

The relationship between Italy and United Kingdom during the Spanish Civil War

1. Spain in the 1930s: The Second Republic

The troubles in Spain began, or rather converged, in the first half of 1931 with the advent of the Republic. The downfall of the monarchy and the transition to a democratic form of government occurred in a period marked by unrest and upheaval. Niceto Alcalá Zamora¹ assumed leadership, heading a moderate left-wing coalition that included the socialists of the PSOE led by the trade unionist Largo Caballero, the moderate center-left led by Indalecio Prieto, and the radical party of Alejandro Lerro, described by Paul Preston as “reformists of the organized working class”².

The flaw in this coalition lay in its heterogeneity, as the various factions had different objectives. At the time of its establishment, a profound social and political crisis ensued, a result of severe economic mistakes during Miguel Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, leading to massive public debt and the devaluation of the peseta. Another significant consequence was the interruption of investments by landowners and industrialists, which were diverted abroad due to anticipated financial repercussions from the new government's social program³.

Despite the unfavorable climate, the new government convened the Cortes to draft the Constitution of the new Republic⁴. Subsequently, efforts were made to reform the country through agricultural reform, restructuring of the armed forces, and attempts to address the situations in Catalonia and the Basque region, as well as the intricate relationship with the Church. In rural Spain, new decrees were

¹ Niceto Alcalá Zamora set up the first provisional government of the second republic, later becoming president and head of state, leaving his office to Manuel Azaña shortly after the constitution was approved.

² Preston P., *La guerra civile spagnola. Reazione, Rivoluzione, Vendetta*, Milano, Mondadori, 1999, p. 46.

³ These fears were influenced by the appointment of a socialist, Indalecio Prieto, as Minister of Finance and another, Largo Caballero, as Minister of Labour.

⁴ On 9 December 1931, the Constitution was approved.

enacted to aid agricultural workers, historically undervalued since the era of the Reconquista⁵, favoring the livestock sector. The decrees prohibited landowners from dismissing tenants and from hiring laborers outside their municipal jurisdiction. Additionally, the rights enjoyed by industrial workers were extended to those in rural areas. Furthermore, the establishment of a 'Technical Agricultural Commission for drafting a law establishing the Institute for Agrarian Reform' was planned but never realized, exacerbating the hardships faced by a significant portion of the population⁶.

The complex political and social situation was compounded by the intricate relationship between the republic and the Catholic Church. The Church was considered a stronghold of the nation's conservative forces, distinguished for its role in education and its complete control over the population, enforced through the threat of hell, the Holy Office, and book burnings. It is important to note how the Spanish Catholic Church had distanced itself from the papacy, embodying a 'Spanish Catholic puritanism' formulated by Cardinal Ximénes de Cisneros⁷, which was rejected and consequently placed “Spain with the task of saving Europe from heresy and Catholicism itself”⁸. Among the reforms of the new government was the “will to establish freedom of worship and effect a separation between state and church”⁹. This spurred a debate within newspapers like *El Debate* and *ABC*, respectively of Catholic and monarchist inspiration, urging both the clergy and citizens to vote against this type of government in the upcoming elections. Attacks against the clergy persisted, with one of the most criticized reforms being the introduction of Articles 26 and 27, which foresaw the dissolution of religious articles and the cessation of state subsidies to the church within two years¹⁰. There was an aim to target “the traditional concept whereby the Church was synonymous with

⁵ After the Reconquista, common lands were requisitioned for sheep grazing, which impoverished farmers, but also led to soil erosion, ruining what had once been the “granary of the Roman Empire”.

⁶ Beevor, *La guerra civile spagnola*, Rizzoli, Milano, 2006, p. 33.

⁷ Cardinal Ximénes de Cisneros was the ascetic friar elevated by Isabella to the most powerful statesman of the time.

⁸ Beevor, *La guerra civile spagnola*, Milano, Rizzoli, 2006, p. 12.

⁹ *Ivi*, p. 35.

¹⁰ *Ivi*, p. 36.

Spain”¹¹, at a time, however, when the Catholic faith in Spain was the lowest compared to other European cities¹².

In this new Spanish reality, disorder and strikes were numerous, caused by both right-wing and left-wing forces. Notable among these was the strike of telephone personnel called by the anarcho-syndicalist CNT¹³, which caused severe disruptions and a blockage of communications from Barcelona to Seville. One year into the Republic, a significant episode was the attempted coup orchestrated by General Sanjurjo¹⁴, head of the Civil Guard¹⁵, historically referred to as the *Sanjurjada*. Initially, Sanjurjo had sworn allegiance to the republic, but feeling unjustly treated, he decided to organize, along with other generals, a coup, which was promptly contained and led to the arrest of some conspirators and the exile of the general.

The 1933 elections saw the victory of the center-right, led by Lerroux¹⁶, who ascended to power due in part to the first-time inclusion of women in voting¹⁷. The new cabinet decided to involve the Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas (CEDA) and its leader, José María Gil Robles, in the government, an agreement reached only in exchange for modifications to previous reforms concerning elementary schools, ecclesiastics, agrarian reform, and labor laws. Furthermore, there was an agreement on amnesty for those involved in General Sanjurjo's coup. One of the most contentious decisions was the annulment of the much-desired agrarian reform by the previous government. This involved the confiscation of lands from the Spanish aristocracy and the annulment of the law granting rural workers the same protection as industrial employees. The popular reaction to this counter-reform

¹¹ Ivi, p.37.

¹² Ranzato, G., *L'eclissi della democrazia. La guerra civile spagnola e le sue origini 1931-1939*. Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2004, p. 37.

¹³ The Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) is a Spanish confederation of anarcho-syndicalist labor unions

¹⁴ José Sanjurjo y Sacanell was a Spanish general who was among the military leaders involved in planning the July 1936 coup d'état that initiated the Spanish Civil War. He also led a coup d'état called la Sanjurjada in August 1932.

¹⁵ Civil Guard was the armed rural police whose task was to protect large estates from the labourers who cultivated.

¹⁶ Alejandro Lerroux, a significant figure in early 20th century Spanish politics, was the leader of the Radical Party in Spain. Lerroux's shift from Radicalism to more conservative alliances, particularly with the right-wing CEDA, was driven by the need to form a government.

¹⁷ The new Republican Constitution of 1931 gave women the right to vote for the first time in Spain.

erupted in violent clashes, sparking a series of uprisings throughout Spain. Conflict was inevitable as the Spanish working class was already on its knees despite previous reforms, leading to desperation at the potential nullification of that minimal improvement, which escalated to violence. Moreover, the defeat of the left in the elections had not been accepted, leading to doubts about possible electoral fraud. This prompted the socialist party to adopt the language of revolutionary rhetoric, to frighten the right and persuade the president of the republic to call for new elections¹⁸.

At the beginning of December, the first workers' revolt was led by anarchists, prompting the declaration of a state of emergency, resulting in arrests and press censorship. This event was followed by further uprisings and strikes across the territory. During this period, the emergence of extremist movements preparing for revolt became evident, such as the Carlists and the monarchists of the Renovación Española¹⁹, led by Jose Calvo Sotelo²⁰. Additionally, a small fascist-inspired party emerged within the far-right spectrum, the Falange Española, led by José Antonio Primo de Rivera, son of the dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera and an ardent admirer of Benito Mussolini. Founded in October 1933, just before the elections, the party received financial support from the monarchists. The national-syndicalist movement proposed a radical program with a vehemently anti-socialist and anti-liberal orientation, drawing inspiration from contemporary European nationalist and fascist movements. It sought to amalgamate traditional Spanish historical values with a profound social upheaval, characterized by the establishment of a corporatist order, socialization of the means of production, and the replacement of parliamentary democracy with new mechanisms of popular participation. However, it wasn't until the summer of 1934 that a palpable fascist presence was felt in Spain after being averted for some time. This sensation intensified with the fusion of Falange

¹⁸ Preston P., *La guerra civile spagnola. Reazione, Rivoluzione, Vendetta*, Milano, Mondadori, 1999, p. 76.

¹⁹ Renovación Española (RE) was a conservative political party in Spain during the first half of the 20th century. It played a pivotal role before and during the Spanish Civil War, promoting authoritarianism and conservative values. The party was established in 1933 and quickly became a significant force.

²⁰ José Calvo Sotelo was a significant Spanish statesman and right-wing personality in the early 20th century. He played a crucial role in opposing the Second Spanish Republic and was a prominent leader among conservative and nationalist groups.

Española with the pro-Nazi group Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional-Sindicalista led by Ramiro Ledesma Ramos²¹, forming the Falange Española de las JONS. Also, the youth movement of CEDA, the JAP (Juventud de Acción Popular)²², organized fascist-style gatherings, dubbing Gil Robles 'jefe' and envisioning a 'March on Madrid' to ascend to power²³. As highlighted by Preston, “from 1933 to 1936, the Falange Española de las JONS acted as a reservoir supplying the upper bourgeoisie with street brawlers to foment clashes and disseminate illegality, amplified by the right-wing press, which would be used to justify the military insurrection”²⁴.

Throughout 1934, tensions between the left and right escalated, culminating in a miners' revolt in the Asturias²⁵ led by communist, anarchist, and socialist trade unions, spearheaded by Deputy Ramon González Peña, creating extensive resonance and concern. This alliance gathered under the name Alianzas Obreras. The insurrectionists seized explosives from the mines and appropriated rifles from the Guardia Civil before targeting Oviedo. They captured the city, initiating a revolution with the objective of instituting a new society. Some individuals were executed in specific areas, being labeled as enemies of the revolution. It took fifteen days for the army, commanded by Francisco Franco, to restore control over the territory through a harsh repression that resulted in 250 military casualties and a thousand civilians. This event marked an unprecedented moment in the country's history and was perceived as a warning of the potential consequences if left-wing forces had attained power. The reverberations of this uprising were examined by Gabriele Ranzato, expressing how this episode might be the actual precursor to the civil war: “The Asturian insurrection made it clear to the left that

²¹ The Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional, established in 1931, was a Spanish group associated with conservative ideology. Its primary aim was to oppose leftist beliefs, especially those that emerged after the Second Spanish Republic. The group held deeply nationalistic views and participated in several acts of resistance against or opposition to the changes taking place in Spain during the Republican period. These movements foreshadowed the wider far-right and conservative groups, which held pivotal roles during the Spanish Civil War.

²² Juventudes de Acción Popular was a Spanish youth organisation affiliated with the conservative right-wing Spanish Confederation of the Autonomous Right (CEDA) during the Second Spanish Republic. The JAP was recognised for its fervent anti-communist and anti-leftist stance and was active in the years prior to the Spanish Civil War.

²³ Beevor, *La guerra civile spagnola*, Rizzoli, Milano, 2006, p. 52.

²⁴ P. Preston, *La guerra civile spagnola. Reazione, Rivoluzione, Vendetta*, Mondadori, Milano, 2011, p. 74.

²⁵ Asturias is a Reconquista symbol of aggressive warfare. this revolt was also called the October Revolution of Asturias.

change could only be attained through legal means, simultaneously demonstrating to the right that the most effective means at their disposal to prevent change was the military's violence²⁶.

In the late months of 1935, the government, which had witnessed multiple alterations and a lack of stability, ultimately collapsed due to two scandals within the Radical Party²⁷. Elections were scheduled for February 1936, leading to the establishment of two distinct alliances: the Popular Front led by Azaña and the counter-revolutionary National Front, which involved a coalition of the right with Gil Robles and the Church, urging the faithful to oppose the government should the left come to power²⁸. The formation of the Popular Front emerged from an international imperative to combat the spreading fascism and was instigated by the Third Communist International, led by Stalin, which had rescinded the ban on collaborating with reformist socialists²⁹ to increase the chances of assuming power.

Throughout the electoral campaign, a palpably grim atmosphere pervaded, indicating that regardless of the election outcome, it would displease one political faction, seeing no viable way for democracy to function, thus foreshadowing a civil war. Despite the economic gap between the two factions, the Popular Front won the election, albeit not decisively. This government faced significant weakness due to the lack of internal cohesion on the left. It immediately became apparent that extensive restoration work was necessary across the country, and the Azaña government proved inadequate in addressing the myriad problems that needed resolution. This included unemployment, prison

²⁶ G. Ranzato, *L'eclissi della democrazia. La guerra civile spagnola e le sue origini, 1931-1939*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 2004, p. 70.

²⁷ Two scandals responsible for the downfall of the Radical Party government were the 'Estraperlo Scandal' and another case of political corruption. The former entailed illegal gambling dealings, leading to President Alcalá Zamora's call for Alejandro Lerroux, the leader of the Radical Party, to resign, further undermining public faith in the government. The second scandal also damaged the reputation and stability of the governing party. These scandals significantly eroded the public's trust in the government and hastened its downfall in late 1935.

²⁸ When the Republic withdrew state subsidies from the Church, a major source of funding, it impoverished the Church and made its priests even more dependent on donations from parishioners.

²⁹ Previously they were referred to with contempt as social-fascists.

disturbances upon the announcement of the political prisoner amnesty of 1934, and the reorganization of the military to distance suspicious soldiers while elevating those loyal to the republic.

Efforts were made to ameliorate the country's unfavorable economic condition by “promoting the confiscation of lands belonging to the aristocrats involved in Sanjurjo's insurrection, reinstating all dismissed workers who participated in the October revolution”³⁰. This led to violence, clashes, attacks on churches, newspaper offices, compounded by dire conditions of poverty, misery, and unemployment among rural laborers and workers. These conditions stemmed not only from work-related issues but also from natural catastrophes affecting the country, such as the severe drought of 1936.

