhard von Stohrer, tried to convince Franco that Poland had

<sup>4</sup> For a more complete description of the internationalization of the Civil War: Coverdale, 1979; Avilés, 1994; Salas Larrazabal, 1974; Hidalgo, 1975; Hurtado, 2013.

launched an aggression against the city of Danzig, however without success. The Italian envoy, Gastone Gambara, who had commanded the Italian Corps of Volunteer Troops (CTV) in the Spanish Civil War, did not want war, but he interpreted that it was inevitable precisely because Germany did. France sent as its ambassador Marshal Pétain, the hero of Verdun and a supporter of the right. Many Spanish officers had been trained at the French War School, where they studied the French experience of the First World War. For example, Franco was made a Knight of the Legion of Honor for his co-operation with the French Army in the suppression of the Rif insurgency of Abd el-Krim. France wanted to gain Spanish neutrality, in return offering to facilitate the return of the country's gold deposits and its fleet, which the Republican government had sent to seek refuge in French ports. The English envoy, Sir Maurice Drummond Peterson, who had previously been His Majesty's Ambassador to His Majesty the King of Iraq, also wanted to guarantee the neutrality of Spain, however in exchange for the development of economic exchange that would help with the country's post-war reconstruction. Many English companies had business interests in Spain and did not want to lose them to the Germans. Portugal had a regime similar to that of Spain, however it maintained close relations with the United Kingdom and, as it transpired, successfully influenced Spain to stay out of the war. The Portuguese Ambassador, Pedro Teotónio Pereira,<sup>5</sup> went on to criticize the Spanish government for not continuing its critique of the German-Soviet alliance. A German invasion of Portugal could have been possible only with the consent of Spain. But the French and English viewed Spain as fundamentally subordinate to Germany, and therefore its support for Italian efforts to avoid a global war would not be backed by the Western powers. Whereas Germany considered Spain as a second-tier country, which should be grateful for the military support it received.

The German Embassy, through its press officer, Josef Hans Lazar, an Austrian of Jewish origin born in Istanbul and married to a Romanian aristocrat, Elena Petrino Borkowska, would be responsible for buying Spanish journalists and flooding the country's newspapers with news originating from German agencies (Schulze Schneider, 1994; Schulze Schneider, 1995). Josef Hans Lazar, together with his deputy, Ekkehard Tertsch, organized intense information and travel campaigns, during which leading representatives of the press and propaganda leaders of the National Movement visited Germany. The British Embassy opted to leverage its "influence" with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Colonel Juan Beigbeder, who was German-speaking and a top expert on North Africa,

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5 He was then sent to Brazil, the USA and Great Britain, respectively, in recognition of his work in Spain (Braga Da Cruz, 2004).

and, importantly, was having an affair with the British spy Rosalinda Fox. Under her influence, the minister became a shameless Anglophile, which led to his eventual dismissal (Romero Salvadó, 2013, p. 78). Whereas the Spanish Communists showed their closeness to Stalin. Dolores Ibarruri, who represented the most radical wing of Stalinism in Spanish Communism and at the time resided in the USSR, went on to publish an article defending the Soviet invasion of Poland (in her mind, it was aimed against the country's Fascist landowners) in "España Popular," which was edited by Spanish exiles in Mexico (Ibarruri, 1940, p. 1). Her political opponent, Sofia Casanova, a right-wing writer who lived in Poland and was of Galician origin like General Franco, wrote on "ABC" in defense of Poland, calling on Spain to intercede on behalf of the fellow Catholic - albeit Slavic - country (Casanova, 1939, p. 8).

### The Spanish Press During the Second World War

All the above notwithstanding, the Spanish press took a position mostly favorable to Germany. The country's written media could be roughly divided into three blocks: newspapers of the National Movement; independent newspapers; and the Catholic Editorial.

The first group was born through the law of 13 July 1940, which gave the National Delegation of Press and Propaganda of the single party ownership of all publications and printing machinery that had belonged to left-wing political formations linked to the Popular Front and had been seized by the State. Among the newspapers controlled by the Delegation, the most important was "Arriba," the official organ of FET-JONS - the single party. Its director, Xavier de Echarri, was made responsible for ensuring that it espoused support for the Third Reich throughout the world war (Bowen, 2000, p. 87). The remaining papers, being local or provincial, dutifully followed its line. The Movement also owned magazines and periodicals addressed to individual social groups (youth, women) and devoted to specific fields of interest (sport, culture). Another newspaper of great importance was the evening "Pueblo," the organ of the Vertical Trade Unions. Initially belonging to the National Delegation of Press and Propaganda, in 1948 it became officially subordinate to the National Delegation of Trade Unions. Jesús Ercilla, its first director, with strong roots in the JONS movement, maintained a philo-German line similar to "Arriba."<sup>6</sup> However, it was "Marca," the National Movement's sports newspaper, that had the largest circulation and the greatest readership.