The weak and divided Popular Front government struggled to manage escalating unrest, influence its electoral allies, or persuade their followers to abide by the law³¹. Both left and right-wing organizations formed their militias. The country was in disarray, with press from both sides attributing blame to each other for the disorder they both contributed to creating. Even “middle-class and upper-class women insulted officers on the streets, calling them cowards for not overthrowing the government”³².

Around this period, a governmental reshuffle occurred, where Azaña and Prieto conspired to remove President Zamora from his position, given his isolation from both factions, elevating Azaña to the presidency. Similarly, changes occurred within the right, sidelining the CEDA and its leader, Jose Calvo Sotelo, now of minimal impact. It was evident that the government was paralyzed and incapable of preventing an open confrontation. Consequently, the initial attempts at a coup began. As Ranzato observed, “the entire context of disorder, violence, and the fear of revolution favored and

³⁰ Beevor, *La guerra civile spagnola*, Rizzoli, Milano, 2006, p. 59.

³¹ Ivi, p. 60.

³² Ibidem.

hastened the preparations for a military conspiracy”³³. The notion that the rebellion should occur and that the military possessed the authority to intervene for the preservation of Spain's integrity and social order became widely circulated across all echelons. Some officers, including José Sanjurjo, Emilio Mola 'Director,' and Francisco Franco, responded to this call.

1.1 The end of the Republic: the coup

In the summer of 1936, the social and political crisis had reached its peak, fostering the idea of an inevitable armed conflict. Spain, during times of severe crisis, was not a stranger to experiments in military intervention, known as *pronunciamentos*, in which groups of military personnel rebelled to effect a change in government during prolonged periods of crisis. An example of this was the military pronouncement that brought Primo Rivera to power, ending the constitutional monarchy experience, even though it did not yield the intended effects.

Despite warning signs, the incumbent government underestimated the growing tension, aiding the conspirators in planning a coup. Particularly, Azaña's government did not adequately consider the potential threat posed by the military, neglecting necessary preventive measures. Even though suspicious military personnel had been relocated from prominent positions and were kept away from the capital, this precaution proved insufficient. As emphasized by Beevor, “during an era when aviation was expanding, Franco's transfer to the Canaries couldn't be deemed a true exile”³⁴. Similarly, Mola, the head of the conspirators and deemed suspicious, was relocated to Pamplona, oblivious that the city was the focal point of the Carlists³⁵.

³³ G. Ranzato, *La grande paura del 1935: Come la Spagna precipitò nella guerra civile*, Laterza, Bari, 2001, p. 270.

³⁴ Beevor, *La guerra civile spagnola*, Rizzoli, Milano, 2006, p. 74.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

Discussions and assumptions about a potential government coup were constant themes of debate in the early '30s. Between the reforms and assaults carried out by the left-wing government against the conservative world in Spain, military discontent was a constant. However, between 1934 and 1935, for the first time, there was a growing drive towards overthrowing the government, as discussions and concerns emerged amidst strikes, protests, and clashes. It was during this time that plots were hatched, frequent clandestine meetings organized, not only identifying dissatisfied military personnel but also seeking support from right-wing parties like the Falange³⁶ to regain control of the country.

José Sanjurjo was the head of the conspiracy, although Emilio Mola was the true “director” and mastermind of the coup, the individual who would trigger the civil war. Great care was taken in organizing a strategic plan, following the “lesson imparted by the Sanjurjada of August 10, 1932”³⁷, requiring “simultaneous occupation of garrisons in the 50 Spanish provinces and the rapid annihilation of the organized working class”³⁸. Another significant factor characterizing the rebellion was terror, which, according to Mola, would be crucial to obtain the unconditional surrender of the republican government.

Several officers, including Cabanellas, Queipo de Llano, and Goded, were involved, each assigned a region from where they would initiate military action, prominently including the name of Francisco Franco. Although Franco was not initially among the main conspirators, he was a brilliant and conscientious officer who, owing to his courage, swiftly progressed. Franco was “a hero in the eyes of the more conservative sectors of the upper-middle class”³⁹, especially due to his actions in the

³⁶ José Antonio Primo de Rivera had been imprisoned in mid-March by the government in an attempt to bring the Falange under control, was more cautious, but eventually agreed to support the insurrection for fear that his movement would be cut off.

³⁷ With the concept of “lesson imparted by the Sanjurjada of August 10, 1932” Preston meant that improvised pronouncements were doomed to failure in the face of a proletariat ready to resort to the weapon of a general strike.

³⁸ P. Preston, *La guerra civile spagnola. Reazione, Rivoluzione, Vendetta*, Mondadori, Milano, 2011, p. 102.

³⁹ Ibidem.

Asturias. It was he who led the revolt in Morocco⁴⁰, a role of vital importance, though not in the forefront⁴¹.

In the two months leading up to the political-military conspiracy, there were numerous reports of potential unrest, with various figures ready to take up arms to overthrow the democratically established government. However, faced with these facts, the Republican government refused to thoroughly analyze the situation and turned a blind eye to the warning signs. The new Prime Minister, Casares Quiroga, was informed about an anti-Republican group of pilots stockpiling weapons and bombs, but no action was taken because Azaña, now the President of the Republic, “curtailed the conversation, stating that formulating such accusations was dangerous”⁴². There were rumors of a secret meeting between Mola and other conspirators, which the Prime Minister himself chose to dismiss, believing the general to be “a loyal republican”⁴³, despite the Civil Guard of Navarre being ready to intervene. Another significant episode involved one of the conspirators, if not the main conspirator, Francisco Franco⁴⁴. In an ambiguous letter to the Prime Minister, he indirectly requested to be given command to prevent potential plots against the government itself. Quiroga took no action; he didn't arrest him or seek his favor. Preston highlights how the importance of General Franco was beginning to be intuited, despite not seeming like a charismatic leader⁴⁵ and, in fact, being labeled “comandantin” or “Franquita” by his subordinates⁴⁶. He was necessary to Mola and the other conspirators.

⁴⁰ On 5 July, Marquis Luca de Tena, owner of the 'ABC' newspaper, had asked his London correspondent, Luis Bolin, to hire a plane to transport Franco from the Canaries to Morocco where he was to take command of the Army of Africa. Bolin did so and loaded a couple of fake tourists onto it to disguise the real purpose of the trip.

⁴¹ P. Preston, *La guerra civile spagnola. Reazione, Rivoluzione, Vendetta*, Mondadori, Milano, 2011, p. 105.

⁴² Ivi, p. 103.

⁴³ Ivi, p. 104.

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ Ibidem.

⁴⁶ Beevor, *La guerra civile spagnola*, Rizzoli, Milano, 2006, p. 72.

The final surge, the “last straw”⁴⁷, stemmed from the death of Calvo Sotelo on July 12, 1936, four days before the coup. This incident gave the final push to the uprising, which seemed to be the result of a sudden decision, whereas discussions, not only clandestine among conspirators but also among politicians within the Cortes, had been escalating since May of the same year. The conspirators felt the urgency to initiate the uprising. The coup took place between the night of July 17 and 18, 1936. From the dawn of July 18, the troops began to rebel everywhere. The rebellion started precisely in those peripheral zones of the Spanish Republic where, in the spring of 1936, generals were sent, whom the Azaña government believed were inclined to organize an armed insurrection⁴⁸. The coup was meant to be a swift seizure of power, ending the country's tension and crisis. However, it did not go as planned; it triggered a brutal conflict, a civil war that tore Spain apart for three years. This was due to immediate strong military and civilian resistance, preventing the coup plotters from taking power. This sparked the armed insurrection that led to the establishment of an alternative government to Madrid's in Burgos. This spark continued until the spring of 1939.

1.2 The internationalization of the conflict

The Spanish Civil War cannot be considered in isolation, but rather as the climax of a series of wars and tensions that had simmered in Europe for two decades⁴⁹. It must be analyzed as a violent fight whose outcome will be determined by the participation of the foreign countries engaged⁵⁰. The tenuous balance of the European continent is disrupted, resulting in a clash between two opposing ideological frameworks. This struggle will soon spread to a quasi-international level, particularly in countries that have gone through similar ideological and political experiences.

⁴⁷ Ivi, p. 74

⁴⁸ P. Preston, *La guerra civile spagnola. Reazione, Rivoluzione, Vendetta*, Mondadori, Milano, 2011, p. 105.

⁴⁹ This could refer to the level of internal strife within Spain, as well as the involvement of external powers supporting different factions in the conflict.

⁵⁰ P. Preston, *La guerra civile spagnola. Reazione, Rivoluzione, Vendetta*, Mondadori, Milano, 2011, p. 148.

The ideological element is undeniably fundamental in explaining the extent of the international mobilization. As Julián Casanova has recently pointed out, while some individuals may have chosen to go to Spain out of unemployment or a sense of adventure, the vast majority of volunteers left their families and jobs because it was “clear that fascism was an international threat and that Spain was the right place to fight it”⁵¹. Contemporaries saw the Spanish Civil War as a watershed moment in European history, elevating the conflict to a global symbol of the struggle between fascism and anti-fascist. The rise of fascism and the vigor with which it was pushing itself in Europe alarmed those in Europe who knew how this ideology or political movement undermined democracy, exercised dictatorial control, and, as a result, fostered racist and xenophobic views.

It is well documented that, at the time of the military coup by the Spanish nationalists, there were differences in the reactions of European governments. Several countries decided to support one of the two sides, the Falangists and the Popular Front, but the military aid provided by these powers should be assessed not only in terms of ideological aspects, which do not explain or motivate entry into the war, but also in terms of territorial and political interests. The French government was initially prepared to support the Republic precisely because it feared a possible victory for the Franco regime⁵². Such a victory would have had consequences not only in Spain but also in Europe, creating a bloc of nationalist forces that would have surrounded France itself.⁵³ However, although it wanted to support the Popular Front, a large section of the population, the French right, was opposed to French intervention in Spain, even if indirectly through military and financial aid⁵⁴.

The pressure was not just internal. The British government also intervened and persuaded French Prime Minister Blum to announce the suspension of all aid to the republican forces. This was

⁵¹ J. Casanova, *Historia de España. República y guerra civil*, Vol 8, Critica-Marcial Pons, Barcelona 2007, p. 37.

⁵² P. Preston, *La guerra civile spagnola. Reazione, Rivoluzione, Vendetta*, Mondadori, Milano, 2011, p. 151.

⁵³ Ivi, p. 152.

⁵⁴ E. Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albión*, op. cit. pp. 137.

announced on 27 July⁵⁵. Immediately afterwards there was a public protest in support of the Spanish Republic, which led to 20,000 people demonstrating on 1 August against the decision not to send planes to Spain⁵⁶. Meanwhile, the right wing did not rest on its laurels and even accused Blum of having provoked the Italian intervention on Franco's behalf⁵⁷. Germany also put pressure on the French government when the German foreign minister told the French ambassador in Berlin that Germany would hold France responsible if it supported 'Moscow's maneuvers' in favor of the Republicans. In such an unstable political situation, Blum decided to advocate non-intervention⁵⁸. This put an end to open French support, although the possibility of French intervention against the Spanish Nationalist army remained unknown throughout the conflict. German intelligence reported to Franco that the French army had long been openly discussing the possibility of intervening in the war in Catalonia and the Balearic Islands⁵⁹.

The only government that openly backed the Republicans was Mexico, not the United States, which had no interest in the Spanish problem and had not even signed the non-intervention agreement. Mexico gave two million dollars in aid and material support right away, refusing to abide by the Franco-British suggestions for non-intervention⁶⁰. An enormous contribution was to provide protection for the approximately 50,000 Spanish refugees. Furthermore, the Mexican administration-maintained communication with the French Prime Minister, who, following a meeting of parliament on July 25, decided to give the material to Mexico and delegate the responsibility of determining how best to use it to the Mexican government⁶¹.

⁵⁵ M. Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*, Kiribati, Palgrave Macmillan, 1994, p. 23.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁹ *Ivi*, p.43.

⁶⁰ A. Beevor, *La guerra civile spagnola*, pp. 169.

⁶¹ Gallagher, M. D., *Leon Blum and the Spanish Civil War*, "Journal of Contemporary History", 1971, Vol.6, n.3, p. 58.

A few days into the conflict, with the arrival of the first aid from the Nazi-fascist forces, the picture changed radically⁶². In fact, the Spanish war gave the two fascist countries, Italy and Germany, the opportunity to test their strength and armies, and possibly to extend their geopolitical interests. Although it did not take part in the insurrection, there is no doubt about the contribution Germany made to the Falangist leadership. The decision to intervene in Spain was dictated by a strategic assessment of the situation. Hitler feared a left-wing bloc in Europe, a communist Spain, which would have prevented the realization of Lebensraum, the living space for Germany⁶³. These expansionist aims were as much threatened by the establishment of the Spanish Republican government as they were by the French. German support for Franco can therefore be defined as opportunistic, using the chaos of the civil war to test a future European war already foreseen by the Führer⁶⁴.

On the other side of the battlefield was the Soviet Union. It was in a very complicated position, as it had re-established diplomatic relations with Spain three years before the civil war. This was symbolic of the end of the Soviet Union's own self-inflicted isolationism⁶⁵. During the Comintern of 1934 it had been decided to approach the western democracies to beat the rise of fascism and Nazism and to renew old alliances such as the Franco-Soviet mutual assistance pact.⁶⁶ The main concern was how to defend the integrity of Soviet territories given the aggression shown by Hitler. Even when the decision was made to support Spain, it was not just for the republican cause, but more from a European security perspective, because a victory for the Spanish republicans could balance the European situation⁶⁷. However, the choice to intervene was a difficult one. On the one hand, Stalin could not remain passive while the Spanish Republic collapsed, as the rise of another fascist state on the borders of France would have greatly strengthened right-wing forces and weakened left-wing

⁶² P. Preston, *La guerra civile spagnola. Reazione, Rivoluzione, Vendetta*, Mondadori, Milano, 2011, p. 158.