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<sup>6</sup> The JONS Movement gathered members of Ramiro Ledesma Ramos' formation from before its unification with the Falanx of Jose Antonio prior to the Civil War, and had always defended a Fascist concept very similar to the Italian.



After the war, the Nationalists returned the assets that they had appropriated from the Republicans. Among the independent media that reappeared was the Madrid-based “ABC,” which had previously enjoyed full financial and political independence. It was a socially and politically conservative newspaper, a defender of order and authority, and also the unofficial organ of the monarchist supporters of Alfonso XIII and later of his son, Juan, the Count of Barcelona. Its readers belonged mainly to the wealthy aristocracy and upper bourgeoisie. José Ignacio Luca de Tena, a member of a landowning family, served as director, and when he was appointed Spanish Ambassador to Chile, he was replaced by José Losada de la Torre, who would hold the position throughout the world conflict and right until February 1946. By 1943, José Ignacio Luca de Tena had already returned to Spain and resumed his effective presidency of the Spanish Press Group. During this period, the newspaper oscillated between Germanophilia and Anglophilia, strengthening the latter as Germany continued to lose the war (Olmos, 2002).

Another of the leading independent newspapers, “La Vanguardia Española,” based in Barcelona, was restored by the Nationalists to its proper owner, Count Carlos Godó. However, the Minister of the Interior, Ramón Serrano Suñer, imposed as its director Luis de Galinsoga, who had always been an enemy of the Catalan language. Even so, “La Vanguardia” maintained its hegemony in Catalonia. As a conservative newspaper representing the upper bourgeoisie of Barcelona, it steadfastly defended a moderate regionalistic line.<sup>7</sup> Its international section, headed by the renowned journalist Santiago Nadal,<sup>8</sup> consistently supported the Allied cause throughout the war (Nogué & Barrera, 2006).

The next in terms of importance was “El Correo Español-El Pueblo Vasco,” which first appeared on 13 April 1938 following the merger of “El Pueblo Vasco,” owned by the Ybarra brothers of Revilla, and “El Correo Española,” which was run by the National Movement. Indeed, the Nationalists would control the medium until 1947, when the Ybarras left the single party and pooled their interests with the business group of Bergareche and Echevarría, the editors of the independent “El Noticiero bilbaíno” (1875); in 1937, this newspaper had been requisitioned by the Republicans, while later it was suppressed by the National Movement, with the shortage of paper being given as the main reason for the move. The

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7 The main grouping of the Catalan right was the Lliga Regionalista, a conservative and regionalistic party led by Francesc Cambó. During the Civil War it supported the Nationalists, while in the Franco era it turned its attention to economic affairs, leaving politics and political advocacy in the hands of the Falangists and monarchists.

8 Santiago Nadal, a monarchist journalist, had been threatened with death by the anarchists prior to his escape to the national zone. His support for the Allied cause led to him being decorated by the British government.



Ybarra, together with Bergareche and Echeverría, bought most of the stock and duly set up Bilbao Editorial, S. A., whose president was Javier Ybarra Bergé (Chacón, 2015, pp. 655–669).

The Ybarra's "El Pueblo Vasco" had a fundamentally liberal-conservative leaning, defending the Alfonsine monarchy, the interests of the Catholic Church, and Spanish nationalism in a region with an intense Basque nationalist presence. Its first director – imposed by the Falangists – was the monarchist Santiago Nadal Gaya (1909–1974). He was replaced at the beginning of 1940 by Joaquín Zuazagoitia Azcorra (1892–1971), who worked in the capacity until 1950 (VVAA, 1985).

In Bilbao itself, its great rival for decades was "La Gaceta del Norte," owned by the Urquijo and Careaga families. Its leaning was independent and Catholic, and it always printed some sections in the Basque language. During the Republican period, the paper supported the CEDA, although it was heavily influenced by the Jesuits. As a Catholic publication, it held a very critical view of the racism inherent in German National Socialism. Its director until 1951 was Aureliano López Becerra, a legendary persona in the industry (Lerchundi, 1985; Orella, 2003).