⁶³ Ivi, p. 159.

⁶⁴ Ivi, p. 160.

⁶⁵ P. Preston, *La guerra civile spagnola. Reazione, Rivoluzione, Vendetta*, Mondadori, Milano, 2011, p. 155.

⁶⁶ Ibidem.

⁶⁷ In the case of a nationalist victory, the socialist government in charge of France at the time would be vulnerable for its adversaries, leaving the Soviet Union to handle a potential right-wing conflict alone.

forces in France. On the other hand, a victory for the Spanish left could have entailed the risk that it would be tempted into revolution, arousing the hostility of the western powers.⁶⁸

Strengthened by this mission to oppose the right-wingers, Stalin intervened in the Spanish conflict more than two months after learning of the “alzamiento”. During this period, Soviet authorities and experts monitored the situation. The closeness of the Soviet people to the Spanish people was particularly felt, except for the organization of demonstrations⁶⁹ and internal campaigns to raise funds to help the Spanish ‘comrades’, which went so far as to contribute part of the workers' salaries for this purpose⁷⁰. The decision to intervene and assist the Republican faction was the subject of prolonged deliberation, largely due to the complexity of interpreting the Spanish situation. The two sides engaged in the conflict were both convinced that a genuine civil war would not occur, yet they anticipated that the situation would be resolved in a relatively short timeframe. On the one hand, the nationalists were confident that a military government would assume power in the near future, despite having already made arrangements to obtain military assistance from Italy and Germany. Conversely, the republicans were inclined to believe that, as had been the case on previous occasions, the revolt would be contained without endangering the survival of the Republic. In this context, it could be said that the Soviet decision was the result of an unexpected and therefore unplanned change in the conflict, as well as aimed at defending the interests of the Spanish republicans⁷¹. Nevertheless, the Valencian government received considerable assistance from Stalin, in the form of financial and military aid, as well as from the spontaneous movement known as the International Brigades, which permitted Soviet officers to be dispatched to train volunteers from various nations⁷². This assistance was provided despite the fact that the Soviet Union was a signatory to the non-intervention pact and

⁶⁸ Ibidem.

⁶⁹ On 3 August, approximately 150,000 demonstrators gathered in Red Square, Moscow, in solidarity with the Spanish Republic. P. Preston, *La guerra civile spagnola. Reazione, Rivoluzione, Vendetta*, Mondadori, Milano, 2011, p. 156

⁷⁰ Soviet factory workers opened subscriptions in favor of Spain and voted to donate 0.5 per cent of their wages to the Republic. These two gestures were undoubtedly expressions of the official party line. Ibidem.

⁷¹ P. Preston, *La guerra civile spagnola. Reazione, Rivoluzione, Vendetta*, Mondadori, Milano, 2011, p. 157.

⁷² Ibidem.

was only extended when it was evident that Germany and Italy were contravening the guidelines of the pact by negotiating on behalf of the Francoist cause⁷³.

A new element was introduced into the conflict by the volunteers who chose to join the cause and leave their country to fight alongside the loyalist army⁷⁴. The initial cohort of volunteers, however, comprised those who had already taken up residence in Spain, having fled their countries of origin under the threat of fascist rule. The Iberian Peninsula in the 1930s was a cultural and intellectual hub that attracted intellectuals and artists. This fascination with the region had led to it becoming a destination for emigration due to the favorable political scenario and the prevalence of ideological struggles. In particular, Barcelona was the designated destination for anarchists who had been prosecuted or imprisoned in Italy. It was in this city, during the initial days of the insurrection, that the *Espartaquiades*⁷⁵, or workers' Olympics, were being held. Approximately 300 athletes participated in the event. The city was thus invaded at the time of the military insurrection by hundreds of workers who had come from all over Europe to participate in or observe the competitions. Despite the prompt decision of the Generalitat to cancel the sporting event and repatriate the athletes, a group decided to remain and enlist in the militia. It is evident that the specter of a possible re-establishment of a fascist government in Europe served to ignite a spark of awareness among the populace, prompting them to fight alongside the popular militias⁷⁶.

It is undeniable that contemporaries were aware of the interconnectivity between Spanish affairs and the complex European situation, and that this was the arena in which to confront them. This can be exemplified by the great solidarity that arrived in Spain from its neighbours, the European countries,

⁷³ Ivi, p.158.

⁷⁴ Ibidem.

⁷⁵ The event was conceived as an antithesis to the Olympic Games, which were scheduled to take place in August in Berlin. These Games were to be a significant showcase for the Third Reich.

⁷⁶ Gori, Enrico. "I volontari anglofoni nella Guerra civile spagnola." *Diacronie*, N° 37, 1 (2019), documento 6. Pubblicato online il 29 marzo 2019. Consultato il 15 marzo 2024. Disponibile su: <http://journals.openedition.org/diacronie/11013>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/diacronie.11013>.

and from overseas, as demonstrated by the Mexican government. A few weeks later, an international volunteer network was created. Among these initiatives, it is impossible not to mention the International Brigades, which were defined as voluntary military units made up of foreign soldiers who decided to fight with republican forces⁷⁷. The nationalities of the participants led to the partition of the brigades into discrete organizational divisions. Each brigade was usually composed of numerous battalions under the command of Spanish officers, all belonging to the Spanish Republican Army⁷⁸. The International Brigades, who were known for their courage and tenacity, were sent to the most hazardous fronts and were crucial to many of the major engagements of the Spanish struggle. The Republican side was ultimately lost in spite of these efforts, and after Franco's victory, many volunteers for the International Brigade were either executed, imprisoned or banished⁷⁹.

However, it is important to note that although the International Brigades were created without the support of any government, the Soviet Union was instrumental in organizing and coordinating them through the Communist International. The Comintern oversaw brigade unit deployment, assisted with volunteer recruiting, and handled logistical support. The Republican side received military support from the Soviet Union in the form of weaponry, ammunition, and military advisors. With Soviet assistance, the Republican Army and the International Brigades were better equipped to hold off the Nationalist offensive⁸⁰.

Lastly, it should be noted that the Spanish Civil War represents the first instance of a mediatized conflict in history. The events in Spain soon had an impact on the whole continent of Europe. To cover and record the battle as it developed, a sizable contingent of reporters and photographers were

⁷⁷ Ibidem.

⁷⁸ Ibidem.

⁷⁹ Ibidem.

⁸⁰ Gori, Enrico. "I volontari anglofoni nella Guerra civile spagnola." *Diacronie*, N° 37, 1 (2019), documento 6. Pubblicato online il 29 marzo 2019. Consultato il 15 marzo 2024. Disponibile su: <http://journals.openedition.org/diacronie/11013>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/diacronie.11013>.

sent to the area⁸¹. The conflict's development was disseminated throughout the world through a range of media, such as newspapers, images, and documentaries. For the first time, film was a vital component of the story of a military scenario⁸².

⁸¹ P. Preston, *La guerra civile spagnola. Reazione, Rivoluzione, Vendetta*, Mondadori, Milano, 2011, p. 170.

⁸² *Ibidem*.

2. An unusual friendship

In the aftermath of the Treaty of Versailles, European nations faced a host of challenges, including economic instability, high inflation, rampant unemployment, and the burden of war debts. Many societies found themselves vulnerable to the allure of fascism, which exploited the prevailing discontent and upheaval to cultivate widespread support. During this period, English conservatives developed a unique relationship with the Italian government. Although not universally accepted within the Tory ranks, fascism was appreciated for its role in ending the era of liberal governance tainted by Giolittism and its perceived defense against the threat of Bolshevism⁸³. Despite initial suspicions, conservatives showed a positive and conciliatory attitude towards fascism. The events that marked the end of the 1930s brought about a significant change. The friendship between the two countries began to deteriorate, and Mussolini's decision to enter the war alongside the Nazis dealt the final blow, which was seen as another betrayal by the British leaders and public opinion.

The relationship between Great Britain and Italy was cautious but not hostile, and it was influenced by the evolution of both international and domestic political landscapes⁸⁴. Whenever there were discrepancies between the political goals and expectations of conservatives and those of Mussolini, the bond weakened. However, several factors influenced the relationship between Italy and Great Britain. Secondly, the bond between Italy and Great Britain was influenced by external factors⁸⁵. Firstly, British domestic politics were in turmoil due to the emergence of a Bolshevik-inspired communist party, recurring economic and social crises, and the rise of the British fascist movement

⁸³ Silei, G. (1992). I conservatori britannici e il fascismo (1929-1935). La parabola discendente di una «storica amicizia», "Il Politico", Vol.57, Issue 3, p. 500.

⁸⁴ Ivi, p. 499.

⁸⁵ Ivi, p.500

led by Oswald Mosley⁸⁶. The events were influenced by the Italian Fascist regime and its leader, which fascinated the British population and leaders⁸⁷.

Great Britain, like all European countries, was rebuilding after World War I and found an ally in fascist Italy. This facilitated Italy's full integration into the international community and, more importantly, into the British economic sphere. The aim of this economic collaboration was to strengthen the national economy without jeopardizing the large enterprises that had benefited from wartime production⁸⁸. The British financial sector sought an Italian executive capable of addressing the challenging political and economic situation and gaining the trust of British investors⁸⁹. Furthermore, international politics played a crucial role, with Britain pursuing objectives such as peace and stability, which dictated its behavior⁹⁰. Judgments on fascism were favorable as long as it aligned with the goals advocated by the Conservative Party, and bilateral relations were characterized by collaboration and mutual sympathy. However, whenever this delicate balance was disrupted, crises inevitably ensued.

Tensions between fascist Italy and conservative Britain gradually emerged as Italian foreign policy aspirations became apparent. Austen Chamberlain endeavored to manage Mussolini's aspirations but faced difficulties due to the aggressive actions of the Italian regime⁹¹. Despite some apprehension, British conservatives maintained a certain degree of positive opinion towards the fascist regime, even after tensions arose during the early 1930s. A significant break occurred with the crisis in Ethiopia.

⁸⁶ Oswald Mosley was the founder of the British Union of Fascists (BUF), which emerged in the anglo-saxon political spheres in a moment of disillusionment with mainstream politics.

⁸⁷ Member of the political and aristocracy scene in Great Britain were fascinated by the cult of Mussolini, such as Sir Austen who boasted of his personal friendship with Mussolini; his wife, Lady Ivy, who had herself portrayed with a fascist badge and Winston Churchill, who praised the Italian regime, initiating a journalistic collaboration with the *Popolo d'Italia*.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁹ Silei, G. (1992). *I conservatori britannici e il fascismo (1929-1935). La parabola discendente di una «storica amicizia»*. "Il Politico", Vol.57, Issue 3, p. 500.

⁹⁰ *Ivi*, p. 501.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

In 1935, Italy invaded Ethiopia, sparking the Second Italo-Ethiopian War and causing significant tension between Britain and Italy. On this occasion the name of "mad dog" to describe the Duce⁹². Britain, along with other members of the League of Nations, condemned Italy's aggression and imposed economic sanctions in an attempt to discourage Mussolini's expansionist goals. Despite the Great Britain's concern, they chose to maintain an ambiguous attitude, hoping for a conciliatory solution, especially in view of the fierce Nazi expansionism. However, with the outbreak of the Spanish conflict, the British government began to distance itself from Mussolini. Italy would no longer be Britain's preferred interlocutor, and good relations with Italy would represent only an instrumental aspect on the European chessboard. Great Britain and Italy represented two different factions in the Spanish panorama: the Phalangists and the Popular Front. The participants' involvement was influenced by a combination of political, strategic, and ideological factors, but it will be fundamental for outcome of war and will influence Spain until the 70s.

2.1 Italy

2.1.1 Background

Post-war Italy emerged as a troubled country. Its participation in the so-called 'Great War' brought with traumatic memories for the population and the surviving combatants, who were "tired of war and thirsty for peace⁹³", and a government that was disillusioned from the negotiations of the Versailles Conference and faced with indescribable poverty. Nevertheless, the rise of fascism was to bring new and devastating violence.

⁹² The expression mad dog was used by Sir Howard Kennard, British chargé d'affaires in Rome, who never took kindly to fascism and Mussolini. In this case, it was used by Winston Churchill. Rumi G. (1968), *Alle origini della politica estera fascista*, Bari, p. 303.

⁹³ Lussu, E. (2002), *Marcia su Roma e dintorni*, Einaudi, Torino, p. 14

During Benito Mussolini's leadership, Italian foreign policy became more aggressive, with the aim of expanding territorial holdings and forming alliances with other authoritarian regimes. This was partly due to a legacy from the post-unification period, but was also influenced by grievances stemming from the Treaty of Versailles and the perception of a “mutilated victory”⁹⁴. Italy aimed to become a major colonial power by expanding into Africa, while also pursuing an expansionist policy towards the Balkans, where it had significant influence, particularly in Albania. Spain held no interest for Mussolini, having long since ceased to be a European power. Despite its attempts to reassert itself through foreign policy in North Africa, particularly Morocco, it held little sway in Europe's political calculations⁹⁵. Although acknowledging each other, the Italian and Spanish governments have not established any commercial relationship or alliance due to their similar economies, which would not provide any benefits to either party⁹⁶.

For a period of time, King Alfonso XIII of Spain attempted to bring the two countries closer together. He did this through official visits to Madrid of Italian leaders and by suggesting an Italian-Spanish alliance, both politically and militarily, with the aim of countering France⁹⁷. However, Mussolini never showed any interest. General Miguel Primo de Rivera attempted to resolve the complex Spanish situation by taking power and presenting his new government as under authoritarian and nationalist leadership⁹⁸. He impressed Mussolini, and a correspondence began between the two leaders envisioning an agreement that could include both Britain and Portugal, but exclude France. Primo de Rivera quickly realized the importance of collaborating with France, not only because of its proximity to European territory but also because of its significant presence in Morocco. Enthusiasm waned as

⁹⁴ Following World War I, Italy harbored discontentment regarding the territorial acquisitions it obtained from the Treaty of Versailles. Despite being victorious in the war, Italy felt that it did not receive the territorial compensations it had been assured in the confidential Treaty of London (1915) for joining the conflict on the side of the Allies.

⁹⁵ Coverdale. J. F. (1975), *Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War*, Princeton University Press, p. 31.

⁹⁶ Ibidem.

⁹⁷ Ivi, p. 32.

⁹⁸ Primo's dictatorship was designed to solve the political crisis that resulted from the Spanish army's inability to repress the revolt of Abd el Krim in Morocco and a threatened parliamentary investigation of Spain's crushing defeat by the rebels at Anual.

he recognized the need for this collaboration. After three years of negotiations, an agreement was reached with Italy. However, the Italian dictator was not satisfied as it was largely symbolic and lacked significant political implications, contrary to earlier expectations of secret clauses regarding Italian use of naval bases in the Balearic Islands in case of war with France⁹⁹.

In the following years, interest in Spain waned, partly due to dissatisfaction with domestic politics. In 1930, the dictator was deposed and elections were called for a new government. The rise to power of the Republican government was viewed with great interest and hostility in Italy for four main reasons: “1) Fascist scorn for the Republic's liberal parliamentary regime; 2) the overt anti-Fascism of many Republican leaders; 3) Italian fears that liberal democracy would soon lead to Communism in Spain; and 4) Rome's apprehension lest Spain be drawn deeper into the French orbit, to Italy's detriment”¹⁰⁰. Moreover, this government was portrayed as the result of the failure of the monarchy and the weakness of its own supporters. During a period when liberal parliamentary democracy was considered outdated and unable to address social issues, Mussolini compared it to an antiquated oil lamp in the age of electric lighting¹⁰¹. He suggested that it was an insufficient and delayed attempt at revolution¹⁰².

The Republicans' reaction was swift. The media began to praise the government and criticize the Duce and fascism. Many Republican leaders aimed to make their country a bastion for the anti-fascist world, establishing links with both French and Italian socialists¹⁰³. Their presence created tensions in relations among the Italian-Spanish community, although they were never particularly numerous and their activities had little practical relevance. The Italian ambassador became suspicious that the

⁹⁹ Coverdale, J., *Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War*, Princeton University Press, 1975, p. 34.

¹⁰⁰ Ivi, p. 37.

¹⁰¹ Ivi, p. 38.

¹⁰² Ibidem.

¹⁰³ Ivi, p. 39.

government was financing a Communist plan with Russian money, even though there was no actual danger¹⁰⁴. It is important to avoid making unfounded accusations without concrete evidence.

The failed Sanjurjo coup of 1932–1933 reignited interest in Spanish territory. The conspirators led by General Sanjurjo received weapons and ammunition from Italian Marshal Italo Balbo¹⁰⁵, who was keen to back the overthrow of the Republican government. Unfortunately, shoddy preparation and execution led to the coup attempt's failure¹⁰⁶. The nomination of Raffaele Guariglia as ambassador during this time contributed to the flourishing of Italian-Spanish relations¹⁰⁷. Through his mediation, he was able to fulfill his duty of fostering positive relations with the Spanish government. The more impartial Italian behavior, “without excessive concern over internal political struggles, party affairs, and ideological questions used for internal politics”¹⁰⁸, was partly responsible for this change, according to Guariglia. With the new elections and the rise to power of the radicals supported by the CEDA and some right-wing factions, relations between the two countries relaxed, at least informally, partly because the Duce supported the enemies of the republic¹⁰⁹. During this period, two significant fascist parties emerged within the territory: the Falange Espanola and the Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista or JONS.

The Italian ambassador had a negative perception. He believed that there was a lack of unity and commitment among the fascist-inspired groups. This was partly due to their incomplete understanding of the doctrine and partly because the right wing accepted them for its own benefit¹¹⁰. Despite this, Guariglia fostered relations between these groups and Italian fascism. The leader of the

¹⁰⁴ Ivi, p. 40.

¹⁰⁵ Italo Balbo was a squadrista and one of the was first a and then one of the quadrumviri of the march on Rome, later becoming commander general of the Voluntary Militia for National Security.

¹⁰⁶ Coverdale, J., *Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War*, Princeton University Press, 1975, p. 40.

¹⁰⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁸ Ivi, p. 45.

¹⁰⁹ Official relations, although they were still far from cordial, rapidly became less tense.

¹¹⁰ Ivi, p. 47.

phalange, José Antonio Primo de Rivera, was considered the most promising of the Spanish fascists. As Guariglia's ideological protégé, he received support and encouragement but refused to become too involved in the Italian sphere of influence. He aimed to create “an authentic Spanish movement, rather than a copy of Italian Fascism”¹¹¹. His party was financed by the Duce for a long period until the leader was imprisoned. Although both Italian and Spanish Fascism shared a great commitment, there were evident differences between the two parties. It is clear that they did not possess the strength to organize a successful coup¹¹².

In 1934, Rome lost interest in Spain¹¹³. Ambassador Guariglia was replaced by Orazio Pedrazzi¹¹⁴, who was less supportive of Spanish fascism and its parties. Pedrazzi's arrival coincided with the worsening of popular discontent, marked by the first uprisings and strikes. In this context, the new ambassador realised that weakness, division, and indecision would not enable the fascist groups to resolve the situation. At the same time, contact with the royalist conspirators was also lost. However, in March 1934, the Italian government and the royalists reached a turning point in their collaboration with the infamous March Agreement. This accord symbolised Italy's efforts to win over right-wing Spanish elements and earn their support. Four Spaniards, Antonio Goicoechea¹¹⁵, Antonio Lizarza Iribarren¹¹⁶, Rafael Olazabal¹¹⁷, and General Emilio Barrera¹¹⁸, sought the Duce's support to restore the monarchy in Spain. Mussolini agreed to support their cause with guarantees. The collaboration was essential for the dictator to obtain a trade agreement and a treaty of non-belligerence and

¹¹¹ Ivi, p. 49.

¹¹² Ivi, 50.

¹¹³ 1934 is a decisive year for Italian foreign policy. The conquest of Ethiopia materializes, following the rapprochement with France through the Mussolini-Laval agreements, aimed at resolving disputes between the two countries over their interests in the Mediterranean and North Africa. The agreement acknowledged Italy's influence in Ethiopia and France's influence in Morocco. Furthermore, the assassination of Prime Minister Dollfuss illustrates the seriousness of actions by Nazi Germany, which threatened to absorb Austria and establish itself on the Italian border.

¹¹⁴ Pedrazzi, a nationalist lawyer and journalist, had served in the government of Fiume from 1919 to 1920 and had been an editor for *Il regno*. He was one of the non-career diplomats brought into the foreign service by Mussolini in 1927.

¹¹⁵ Antonio Goicoechea, who is the founder of Renovación Española, created this political group with the specific goal of preparing an armed assault on the Republic, spreading officers and former officers, and obtaining foreign support, mainly in Italy.

¹¹⁶ Antonio Lizarza Iribarren was leader of the Carlists or Traditionalists.

¹¹⁷ Rafael Olazabal was a traditionalist leader.

¹¹⁸ General Emilio Barrera was the former chief of staff of the Spanish army.

neutrality¹¹⁹. In addition, a crucial aspect was an article that obligated both sides to maintain the status quo regarding all Spanish territories and protectorates in the western Mediterranean. Simultaneously, the Spanish had to denounce the alleged secret Franco-Spanish treaty in exchange for Italian recognition of the new government¹²⁰. Furthermore, there was significant economic support and the opportunity for special training courses, although the promised war materials never arrived¹²¹. There were two versions of the treaty: the original, kept by Goicoechea, and a poor Italian translation that was stored in a safe deposit box in Rome¹²². The Spanish police discovered the first copy during a raid, and it was reported as evidence of Mussolini's involvement in the preparation of the Civil War¹²³.

Following the March 1934 agreement, Italy distanced itself from any events in Spain. Therefore, there is no evidence of Italian involvement prior to the coup¹²⁴. Upon the opening of the archives, none of the Italian documents attest to any active aid or Italian agents provoking the uprising in any way. On the contrary, they emphasize that there was no longer any interest in Spain. After Guariglia's departure, the Duce did not seek any contact with the right¹²⁵. Until 1936, his focus had shifted to Africa and finding common ground with Nazi Germany. The Italian embassy staff remained unconvinced that a social uprising would occur until the very end. Despite rumors, they maintained that no right-wing group was powerful enough to overthrow the republican government.

Due to the political impotence of the right-wing opponents and the left-wing sympathies of the commanding generals, a military insurrection was deemed impossible¹²⁶. Unfortunately, Pedrazzi persisted in ruling out the possibility of an uprising even after Calvo Sotelo's death, stating that

¹¹⁹ Coverdale, J., *Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War*, Princeton University Press, 1975, p. 51.

¹²⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹²¹ *Ivi*, 53.

¹²² *Ibidem*.

¹²³ The text was first published in Madrid papers on May 14, 1937. It is contained in the pamphlet, *Documentary Evidence: How Mussolini Provoked the Spanish Civil War*, published in London in 1938, as a facsimile of the handwritten original in which it is possible to see how the figure 10,000 was written over, changing the one to a two.

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁵ Coverdale, J., *Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War*, Princeton University Press, 1975, p. 56.

¹²⁶ *Ivi*, p. 62.

anarchy was “the most plausible prospect for Spain in the near future”¹²⁷. It has been claimed that on 13 July, they sent Mussolini a note announcing the imminent rebellion. However, the courier had to destroy the letter he was carrying when he was stopped in Barcelona. There were no other attempts to warn Rome of the impending coup or to obtain Italian assistance¹²⁸.

2.1.2 Reason to aid

Vanity and pride were the factors that drove the Duce to take part in the Spanish conflict. With an incessant desire to redeem his country after the wrongs suffered during the peace treaties at Versailles and to make “Italy great, respected and feared”, Mussolini decided to intervene, considering Spain the suitable arena to show the ferocity of his army. This was not, however, the main reason for Italian involvement in the Spanish war¹²⁹. There were numerous opportunities that Mussolini saw within this conflict in return for helping Franco, especially when he realized that neither London nor Paris would or could intervene in favor of the republicans. The future victory of the Falangists, obtained at great cost to the Italians, would have satisfied certain interests dear to the Italian prime minister such as strategic ambitions, ideological considerations, and aspirations for international influence. These factors were crucial to the shaping of Italy's role in the conflict and had an impact on its relations with other nations, including Germany.

One of Italy's main concerns revolved around the fear of the emergence of anti-fascist governments in Western Europe, particularly France and Spain. The engagement of these nations in anti-fascist foreign policy through popular front movements caused alarm in Italy, particularly in the western Mediterranean, where the prospect of having vehemently anti-fascist neighbors was a source of

¹²⁷ Ibidem.

¹²⁸ Ivi, p. 64.

¹²⁹ Rosaria Quartararo, *Roma tra Londra e Berlino. La politica estera fascista dal 1930 al 1940*, Roma, Bonacci, 1980, p. 54.

considerable apprehension. Mussolini made Franco's cause his own for this reason; he could not accept the formation of pro-communist government. Italian involvement in the Spanish Civil War extended to the perception of a crusade against international communism¹³⁰. The fascist regime saw the conflict as an opportunity to counter the perceived communist threat in Spain, aligning itself with the statement of the Soviet Union that considered fascism and Nazism as primary adversaries. This perspective created an implicit alliance between the fascist regime and the Catholic Church against communism, with Spanish cardinals and archbishops supporting a coup d'état under the banner of defending Catholicism¹³¹.

At the same time, Italy sought to strengthen its influence in the Mediterranean by supporting General Francisco Franco in Spain. The fascist regime, under the leadership of Mussolini, harbored ambitions to exert control over strategic locations such as the Balearic Islands and Gibraltar. However, these aspirations met practical obstacles, as Franco proved resistant to significant concessions, leading to minimal benefits for Italy¹³². Furthermore, Mussolini entertained the idea of exporting fascist ideology beyond the Italian borders, undertaking propaganda initiatives in various countries, particularly Latin America with substantial Italian communities. The feasibility of this venture, however, varied. While the dictatorship in Brazil adopted some fascist elements, Spain under Franco remained aligned with the military dictatorship rather than fully embracing fascist ideology¹³³.

In conclusion, Italy's involvement in the Spanish Civil War was driven by a combination of fears, strategic ambitions, anti-communist sentiments and attempts to export fascist ideology. These

¹³⁰ Rosaria Quartararo, *Roma tra Londra e Berlino. La politica estera fascista dal 1930 al 1940*, Roma, Bonacci, 1980, p. 60.

¹³¹ *Ibidem*.

¹³² *Ibidem*.

¹³³ *Ibidem*.

interconnected motivations underline the complexity of Italy's role in the conflict and its broader geopolitical objectives during this tumultuous period in European history¹³⁴.