The third block of newspapers were those belonging to the Catholic Editorial. This group that had emerged from "El Debate," a newspaper founded by Ángel Herrera Oria and the Catholic Association of Propagandists; during the Republican period, it was viewed as the unofficial mouthpiece of the CEDA, due to its "incidental" defense of Catholicism. After the war, the Ministry did not allow the publication of two newspapers by the same publishing house in Madrid, and so the authorities opted to retain the evening "YA." Minister Serrano Suñer, who held a negative view of the editorial board, imposed as its director Juan José Pradera, who managed the paper from 1939 to 1952 (Sinova, 2006, p. 58). Pradera was the son of Víctor Pradera, the official ideologue of Carlism, who had been executed by Basque nationalists in San Sebastián during the Civil War. The "YA" had always been perceived as speaking for the Catholic Church, and indeed the articles which it published displayed a Christian Democratic bias. The Catholic Publishing House went on to rival the Movement printing network by having its own newspapers in various Spanish cities, such as "Ideal" in Granada; "Hoy" in Badajoz; "La Verdad" in Murcia; and "El Ideal Gallego" in A Coruña. Its output was later augmented by the Logos Agency, the "Jeromín" children's magazine, the "Dígame" weekly, the Christian Authors Library, the Rioduro publishing house, and the "Letras y Criterio" magazines (Cantavella & Serrano, 2010).

Although the regime in Spain was authoritarian, it was far from the totalitarianism of Nazism or Communism. The above brief description of the press media in the country shows that while there were restrictions on freedom, the different political groupings of the right were allowed to have their own media. Furthermore, censorship – initially

very strong – was limited exclusively to moral issues, being under the exclusive guidance of the Catholic Church.

### The Orientation of the First Governments

As regards the governments of this first period of General Franco's rule, we should observe that they were characterized by a balance between the influences of various political factions, with none enjoying hegemony. In the second national government, established on 9 August 1939, the presence of military officers loyal to Francisco Franco was essential. Chief among them were General Varela, the Minister of War; Admiral Moreno, Chief Admiral of the Land, Sea and Air Forces of the Mediterranean Blockade; and General Yagüe, Minister of the Air Force. Other important ministers included the Anglophile Juan Beigbeder, who was in charge of Foreign Affairs and maintained the pro-British line favored by Gómez Jordana until he was dismissed following his affair with Miss Fox; General Luís Alarcón de la Lastra, who was placed in charge of Industry and Commerce; General Agustín Muñoz Grandes, who served in the capacity of General Secretary of the Nationalist Movement; and Alfonso Peña Boeuf, an engineer, monarchist and former functionary of the dictatorship of General Miguel Primo de Rivera (1923–1930), who was appointed Minister of Public Works. The Carlists maintained their hold on Justice through Esteban Bilbao, a Basque, while the Christian Democrats made their importance known with the award of two key ministries: of the Treasury, which was entrusted to José Larraz, and of Education, under José Ibáñez Martín. The Falangist presence was reduced to Ministry of Agriculture, headed by Joaquín Benjumea, a veteran adherent of Primo de Rivera, and Minister without Portfolio Rafael Sánchez Mazas, a poet who was one of the founding members of the original Falange. Shortly thereafter, Demetrio Carceller, a Catalan and Falangist of the old guard, would take over the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, however he was not a revolutionary. He came from conservative business circles and was a friend of José Antonio, the son of Miguel Primo de Rivera. In 1940, Sánchez Mazas would be replaced by Pedro Gamero del Castillo, a young neo-Falangist from the Catholic youth of Seville and a friend of Ramón Serrano Suñer.

In the third national government, which was sworn in on 20 May 1941, the appointment of Ramón Serrano Suñer as Minister of Foreign Affairs signaled a visible change of orientation in favor of the Fascist powers. The Germanophilia of Ramón Serrano Suñer stemmed from the Civil War: his brothers had helped him escape to the Nationalist zone, however they were in turn killed by the Communists when the English and French Embassies refused to give them refuge. As minister, he clearly personified the most pro-German elements of the Falange. The Carlists and the monarchists, on the other hand, were more pro-British.

The position of Minister of the Interior was assumed by Valentín Galarza, despite the efforts of the Falangists. The Army ministers remained in their posts, although the pro-Falangist Minister of the Air Force, General Yagüe, resigned in favor of Juan Vigón, a prominent monarchist. The Falangist presence, at a time when the Axis was strong, was further increased by the transfer of Joaquín Benjumea to the Treasury and his replacement in Agriculture by Miguel Primo de Rivera, the creation of a new ministry – Labor – headed by José Antonio Girón de Velasco from the old guardian sector of Valladolid, and the emergence of a group of conservative Catholic Falangists under the leadership of José Luís Arrese. As it turned out, this government most closely followed the line set by the Axis powers.