2.1.3 Intervention

According to diplomatic sources, rumors of imminent right-wing revolutionary movements in Spain had already surfaced by the end of June 1936. Expressing these concerns was the Italian ambassador Pedrazzi in Madrid. In his telegram, he referred to several reports received at the embassy before that date, which they chose not to transmit because “almost daily there are rumors of imminent upheavals by the right or the communists, sometimes even with a precise time for the start of the movement”¹³⁵, although he emphasized how “the state of anarchy that exists in the country does not exclude the possibility of direct action against the current Government at any moment, which is blamed for great weakness in the face of the most extreme elements”¹³⁶. At the beginning of July, the rumors became more insistent; in fact, the consul in Barcelona reported to the foreign minister Ciano about “a vast insurrectional movement of the Spanish army aiming to overthrow the current regime and establish a military dictatorship”¹³⁷, led by general Sanjurjo, who would be seen as the possible candidate for power in that case¹³⁸. Unlike other news, this one seems more serious precisely because “garrisons from all over northern Spain and Catalonia would take part in this uprising, while the support of the Madrid garrison would not be counted on; the Civil Guard would collaborate with the insurgents everywhere. The political party most widely involved seems to be that of Renovación Española (Pure Monarchist), whose leader Goicoechea would have issued instructions these days, gathering regional

¹³⁴ Rosaria Quartararo, *Roma tra Londra e Berlino. La politica estera fascista dal 1930 al 1940*, Roma, Bonacci, 1980, p. 62.

¹³⁵ Documents on Italian Foreign Policy (from now on, DDI), 1935-1939, Octave Series, vol. IV, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1936, p. 469.

¹³⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁷ DDI, 1935-1939, Octave Series, vol. IV, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1936, p. 521.

¹³⁸ *Ibidem*.

leaders in Madrid; moreover, all right-wing parties would view the movement favorably and would not deny their support to it”¹³⁹.

The situation seems to change when, on July 15th, news arrives of the killing of Calvo Sotelo, often cited as the ultimate reason for the friction that leads to the revolt, which is communicated by Ambassador Pedrazzi to Ciano the day before¹⁴⁰. In this telegram, the activation of the state of alert is communicated¹⁴¹, with the consequent suspension of the Cortes sessions¹⁴², and it is reported that the situation returned to normal after the funerals, which caused some clashes. Despite this, already the day after, there are reports of an imminent uprising led, however, by General Francisco Franco, with which, two days later, the uprising will be launched.

In the days following the uprising, the first requests for aid from the Spanish nationalists began. Initially, General Franco requested the transfer of airplanes for transporting troops from Morocco to Spain¹⁴³. Later on, he attempted to establish a secret connection with the officer attached to the Italian Consulate General in Tangier, Luccardi, using a special cipher¹⁴⁴. The Italian response, especially from the military hierarchies, was opposed to accepting or militarily intervening. In fact, the head of military intelligence, Roatta, responded to Luccardi's telegram denying the transfer of military aircraft¹⁴⁵, citing the damage caused to Italian planes by rains in Ethiopia and thus stating it was not possible to provide the requested aid. Moreover, the inadvisability of establishing a secret connection

¹³⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁰ DDI, 1935-1939, Octave Series, vol. IV, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1936, p. 569.

¹⁴¹ The state of alarm in Spain is a legal mechanism provided for in the Spanish Constitution that grants the government exceptional powers to deal with crises such as public health emergencies, natural disasters, or other situations that threaten public safety. The government can take extraordinary measures, such as restricting movement, regulating transportation, and controlling economic activities, to address the emergency effectively. The declaration of a state of alarm requires approval from the Spanish Parliament and usually has a limited duration, although it can be extended if necessary.

¹⁴² The Cortes is the bicameral legislature of Spain, composed of two chambers: the Congress of Deputies (Congreso de los Diputados) and the Senate (Senado).

¹⁴³ Coverdale, J. F. (1975), *Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War*, Princeton University Press, p. 67.

¹⁴⁴ DDI, 1935-1939, Octave Series, vol. IV, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1936, p. 641.

¹⁴⁵ DDI, 1935-1939, Octave Series, vol. IV, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1936, p. 651.

was expressed¹⁴⁶. Ambassador Orazio Pedrazzi, the Italian ambassador in Spain, also disagreed with any potential interference in Spain, partly because he doubted the nationalists' victory.

In the context of the aid request, former King of Spain, Alfonso XIII, also entered the picture. He wrote directly to Mussolini, thanking him in advance for sending airplanes to the revolutionary forces¹⁴⁷. In the telegram, the former Spanish king mentioned Luis Bolín, a journalist from ABC, as “a person of my complete trust”¹⁴⁸ sent to purchase “modern aviation elements”¹⁴⁹, who met with Ciano, showing goodwill towards Spain.

At the beginning of the conflict, the fascist government hesitated to support the Francoist project more due to international considerations than a genuine interest in the Spanish drama. Warm support had long been extended towards Renovación Española. However, initially, Mussolini did not seem inclined to support Franco because he could not grasp what he could gain from the situation. Among the various concerns of Il Duce at the time were the still troubled relations with Great Britain after the war in Ethiopia and concerns about France, which, being led by a socialist government, might openly declare support for the republican cause. Regarding the latter, Mussolini was certain that the government of Léon Blum would not be able to effectively intervene in Spain due to the enormous media campaign promoted by the conservative and pro-nationalist press, but above all because he feared the reaction of Great Britain¹⁵⁰. The British position played a crucial role in preventing French involvement alongside the Spanish republic, as it exerted strong pressure to prevent it¹⁵¹. Additionally, memories of the victims of World War I and the constant need for security were the

¹⁴⁶ DDI, 1935-1939, Octave Series, vol. IV, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1936, p. 651.

¹⁴⁷ DDI, 1935-1939, Octave Series, vol. IV, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1936, p. 648.

¹⁴⁸ P. Preston *La aventura española de Mussolini*, cit., p.63.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵⁰ P. Preston, *La guerra civile spagnola. Reazione, Rivoluzione, Vendetta*, Mondadori, Milano, 2011, p. 152.

¹⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

primary concerns of the French prime minister, driving him to seek a closer alliance with the British, especially at a time when the French alliance network in Eastern Europe had deteriorated¹⁵².

The main problem for Mussolini was Britain. Relations between the two countries had been compromised due to the Abyssinian crisis¹⁵³. For this reason, initially, Duce's intention was not to intervene in Spain or to support the nationalist cause while keeping a low profile. On the British side, the policy of non-intervention was the line adopted by the government for various reasons, including the fear of an escalation of a conflict that was ultimately considered regional, a domestic division in terms of public opinion where a part of the population supported the republican cause, specifically those who ultimately chose to fight alongside the Spanish, but above all the policy of appeasement and limited military capacity¹⁵⁴. At the same time, Il Duce was aware that the British government was not favorable to another close socialist government and consequently to a possible victory of communism, and that conservative circles were generally favorable to Franco. Further reassurance came from reports from Major Luccardi, which reported the British prohibition on the access and presence of ships and troops from the Spanish Republican army in the ports of Gibraltar and El Peñon¹⁵⁵.

The continuous negative responses to the Spanish request for aid did not discourage the leader of the Falangist insurgency from seeking sympathy and empathy from the Italian government. In this regard, initially, an important role in establishing the first contacts with General Franco after the uprising was played by Major Luccardi, the officer in charge of the consulate in Tangier, who in his telegrams

¹⁵² P. Preston, *La guerra civile spagnola. Reazione, Rivoluzione, Vendetta*, Mondadori, Milano, 2011, p. 152.

¹⁵³ From 1935 to 1936, Italy and Ethiopia were in conflict during the Abyssinian Crisis, also known as the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. Italy, under the rule of dictator Benito Mussolini, aimed to expand its colonial empire by conquering Ethiopia. The crisis increased when Italy invaded Ethiopia in October 1935. Ethiopia, led by Emperor Haile Selassie, resisted fiercely but was unable to resist the modern Italian military forces. The League of Nations condemned Italy's aggression, but failed to act effectively, leading to criticism of the League's inability to prevent conflict.

¹⁵⁴ Britain was still recovering from the economic and military strains of World War I. The military resources were not readily available for a significant intervention in Spain. The priority for the British government was to rearm and strengthen its defenses rather than becoming embroiled in a foreign conflict.

¹⁵⁵ P. Preston, *La aventura española de Mussolini*, p. 85.

to the Ministry of War communicated on the one hand the need for Italian military material¹⁵⁶ and on the other the irritation of the future head of state towards the lack of help, especially because of his “sympathy towards Italy, he has suspended any action against Tangier despite the fact that this harms his action”¹⁵⁷. Already from July 23, the situation began to unlock. As reported in Luccardi's telegram to the Ministry of War, “In a very confidential manner [...] Minister De Rossi made me understand that the Minister of Foreign Affairs would not be opposed”¹⁵⁸ to an intervention in Spain. Subsequently, a determining factor proved to be the aid provided by the French socialist government, which decided to send bombing planes to the Madrid government¹⁵⁹, as well as the ambiguous intervention of the Soviet Union. During the civil war, the Kremlin put an end to the isolationism that had characterized it for a decade. Intimidated by the advent of totalitarian regimes, they decided to support the Spanish government through statements at first, and then to decide to donate 0.5 percent of their salary to the Republic. Thus, on September 18, “the first ship loaded with provisions purchased with the money collected in Russian factories” arrived¹⁶⁰. A hypothetical socialist victory according to Stalin would have strengthened European balances, weakening fascist countries, but above all the triumph of the insurgents would have been a great embarrassment. Moreover, an important Soviet contribution also consisted in sending officers who were tasked with training international volunteers, who gathered within the *International Brigades*. However, towards August of the same year, aid to the Republic was blocked, but it resumed in September when it was learned that Germany, Portugal, and Italy had continued to send weapons and would continue to do so¹⁶¹.

The undefined position of the USSR and the awareness that London would not take action against Italy in the aftermath of the sending of the first aid, led Mussolini just ten days after the conflict to

¹⁵⁶ DDI, 1935-1939, Octave Series, vol. IV, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1936, p. 663.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵⁸ DDI, 1935-1939, Octave Series, vol. IV, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1936, p. 663.

¹⁵⁹ DDI, 1935-1939, Octave Series, vol. IV, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1936, p. 669.

¹⁶⁰ P. Preston, *La guerra civile spagnola. Reazione, Rivoluzione, Vendetta*, Mondadori, Milano, 2011, p. 158.

¹⁶¹ *Ivi*, p. 159.

intervene in the conflict alongside General Francisco Franco. On July 27, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Galeazzo Ciano informed the Consul General in Tangier, De Rossi, that “twelve bombers, suitably disguised, are concentrated in Sardinia and can reach Melilla in five hours”¹⁶², and asked “without assuming commitments or making promises of any kind”¹⁶³ to have a clearer picture of the Spanish situation in order to decide better on a possible intervention. In response to this, De Rossi himself explained the situation of great Spanish instability and deadlock between the two sides of the conflict, which need further aid in order to assert themselves in the fight. Of great importance to the consul is also the need to increase aid in order to discourage possible aid from Soviet and French socialists. Although Italy's position is changing towards the civil war, it is still emphasized that there is no willingness to make a real commitment or promise to Franco. For the moment, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs is still pondering the consequences of actual interference in Spain and continues to verify the positions of public opinion and the British, especially conservative, and French governments on the issue. It will be the chargé d'affaires in London, Vitetti, who will communicate to Ciano the apprehension towards the Iberian situation, the belief that this war is a Soviet plan to establish Bolshevism in the country and destabilize Europe, and the fears towards France as well, sensitive to this threat, which must be convinced to desist and give up any idea of helping the republican cause. A possible Franco-Soviet collaboration greatly frightens England. They recognize that this understanding is incompatible with any security arrangement they might be willing to provide to France and, at the same time, would have consequences for the English, who are not willing to take risks. In the event of an expansion of the conflict, the English would find themselves “having to defend Russia or to counterattack or to become attacked by Japan”¹⁶⁴. This eventuality is not contemplated because the English are “determined [...] not to let ourselves be dragged into a war with Germany because of a Russo-German conflict and, even less, to expose ourselves to the risk of a

¹⁶² DDI, 1935-1939, Octave Series, vol. IV, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1936, p. 705.

¹⁶³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶⁴ DDI, 1935-1939, Octave Series, vol. IV, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1936, p. 712.

possible war with Japan”¹⁶⁵. The greatest fear is that, therefore, Europe will be split into two ideological camps, fascism or Bolshevism, precisely because of the USSR and France, which would not receive compassion or help from Britain for any reason.

On August 30, after a request for immediate aid, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs approved the sending of airplanes to Melilla¹⁶⁶. Thus, through the dispatch of twelve Savoia-Marchetti S.81 bombers departed from Elmas airport, in Sardinia, towards Spanish Morocco with the distinctive markings of the Italian aviation carefully covered, the beginning of Italian intervention in Spain was sanctioned. The pilots who took part in the mission were volunteers and were supposed to change into uniforms of the Spanish Legion and serve the Falangist cause once landed.

2.2 Great Britain

2.2.1 Background

Throughout history, Britain's interest in Spanish territories has been driven by a combination of strategic, economic, and geopolitical factors. From the early modern period to the tumultuous years of the Spanish Civil War in the 20th century, Britain's engagement with Spain and its territories reflected its broader ambitions and concerns on the global stage. Due to its geographical position between two continents and its possession of the Balearic and Canary Islands, as well as a protectorate in the northern part of Morocco, Spain drew Britain's attention. The British government was interested in forming an alliance with Spain, despite its limited social and political structure and economic deficiencies. It was considered a geo-politically strategic country. In the 1930s, Spain had an agrarian

¹⁶⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁶ DDI, 1935-1939, Octave Series, vol. IV, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1936, p. 714.

system with limited industrial capacity¹⁶⁷. The British government was able to involve itself in Spanish affairs due to its economic dominance. It was the “primary recipient of Spanish exports, accounting for 25% of the total, and the second-largest supplier to the country, providing 7% of imports (excluding those from the colonies - India accounted for another 3%)”¹⁶⁸.

For these reasons, London observed the riots and political changes of the 1930s with great attention. The British government and the Foreign Office initially addressed the growing tension in Spain with a series of complex assessments. Their attention was focused on the Anglo-Spanish payments agreement of December 1935¹⁶⁹ and the upcoming elections of February 1936. Angel Herrera, a member of Acción Popular, contacted the British ambassador Sir Henry Chilton to express concerns about the potential risks of a left-wing victory and its impact on British interests¹⁷⁰. The collapse of the monarchy and the unexpected left-wing victory caused great surprise and tension. During this period, the British perception of the Spanish political situation was shaped by information from Spain, including reports from the uncensored press and opinions of influential figures such as the President of the State Council. Despite the initially positive impressions of the members of the new Popular Front government, who were considered “composed of men of moderate ideas [...] intellectuals rather than practicing socialists”¹⁷¹, concerns about the future of British economic interests in Spain under a left-wing government began to emerge.

¹⁶⁷ Moradiellos, E., *The Origins of British Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War: Anglo-Spanish Relations in Early 1936*, “European History Quarterly”, 1991, vol. 21, issue 3, p. 343.

¹⁶⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁹ The Anglo-Spanish Payments Agreement of December 1935 was a significant economic arrangement between Britain and Spain. It aimed to address the issue of outstanding payments owed by Spain to British creditors, particularly in the context of Spain's ongoing economic challenges during the 1930s. The agreement essentially allowed Spain to defer its debt repayments to Britain for a specified period, providing much-needed financial relief to the Spanish government. In return, Britain received assurances regarding the eventual repayment of the debt and potentially secured preferential treatment for British interests in Spain.

¹⁷⁰ Edwards, J., *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War*, London, Macmillan, 1979, p. 4.

¹⁷¹ Ivi, p. 4.

Large financial investments had flowed into Spain, amounting to 200 million dollars, especially in the mining sector, manufacturing, and public services¹⁷². The initial action taken by the Popular Front was to implement a nationalist and protectionist policy. This involved the nationalization of foreign companies and the establishment of progressive labor legislation¹⁷³. As a result, tariffs were introduced on British products. Additionally, efforts were made to bring English companies such as Rio Tinto Company and Yeoward Bros under the control of local committees. These companies were respectively involved in copper mining and banana plantations in the Canary Islands¹⁷⁴. The government of Great Britain origin rebelled against these conditions based on the commercial treaty of August 1935¹⁷⁵. The republican government also backtracked, returning trade to previous agreements.

Herrera's concerns regarding the Spanish regime were confirmed when the British community, supported by consular reports, requested the Foreign Office to address a wave of complaints¹⁷⁶. Arthur Bryant's report to Prime Minister Baldwin emphasized the class hatred and widespread revolutionary sentiments fueled by Soviet agents¹⁷⁷. British businesses were furious about the economic decrees of the Popular Front government, such as tariff increases and labor mandates. Chauvinistic sentiments led to strikes, sabotage, and dynamite attacks, which caused British concerns about the stability of the country and the safety of British citizens and investments¹⁷⁸. The assassination of Joseph Mitchell Hood, the British director of a lace factory in Barcelona, further heightened the concerns of the British colony in Spain. It is important to note that the term communist is used here in a political sense and not as an objective description of the individuals involved. The

¹⁷² Little, D., *Malevolent Neutrality. The United States, Great Britain and the Origins of the Spanish Civil War*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 37.

¹⁷³ Moradiellos, E., *The Origins of British Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War: Anglo-Spanish Relations in Early 1936*, "European History Quarterly", 1991, vol. 21, issue 3, p. 345.

¹⁷⁴ *Ivi*, p. 342.

¹⁷⁵ Edwards, J., *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War*, London, Macmillan, 1979, p. 5.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷⁷ *Ivi*, p. 6.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibidem*.

discovery of communist' uniforms in Madrid and reports of thousands of communists confirmed fears of anarchy¹⁷⁹. The Foreign Office attempted to maintain a detached view from the reports. The Spanish government provided assurances for the protection of British lives and property. However, the assassination of Jose Calvo Sotelo and the worsening tensions brought Spain to the brink of civil war.

At the outbreak of the civil war, the Popular Front government was unprepared for the events of July 1936. The internal situation in Spain was disrupted by various revolts and internal struggles, rendering it incapable of managing external relations. The already strained relations between the Spanish republican government and the British worsened. British representatives made few efforts to establish strong ties with the Popular Front government before hostilities broke out¹⁸⁰. The Foreign Office had the responsibility of safeguarding English interests in the territory. However, some British plenipotentiaries developed hostility towards the Spanish government, as in the case of Sir Henry Chilton¹⁸¹. Chilton's experience further complicated matters. Chilton was assigned to Spain a year before the civil war, and his task proved to be challenging and unappreciated. During the conflict, Chilton expressed dissatisfaction with the government's actions¹⁸². He was forced by communist forces to conduct his diplomatic activities first in Zarauz and then in St. Jean-de-Luz¹⁸³. This episode shaped his opinion of Spain and Great Britain, as both were incapable of safeguarding their interests or citizens in this situation. While initially remaining impartial, the author's experiences confirmed the inadequacy of both Spanish and British entities in evaluating the socialist government¹⁸⁴.

¹⁷⁹ Ivi, 7.

¹⁸⁰ Edwards, J., *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War*, London, Macmillan, 1979, p. 10.

¹⁸¹ Ivi, p. 7

¹⁸² Ibidem.

¹⁸³ Ivi, p. 8.

¹⁸⁴ Ibidem.

In the context of Spain on the brink of civil war, there were various speculations about a possible coup d'état. However, these speculations were treated with extreme skepticism. It is noteworthy that the Foreign Office was informed of a possible coup as early as May 1936. The coup was not organized by a fascist movement, but aimed at restoring order and installing a right-wing civilian government¹⁸⁵. This skepticism arises from the ongoing instability in Spain. Although the atmosphere of civil war is perceived, no one expected such a sudden reversal of the situation.

2.2.2 Reaction

Upon the commencement of the Spanish conflict, the British government recognized that a triumph by either of the two factions, the extreme left or the extreme right, would present a challenge to British foreign policy and interests¹⁸⁶. It is evident, however, that the Tories favored the nationalists, led by Francisco Franco, as the preferable option. This reactionary response by a conservative government, common throughout Europe, was based on the suspicion that communism could spread rapidly across the continent following the October Revolution. This growing fear served to justify British foreign policy choices, but it was also a means for the dictators of the time to create consensus and rally a population against a shared cause, in this case, communism¹⁸⁷.

Britain's attitude undoubtedly had a significant impact on the outcome of the war. Even British government officials acknowledge the significant contribution made by Franco's victory. For example, Sir Robert Vansittart¹⁸⁸ privately acknowledged at the end of the conflict that the policy of non-intervention, which effectively worked in an entirely one-sided manner, had put a premium on

¹⁸⁵ Ivi, p. 7.

¹⁸⁶ Edwards, J., *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War*, London, Macmillan, 1979, p. 10.

¹⁸⁷ Ivi, p. 3.

¹⁸⁸ Robert Gilbert Vansittart, Baron Vansittart was a British diplomat, author, and extreme Germanophobe.

Franco's victory¹⁸⁹. It is important to note that scholars recognize the British attitude and policies were in complete support of the insurgents. However, there is no unanimity in identifying the motivations behind this policy¹⁹⁰. Among the recognized causes is the fear of the escalation of the conflict, leading to an attempt to contain the war to Spanish territory only. The European continent was still recovering from recent events. Britain adopted a policy of appeasement; whose primary objective was to pacify a country under attack through negotiation to prevent war. This policy embodied the guidelines of English foreign policy, which aimed to preserve peace and prevent the expansionist tendencies of European countries¹⁹¹. However, the primary reason for British non-intervention is hostility and distrust towards communism. It is widely accepted that the conservative government's response was based on a thorough analysis of the situation in Spain. Considering the rise of the Popular Front to power and the fear of a potential 'red' revolution in Spain, which could have caused significant imbalances in Europe and benefited the socialists in the Soviet Union and France, Britain's actions can be criticized for their malevolent neutrality. Despite presenting itself as a neutral country in the conflict, Britain secretly provided assistance and support to the insurgents.

For a short time, the British government thought it could treat the Spanish problem as a minor one that would resolve itself, mainly internally. Spain was prone to such uprisings. In the past, after long periods of turmoil, the situation had been resolved with the help of a temporary dictator¹⁹². The British Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, overestimated the Iberian problem and entrusted his Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, with the task of dealing with it. During this period, however, Eden's work was made difficult by the amount of advice he received from numerous advisers who wanted to play

¹⁸⁹ Moradiellos, E., *The Origins of British Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War: Anglo-Spanish Relations in Early 1936*, "European History Quarterly", 1991, vol. 21, issue 3, p. 340.

¹⁹⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁹¹ Ibidem.

¹⁹² Political instability and upheavals have historically plagued Spain, frequently sparking revolutions or uprisings. Temporary dictators have arisen to take control during protracted periods of unrest, either by coercion or popular backing. Restoring the nation's stability and order was their primary goal. Although these dictatorships were not meant to last, they frequently were very important in keeping the country stable until a more long-term solution could be found, such as restoring democratic administration or installing a new government.

an active part in the formulation of foreign policy, among whom Viscount Halifax, Lord Privy Seal and Minister without Portfolio, stood out. He was able to push through his work and manage the initial period of the coup because the Foreign Secretary was away on his summer holiday¹⁹³. He was the one in control of foreign policy decisions, although this only became necessary on 5 August¹⁹⁴. In addition, during the delicate early stages of the Spanish Civil War, the long parliamentary recess also affected the decision-making process. The recess resulted in the absence of cabinet meetings from 29 July to 2 September 1938 and the dispersal of ministers. For these reasons, the role played by Foreign Office officials during the first weeks of the Spanish crisis was significant. Unfortunately, their seasonal absences also became increasingly important, even as their memos became more important¹⁹⁵.

A major initial inconvenience was the lack of communication channels at the start of the war. From the outset, the Conservative government managed to establish an immediate means of communication through telegrams sent from British ships in Spanish waters or at Gibraltar¹⁹⁶. Despite the limited initial information, the British government's first response to the crisis was necessarily to ensure the safety of all British citizens in Spain. London therefore made warships available to enable the evacuation of both British and other nationalities. The oil reserves in Gibraltar were then considered and even offered to the Spanish government, but it was vital to keep the war away from the duty-free port of Tangier¹⁹⁷.

Tangier was under the control of an international committee because of its unique status as an international zone¹⁹⁸. At the same time as the uprising in Spain, there was also an uprising in Tangier.

¹⁹³ Edwards, J., *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War*, London, Macmillan, 1979, p. 11.

¹⁹⁴ *Ivi*, p. 12.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹⁷ *Ivi*, p. 13.

¹⁹⁸ This status was established by the Tangier Protocol of 1923, which aimed to safeguard the city's neutrality and allow free trade and movement for all nations. The international committee, composed of representatives from various countries, was tasked with overseeing the administration of Tangier and ensuring that it remained neutral and open to all nations.

While the Republican government was trying to put down the rebellion in Morocco, the officers, aware of what was happening in their homeland and under Franco's control, decided to join him. However, they were faced with a counter-revolution that led to the reorganization of the Spanish navy. Following the loss of the ships, which led to a change in Franco's plan of action, he first threatened to bomb both Tangier and Gibraltar if the Spanish ships in the ports were refueled¹⁹⁹, and then mistakenly ordered the bombing of two British ships²⁰⁰. The first sign of neutrality came when, on 21 and 22 July, the British authorities refused “to allow Tangier and Gibraltar to act as bases for the operations and supplies of the Republican fleet”²⁰¹.

2.2.3 Not to aid

Up to this point, the British government had not made a clear decision on whether or not to intervene in the Spanish conflict. On the other hand, there had been no specific requests from the rebels, apart from negotiations over fuel for the Spanish ships²⁰². Informally, the head of the British state was already convinced that it was advisable not to get involved in a war “on the side of the Russians”²⁰³, but there are no official traces of discussions on the Spanish question, although there must have been some. When the Spanish ambassador reported the Republican government's request for arms, a cabinet meeting had to be convened to discuss it²⁰⁴. Immediately the Great Britain's reaction, expressed in this case by Eden, was against the request. In theory, he could not refuse the sale of arms already on the market, but he could prevent new production. Negotiations between the Republicans and British arms manufacturers began shortly afterwards, but were subsequently blocked²⁰⁵. The English approach to the Spanish conflict was one of non-intervention. This decision can be seen as a

¹⁹⁹ The normal sources of oil were now in the hands of the rebels.

²⁰⁰ Edwards, J., *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War*, London, Macmillan, 1979, p. 17.

²⁰¹ Moradiellos, E., *The Origins of British Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War: Anglo-Spanish Relations in Early 1936*, “European History Quarterly”, 1991, vol. 21, issue 3, p. 358.

²⁰² *Ibidem*.

²⁰³ Edwards, J., *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War*, London, Macmillan, 1979, p. 18.

²⁰⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁰⁵ *Ivi*, p. 19.

pragmatic and cautious choice, in line with the government's policy of appeasement. This policy was not only applied to the Spanish situation but also to the expansionist aims of Germany and Italy.

With the aim of staying out of the war, explicitly on the side of the Republican faction, the management of the office was left to Viscount Halifax, who stayed in line with what Eden and Baldwin had decided: non-intervention. This decision was difficult to maintain because, on the one hand, communications with Spain were handled by the Foreign Office, while commercial cooperation with English companies continued. With the exception of non-commercial aid, which required the cooperation of the British government, the Foreign Office vehemently resisted any form of cooperation²⁰⁶. However, it soon became clear that even private commercial transactions were becoming a source of international friction²⁰⁷. The British had significant business interests in Spain, with several investments in the territory that fueled a vested interest in the outcome of the conflict. This interest aligned with the victory of the nationalists, the faction that the British government was backing. It is important to note that this information is presented objectively without any subjective evaluations. This support was facilitated by a deep connection between the British establishment and the Spanish sherry exporting elite, who supported Francisco Franco's cause. Paul Preston argues that the intermingling of economic and cultural interests resulted in a strong desire to avoid war at all costs. This led to a preference for a neutral approach and distancing oneself from the conflict.