On 3 September 1942, following the events of Begoña, the composition of the government was changed, with both Ramón Serrano Suñer and General José Enrique Varela being dismissed. For clarity we should explain that on that day Falangist activists – some of whom had even served in the Blue Division – threw a pair of hand grenades at the Minister of War, General Varela, who, well known for his pro-Allied sympathies, was participating in a Mass for the fallen of a Tercio (combatant unit) of the Requete organization; as a result of their action, seventy veterans suffered injuries. Differences and provocations between Carlists and Falangists had been acute and mutual before the attack. Juan José Domínguez, the former Falangist combatant who was recognized as the one who threw the grenade, was tried and shot. The post of Minister of Foreign Affairs, vacated by Serrano Suñer, was assumed by the Anglophile military veteran Gomez de la Jordana; following his death (of natural causes), the position was taken over by José Félix de Lequerica, a pro-monarchist businessman from Bilbao. As regards the Ministry of War, the Carlist General José Enrique Varela was relieved by General Carlos Asensio, a prominent Africanist who had commanded native (regular) troops both in Africa and during the Civil War but had taken a stance similar to the Germanophilia of the Minister of Justice, the Carlist Esteban Bilbao, who was replaced by the Catalan regionalist Eduardo Aunós (Orella, 2001; Equipo Mundo, 1971).

Meanwhile, General Francisco Franco, who had received an image of the Virgin of Poland from Stanislaw Pilcicki considered that Poland, a fellow Catholic country, was a bastion against Communism. Franco supported Italian diplomacy in his attempt to avoid a world war and guaranteed France and Britain neutrality in a possible conflict. General Franco's opinion was that in the event of a German war against France, England and Poland, only the Soviets would benefit. His focus was to continue the struggle for peace and at once guarantee the neutrality of Spain, in direct co-operation with Portugal, so as to keep any conflict away from the Iberian Peninsula. Spain would not raise its voice in the press against Germany, but neither would it join the fighting, while the Polish Embassy was allowed to function even after the country was invaded. Germany

blamed the failure of its policies in Spain on the Catholic Church. General Franco was a conservative officer and a faithful servant of the Church, which in a sense made him useless for the purpose of furthering German interests. For Hitler, Spain's problem was the Catholic Church, and Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop actually went on to say that the Third Reich had been wrong to support the Nationalists in the Civil War. However, although the Catholic Church was sure of the loyalty of the Franco regime, some in the Vatican voiced doubts in light of the country's seemingly close rapport with Germany. Interestingly, the Spanish Ambassador had to ask for help from the Superior-General of the Society of Jesus, Włodzimierz Ledóchowski, to counter accusations against Spain promoted by clerics who supported Basque nationalism.

Through the reports of their own Ambassador, Eberhard von Stohrer, the Germans knew that the Spanish military would be inclined to a monarchical restoration, that the Catholic Church had a great influence on society, and that the powerful Ramón Serrano Suñer, despite his Germanophilia, was still a Catholic corporatist. Interestingly, the small and radically pro-German groups of Falangists of the old guard – successfully marginalized from power by Franco and the conservative military – nevertheless misled the Third Reich and Fascist Italy into believing that Serrano Suñer would sway Spain decisively in favor of the Axis powers. In reality, however, the new government never ceased to be a coalition of right-wing political factions, controlled and balanced by General Franco. The single party was never the deciding factor in government, and possessed neither the power nor the independence required to eclipse General Franco, who further justified his strategic vision of Spanish neutrality in the global conflict by the hardship and suffering brought on by the Civil War (an argument which he put forward to Hitler on a number of occasions). Except for some Germanophilist Falangist elements, no Spanish political circles of note supported the country's entry into the global conflict.

In a clash between the French, whose army after the First World War was considered the best trained in the world, and the Germans, Franco could name only one winner: the Soviets. For Franco, any weakening of the Western states would only help strengthen the USSR's appetite for Europe. But when France capitulated to Germany and Italy entered the war on its side, Spain shifted to extreme neutrality, officially declaring its non-belligerence on 10 June 1940. In light of its trade debts, the country maintained commercial dealings with Britain, France, Italy and Germany. However, the political relationship with Portugal was of key significance, designed as it was to keep the two countries out of the global conflict by taking advantage of the proximity of the Portuguese to London, and of the Spaniards to the Rome-Berlin Axis. On 14 June 1940, at the height of the fighting on the Western front, the Mehalas (indigenous troops in Spanish service) occupied the international city of Tangier. Importantly,

this Spanish conquest was not accompanied by any annexationist claims – its sole purpose was to make clear that the country was prepared to defend a strict neutrality in collaboration with Portugal.

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