It is important to note here the respective perspectives on the conflict held by the two main factions within the English political landscape. Neutrality was backed by the Conservative Party. Despite rumors spread by the party, influenced by reactionary Catholicism, detailing atrocities allegedly committed by anarchists, such as looting and rape, this was not enough to move them towards an interventionist policy. The majority of Conservatives still favored appeasement. Only a minority,

²⁰⁶ Edwards, J., *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War*, London, Macmillan, 1979, p. 19.

²⁰⁷ Watkins, K. W., *Britain Divided. The Effect of the Spanish Civil War on British Public Opinion*, University of Michigan, T. Nelson, 1976, p. 147.

including Anthony Eden, who distrusted the Italian fascist government, opposed it. As the war progressed, it became clear that Italy and Germany had intervened in Spain to a greater extent than previously thought. Winston Churchill proposed that France and Britain maintain strict neutrality to ensure the security of both nations.

On the other hand, the Labour Party had never had direct contact with the Spanish left, but it sympathised with their cause and also supported the Non-Intervention Committee, hoping that it might actually hinder General Franco²⁰⁸. Within the party, despite a common condemnation of the Republican government for bringing chaos to the country, there was great division. Some, like Walter Citrine, president of the main English trade union confederation, the Trade Union Centre, and Hugh Dalton, were against any form of English interference in Spain, especially the latter, who even joined the Conservative line, fearing the violence observed in Spain²⁰⁹. Labour leader Clement Attlee, on the other hand, sympathised with the Spanish government and decided to support neutrality by adopting a pacifist stance. Meanwhile, they organised fund-raising campaigns to provide food and clothing for Republicans under siege, for the children of Guernica after the bombing of 24 April 1937, and for ambulances for the International Brigades²¹⁰. Subsequently, the party formally abandoned non-intervention when it became clear that in the end it was only Franco who benefited from it by increasing his power, but limited its demand to the restoration of the right to trade in munitions²¹¹.

Although the government maintained a position of neutrality in the conflict, it failed to recognise the widespread emotional, political and intellectual support among the population for the legitimate government in Madrid. The British public sympathised with the supporters of the Republic to such

²⁰⁸ Gori, Enrico. "I volontari anglofoni nella Guerra civile spagnola." *Diacronie*, N° 37, 1 (2019), documento 6. Pubblicato online il 29 marzo 2019. Consultato il 15 marzo 2024. Disponibile su: <http://journals.openedition.org/diacronie/11013>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/diacronie.11013>

²⁰⁹ *Ibidem*.

²¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹¹ *Ibidem*.

an extent that a large proportion of the population responded to the call to arms, despite the resolution that it was a crime to volunteer to fight in Spain. Many English volunteers who were active in the war were already in the territory for the Popular Olympics²¹². Among them were Felicia Browne, a communist painter who distinguished herself both in the fight against the Nazis in Berlin and in her participation in the PSUC column in Aragon, as well as Nat Cohen and Sam Masters, famous for founding the first Anglo-Spanish formation²¹³. Many writers and poets also joined the socialist cause, such as George Orwell, the poet John Cornford and the journalist Tom Wintringham. They all agreed and wrote about the Civil War, focusing on the disorganisation and indiscipline that characterised a revolution as heterogeneous as the Spanish one, due to the wide range of factions and interests involved in the conflict. It was a complex web of political ideologies and interests. These authors understood the different levels through which the revolution unfolded, between internal divisions, regional differences that had characterized Spanish history for decades, but above all how foreign involvement complicated the end of the uprising.

In conclusion, Britain's non-involvement was determined by a complex interplay of economic, political and cultural factors, but there was a firm belief that “the alternative to Franco was Communism tempered by anarchy”²¹⁴. For this reason, British neutrality was strongly supported, although by the end of the summer it was clear that the Spanish conflict was becoming internationalized. Moreover, the British authorities were convinced of their choice, which had a major impact on the fate of Spain and led to the rise of Franco as an alternative to a Republican government that was seen as incapable of governing. For this reason, the same government exerted great pressure on the French Prime Minister Blum to prevent him from becoming involved in the conflict in any

²¹² The 1936 "Olimpiada Popular" in Barcelona is referred to as the "Popular Olympics" in Spain. This competition was set up as a counterbalance to the official Olympic Games, which were governed by the Nazi government and held in Berlin that same year. The goals of the Popular Olympics were to advance internationalism, democracy, and anti-fascism.

²¹³ Ibidem.

²¹⁴ Moradiellos, E. (1991). *The Origins of British Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War: Anglo-Spanish Relations in Early 1936*, *European History Quarterly*, vol. 2, issue 3, p. 359.

way. The final attempt in this regard is linked to the future Non-Intervention Pact and the same Committee, of which the Conservative government was one of the most convinced proponents, which represented the means to achieve British political objectives: to slow down support for the Republic in France, to avoid conflicts with Italy and Germany, and to maintain a favourable public image²¹⁵. The first and most obvious effect of the Committee's mission was to isolate the Republic, while Franco continued to receive men and resources to gradually conquer all Spanish territory.

²¹⁵ Ivi, p. 358.

3. The International Non-Intervention agreement

A significant international attention and interest was gathered around the Spanish civil war. At that time, the confluence of ideological, geopolitical, military, and humanitarian forces attracted the engagement of foreign governments and individuals in support of their different interests and causes. The struggle itself between the republicans and the nationalists was seen in a sympathetic way from the intellectuals, artists and activists of all over Europe. Numerous volunteers traveled to Spain to fight on the Republican side. The active participation bought some international visibility to the civil war; however, it was feared by the governments who viewed the rapid development of the war with dread and whose aim was to prevent an escalation of the conflict. This desire is not unprecedented in history. As a matter of fact, Spain's internal conflicts have frequently lasted a long time and impacted neighboring nations. This was so evident that even in the midst of the Spanish Civil War (1873–1875), a non-intervention pact had to be arranged and signed²¹⁶. However, these two non-intervention pacts could not be more different from each other.

Between 1873 and 1875 it was established an “international non-interference accord”²¹⁷, which was characterized by a much less formal and organized nature. The necessity of this agreement was felt by nations like France and Great Britain, primarily because to fears that Germany might interfere in Spain and worsen the situation for all of Europe²¹⁸. The British and French ambassadors had made an effort to promote as cooperation and, more importantly, non-interference. In this occasion, these principles were respected and a united front was formed according to which even Germany adopted similar procedures to confine the conflict in the Spanish territories. A formal agreement between Germany, France and Great Britain was signed, which was joined by the other major powers both in

²¹⁶ Padelford, N. J., *The International Non-Intervention Agreement and the Spanish Civil War*, “The American Journal of International Law”, 1937, vol. 31, issue 4, p. 578.

²¹⁷ Ibidem.

²¹⁸ Ibidem.

Europe and in the United States. Thus, a potential international intervention comes to an end here. In contrast to Spain in the 1930s, there was undoubtedly less outside intervention despite the agreement being followed by a great deal of correspondence²¹⁹. The current non-intervention strategy is far more ambitious, although not necessarily more successful²²⁰.

3.1 The Strategic Dynamics behind the Non-Intervention Pact

The decision for a non-intervention agreement between the great European powers in the Spanish conflict is officially the result of a French initiative, although unofficially it is the result of a British political move. The British government, concerned about a possible ideological rapprochement between socialist France and the Spanish republic, put great pressure on the former to adopt a non-interventionist line²²¹. The prompt intervention had effectively restrained the French leader's disposition to grant demands for assistance from Jose Giral, the president of the Spanish government²²². This effect resulted from the belief held by the British government that France's political might was too small to incur the risk of future conflict with London. As a result, the British government purposefully pushed the French to initiate the pact's proposal. This method had two major strategic advantages from the British point of view²²³. First of all, it was thought that internal resistance within the French Popular Front would be more difficult to overcome because the initiative originated in France. Second, the British expected the plan to effectively neutralize resistance from the British Labour Party if it came from Paris, especially from a socialist prime minister²²⁴.

²¹⁹ Padelford, N. J., *The International Non-Intervention Agreement and the Spanish Civil War*, "The American Journal of International Law", 1937, vol. 31, issue 4, p. 579.

²²⁰ Ibidem.

²²¹ Gallagher, M. D., *Leon Blum and the Spanish Civil War*, "Journal of Contemporary History", 1971, vol. 6, issue 3, p. 56.

²²² Ivi, p. 57.

²²³ Ivi, p. 62.

²²⁴ Ibidem.

Blum's surrender came gradually over the course of several steps²²⁵. The first chance came when, in a calculated move prior to the Spanish crisis, French Premier Leon Blum arranged a diplomatic visit to London in order to fortify Franco-British cooperation in order to tackle the issues of the time. Their cooperation served as a safeguard against the extreme uncertainty that pervaded Europe at the time. But there were difficulties on this occasion. France's place in the geopolitical scene had long been viewed with disdain in diplomatic circles. Doubt and skepticism resulted in the European capital being portrayed as a sleeping partner that is now ineffectual and marginalized.²²⁶ In light of the potential for the British government to diverge further from the French, this meeting was convened to reaffirm French commitments to international affairs and the historic alliance. Consequently, on 23 and 24 July, Britain, France and Belgium met in conjunction with the Three Powers Conference²²⁷.

At the time, the French government served as a model and a pillar for people who believed that a socialist government could provide an efficient political system. For this reason, the Spanish republic notified the French prime minister its first aid requests right away. The prime minister complied with the Spanish demands by making a few concessions²²⁸. Nonetheless, there was a division in French public opinion following the announcement of the attack on the Spanish government. On the one side, there were those who favored assistance sending and backed the republic. Conversely, the right-wing community opposed any intervention in Spain due to their grave concerns about a potential clash with Germany. The British used pressure to dissolve the dichotomy between caution and interventionism.

After returning to France, Blum called a cabinet meeting on July 25 and decided to stop providing any military support to Spain²²⁹. What part London played in the decision to support a non-

²²⁵ Gallagher, M. D., *Leon Blum and the Spanish Civil War*, "Journal of Contemporary History", 1971, vol. 6, issue 3, p. 56.

²²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²²⁹ On 25 July he called the first cabinet meeting following his return. It revealed the division of opinion among the ministers; there was willingness to help the Spanish Republicans, but reluctance to deliver arms openly to Spain. It was decided to assign the material to Mexico, and to leave it to the discretion of the Mexican Government to put the material

interventionist stance and refrain from providing assistance to the Spanish government is still unknown. There is no proof of the French side's assertions in the British archives. Although it appears that the Spanish question was not included in the conference's official proceedings, it is apparent that this was one of the subjects covered, albeit informally. The French Prime Minister was lobbied by several influential politicians. First, Baldwin forewarned Blum that Britain would maintain its neutrality if French action in Spain sparked a battle with Italy²³⁰. A second visit came from journalist Pertinax (Andre Geraud), who implied that Britain did not approve of the arms sale to Spain. Blum was unfazed and responded that he planned to move forward²³¹. Finally, Blum claims to have been reached during his stay in London by a phone call from Eden urging him to be cautious, having learned that his government intended to send arms to the Spanish government²³². The latter remains a controversial fact since in his memoirs, Eden merely points out that 'nothing was discussed about the Spanish problem during meeting with the three powers', omitting any statement he made at the hotel²³³.

Another occasion concerns the British Admiralty's rejection of the Chief of Service, Admiral Darlan, who was dispatched to London with the objective of persuading his naval counterpart of the pivotal strategic significance of the Spanish situation²³⁴. In an attempt to convince London to intervene, which had not yet declared its complete neutrality, there was a meeting between Philip Noel-Baker, a British politician, and the French premier²³⁵. On this occasion, Noel-Baker suggested to Admiral

to use.¹⁶ The decision was largely influenced by awareness of the British Government's attitude. Gallagher, M. D. (1971). Leon Blum and the Spanish Civil War. *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.6, n.3, pp.56-64.

²³⁰ Edwards, J., *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War*, London, Macmillan, 1979, p. 16.

²³¹ Ivi, p. 17.

²³² Adamthwaite A., *France and the Coming of the Second War World 1936-39*, London, Routledge, 1977, p. 43.

²³³ Edwards, J. (1979). *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan UK, p. 17.

²³⁴ Ivi, p. 19.

²³⁵ Gallagher, M. D., *Leon Blum and the Spanish Civil War*, "Journal of Contemporary History", 1971, vol. 6, issue 3, p.

Darlan, who supported the republicans, to speak to the eminent British official Sir Maurice Hankey, to discuss the possibility of convening a meeting of the British cabinet to address the issue²³⁶. Then, in an attempt to gain British support for the French intervention in Spain, Darlan went to London to talk to Lord Chatfield, the First Sea Lord. Despite the absence of any documentation pertaining to the content of the discussions, the London meeting concluded in a negative manner from the perspective of the French government²³⁷. It became evident that Paris possessed minimal influence or authority over British decisions, to the extent that Blum's decisions in Paris were significantly influenced by this revelation²³⁸. The consequence of this complete failure was that on 31 July, a session of the French Chamber of Deputies commenced debating the adoption of a position of non-intervention, which was announced by the Foreign Office itself²³⁹.

This concludes the body of evidence. Actually, in an attempt to secure a worldwide non-intervention pact in Spain, the French government officially proposed the idea to the premiers of Italy and the United Kingdom on August 2, 1936²⁴⁰. Six days later, the Pyrenean border was closed, and Blum reiterated in a communiqué that selling arms to the Republic was forbidden in order to prevent problems with other countries²⁴¹. A draft document "laying down definite rules for the application of common undertakings for non-intervention" was, on August 6, sent to all of the European Powers²⁴². At the cabinet meeting in Paris on August 8, a final decision was made. Following a period of three weeks of uncertainty, France ultimately opted for a non-interventionist strategy on August 8. With regard to this policy, France was the pioneer²⁴³. The revelation on August 7th, of France's definitive

²³⁶ Gallagher, M. D., *Leon Blum and the Spanish Civil War*, "Journal of Contemporary History", 1971, vol. 6, issue 3, p. 60

²³⁷ *Ibidem*.

²³⁸ *Ibidem*.

²³⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁴⁰ *Ivi*, p. 61.

²⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

²⁴² *Ibidem*.

²⁴³ *Ivi*, p. 62.

determination to follow a policy of non-intervention, was the third event that sparked rumors. It was thought that Britain had applied significant diplomatic pressure before making the decision²⁴⁴.

Thus, the proposal for a non-intervention pact during the Spanish Civil War emerged as a result of intricate diplomatic maneuvers, with both French and British interests playing pivotal roles in shaping its development²⁴⁵.

3.2 The agreement and its characteristics

Under M. Blum's leadership, the French government launched a diplomatic initiative that resulted in the signature of the non-intervention agreement on August 15th 1936, during the early stages of the Spanish Civil War²⁴⁶. The agreement sought to prevent international countries from becoming directly involved in the conflict either by giving military support to the Republican government or the Nationalist rebels under General Francisco Franco's leadership. The signatories were mostly major European countries, such as France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union, but the list of participants included also non-European countries, such as Mexico, Turkey and Egypt.

Nonetheless, the Non-Intervention Agreement's efficacy was restricted²⁴⁷. First of all, a large number of signatories broke the agreement by secretly endorsing their favorite side in the fight. For example, Germany and Italy publicly supplied military support to Franco's Nationalist forces, and the Soviet Union aided the Republican government. Furthermore, although this agreement is now regarded as an important historical record of the international community's attempts to stop the Spanish Civil War

²⁴⁴ Edwards, J., *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War*, London, Macmillan, 1979, p. 61.

²⁴⁵ Ivi, p. 62.

²⁴⁶ Vedovato, G., *Il non intervento in Spagna (31 luglio 1936- 19 aprile 1937)*, "Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali", 1982, vol. 49, issue 4, p. 2.

²⁴⁷ Ibidem.

from spreading outside of Spain, it was unable to stop foreign involvement in the conflict²⁴⁸. The war dragged on with the support of foreign powers until 1939, when General Franco emerged victorious and took control of the entire nation.

At the bottom of this process there was an exchange of notes between France and Great Britain, during the early summer. The purpose of these notes was to establish a common attitude and they were composed of a preamble and three declarations of policy²⁴⁹. The policy stated in the Non-Intervention Agreement's preamble conveyed the governments' general intention to abstain from meddling in Spain's domestic affairs, both directly and indirectly²⁵⁰. They agreed that issues had to be avoided that would damage ties between their different communities. In their declaration, the signatories vowed to forbid the transfer or reexport of weapons, ammunition, war supplies, aircraft, military hardware, and warships to Spain²⁵¹. This ban included contracts that were already in effect, and the signatory nations promised to notify other involved nations of the steps they were taking to enforce these limitations²⁵². The agreement's success, though, depended on the support of other countries as well, namely those of Germany, Italy, the Soviet Union, and Portugal²⁵³.

This pact was a political agreement, which meant that its implementation had to be supervised by the states themselves. For this reason, no single instrument was selected, shared by the various signatories, to verify what was declared²⁵⁴.

²⁴⁸ Vedovato, G., *Il non intervento in Spagna (31 luglio 1936- 19 aprile 1937)*, "Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali", 1982, vol. 49, issue 4, p. 530.

²⁴⁹ Padelford, N. J., *The International Non-Intervention Agreement and the Spanish Civil War*, "The American Journal of International Law", 1937, vol. 31, issue 4, p. 579.

²⁵⁰ *Ivi*, p. 580.

²⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

²⁵² *Ibidem*.

²⁵³ *Ibidem*.

²⁵⁴ *Ivi*, p. 81.

The Non-Intervention Agreement was formulated apart from the League of Nations and primarily functioned beyond its jurisdiction²⁵⁵. However, it was occasionally brought up in discourse within the League and provoked significant remarks. Within this organization, the agreement was discussed, or rather how the agreement itself was actually an intervention. At the September 1936 meeting, the Spanish delegate, Foreign Minister Alvarez del Vayo, criticized this pact on the grounds that it put the rebels on the same level as the established government and refused legitimate aid to an established government with which other countries were at peace²⁵⁶. A comparable perspective was articulated by the Soviet representative, Litvinov, who disclosed that his government had only consented to the non-intervention pact due to concerns about the potential for an international conflict, yet considered it a “violation of the principles of international law”²⁵⁷. Consequently, even the Portuguese Foreign Minister, Monteiro, expressed skepticism about the agreement, acknowledging the legal argument that a legitimate government should maintain its normal trade relations. While the legal argument presented is compelling, there are concerns about the practical feasibility of strictly adhering to this legal principle, particularly in the context of a civil war. The issue arises from the fact that civil war itself affects trade²⁵⁸.

3.3 Assessing the Reactions of Signatory States

The different responses and interpretations among signatory states is of utmost importance. Expressing great concern over the Spanish War, the states²⁵⁹ reacted to the non-intervention plan positively and shared with France and Great Britain what was at the heart of the agreement itself²⁶⁰. However, the twenty-seven signatory states later made similar if different declarations both in content

²⁵⁵ Padelford, N. J., *The International Non-Intervention Agreement and the Spanish Civil War*, “The American Journal of International Law”, 1937, vol. 31, issue 4, p. 585.

²⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁵⁹ *Ivi*, p. 580.

²⁶⁰ *Ivi*, p. 581.

and composition. Understanding the nuances of putting the agreement into practice, the effect of external conflicts on foreign states, and the goals and priorities of each government all depend on an analysis of the contradictions between the numerous statements. This makes it possible to evaluate whether nations truly intended to abstain from interfering or if they had other plans.

Upon examination of the statements, it is evident that fifteen out of the 27 governments—Britain and France not included—repeated the three core policy declarations as well as the justifications for the declaration verbatim²⁶¹. This suggested that these states, together with France and Great Britain, had a common understanding of the steps to be taken and the reasoning behind them²⁶². On the other hand, six states simply restated the three policy declarations without including the preface. By doing thus, these governments maintained their ability to influence or intervene in ways that were not expressly forbidden by the previous two statements²⁶³. The remaining seventeen states, on the other hand, committed to abstaining from any form of intervention, direct or indirect. Despite public opinion and media criticism, these six states could not be blamed for allowing volunteers, officers, financial, and moral assistance to flow to Spain because they placed fewer limitations on themselves than the other states²⁶⁴.

The variations amongst the different texts that were produced went beyond these. A lot of states inserted interpretations, restrictions, or reservations, or omitted sections²⁶⁵. By defining terms like "indirect interference" in ways that suited their interests, several governments attempted to carve out

²⁶¹ Padelford, N. J., *The International Non-Intervention Agreement and the Spanish Civil War*, "The American Journal of International Law", 1937, vol. 31, issue 4, p. 580.

²⁶² Albania, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Irish Free State, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Rumania, Czechoslovakia, Sweden, Soviet Union, Yugoslavia. Padelford, N. J. (1937). *The International Non-Intervention Agreement and the Spanish Civil War*. The American Journal of International Law, vol. 31, n. 4, p. 580.

²⁶³ Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Turkey. Padelford, N. J. (1937). *The International Non-Intervention Agreement and the Spanish Civil War*. The American Journal of International Law, vol. 31, n. 4, p. 580.

²⁶⁴ *Ivi*, p. 581.

²⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

exceptions for themselves²⁶⁶. Italy and Hungary are two examples of such governments²⁶⁷. In addition, while other signatories are expected to rigidly adhere to their interpretations, Italy remains flexible in its activities, allowing itself public subscriptions or enrollment of troops in support of either party involved in the conflict, because the Italian response does not include the preamble²⁶⁸. However, Yugoslavia and Turkey included two significant disclaimers in their comments, highlighting the unique nature of the agreement and the fact that it does not establish a precedent—particularly with regard to the ability of states to support legitimate governments in their fight against insurrection²⁶⁹. The most interesting case concerns Luxemburg. Its government approved a declaration whose focus was on the prohibition on the exportation of arms, leaving aside both the preamble and the policy declarations²⁷⁰.

In response to this agreement, various countries have expressed their position on the war, despite not being party to the signing of the pact. Switzerland's authorities issued an official statement prohibiting any involvement in, support for, or other favoritism of the hostilities in Spain²⁷¹. They also declared that Switzerland would not partake in the common proclamation, as they had previously taken independent measures to preserve their neutrality. This was followed by a decree issued by the Federal Council on August 26, imposing penalties and fines on violators of its regulations²⁷². Meanwhile the International Control Committee of Tangier makes a number of choices to maintain the zone's unique international status of perpetual neutrality and to stop Spanish government ships from returning to the port²⁷³. The same day, General Sir Charles Harrington, the Governor of

²⁶⁶ Padelford, N. J., *The International Non-Intervention Agreement and the Spanish Civil War*, “The American Journal of International Law”, 1937, vol. 31, issue 4, p. 581.

²⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁶⁸ Here, we are referring at the preamble clause that expresses the commitment to abstain from all forms of interference, both direct and indirect.

²⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁷⁰ *Ibidem*.

²⁷¹ *Ibidem*.

²⁷² Vedovato, G., *Il non intervento in Spagna (31 luglio 1936- 19 aprile 1937)*, “Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali”, 1982, vol. 49, issue 4, p. 533.

²⁷³ *Ivi*, p.532.

Gibraltar, issues a proclamation urging citizens to strictly refrain from interfering with the events in Spain and announcing the immediate expulsion from Gibraltar of anyone offering support to the parties involved in the conflict²⁷⁴.

Nevertheless, the Portuguese reaction to the agreement is of great importance. The neighboring Spanish nation expressed concern for the Spanish conflict and sought assurances from France and England regarding the preservation of its territorial integrity, promising to come to Portugal's aid if it were attacked as a result of participating in the non-intervention agreement²⁷⁵. While adopting a circumspect stance toward the agreement, it adhered to the fundamental tenets of the preamble, retaining the power to take specific acts under specified circumstances. These ranged from aiding newly elected government or confrontational political organizations in Spain to protecting Portuguese nationals and their homeland²⁷⁶. In the event that the signatory nations of the noninterventionist treaty, which are deemed essential for its strict implementation, were engaged in volunteer recruitment campaigns or fund-raising activities to support warring nations, they would forfeit their entire sovereign power²⁷⁷.

3.4 The committee

A committee has to be established in order to supervise the Non-intervention agreement's execution following its signature. Due to the intricate nature of the civil conflict and the possibility of foreign interference, a method for enforcing and monitoring adherence to its provisions was required. Upon realizing that a mechanism was required to accomplish this, the parties began negotiating the

²⁷⁴ Vedovato, G. (1982). Il non intervento in Spagna (31 luglio 1936- 19 aprile 1937). *Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali*, vol. 49, n. 4 (196), p. 532.

²⁷⁵ Padelford, N. J., *The International Non-Intervention Agreement and the Spanish Civil War*, "The American Journal of International Law", 1937, vol. 31, issue 4, p. 581.

²⁷⁶ Ivi, p. 582.

²⁷⁷ Vedovato, G., *Il non intervento in Spagna (31 luglio 1936- 19 aprile 1937)*, "Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali", 1982, vol. 49, issue 4, p. 531.

committee's composition, mandate, and structure. During this process, the committee's duties, decision-making processes, and strategies for handling infractions were all discussed.

The first meeting of the Committee was attended by diplomatic officials from the signatory states to the agreement and took place on September 9, 1936 at the British Foreign Office²⁷⁸. In pivotal roles were two British officials: the president of the committee was Mr. W. S Morrison²⁷⁹ and the executive secretary was Mr. Francis Hemming. In the inaugural meeting, the topic of gathering the paperwork required to support the Committee's activities was deliberated. It was resolved to ask each delegate for details regarding the laws and other actions that their nation has taken to implement the no-action agreement²⁸⁰. One of the first decision taken by this commission was to create a subcommittee, made up of representatives from Belgium, Britain, Czechoslovakia, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and Soviet Russia, whose function concerns the assistance of the president, meaning facilitating procedure, reviewing and providing suggestions to the committee. This choice was established during the second session of the committee on September 14. During this meeting, a previously passed resolution was brought up, stating that the topics being discussed were completely confidential and would only be covered in communiqués²⁸¹.

On September 21, the unrepresented powers of the subcommittee convened in the presence of Lord Plymouth, the newly appointed chairman, to deliberate on the protocol for submitting complaints of agreement breaches. The complaints were limited to those from participating governments and had to be supported by evidence that plausibly indicated a breach of the agreement²⁸². At the subsequent meetings, almost all of the twenty-six members attended with the exception of Spain, Portugal and

²⁷⁸ Padelford, N. J., *The International Non-Intervention Agreement and the Spanish Civil War*, "The American Journal of International Law", 1937, vol. 31, issue 4, p. 582.

²⁷⁹ He will be succeeded by Lord Plymouth.

²⁸⁰ Ivi, 583.

²⁸¹ Vedovato, G. (1982). Il non intervento in Spagna (31 luglio 1936- 19 aprile 1937). *Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali*, vol. 49, n. 4 (196), p. 533.

²⁸² Ibidem.

Switzerland, which, however, despite having adopted the principle of non-interference, continued to comment on and highlight the Spanish situation²⁸³.

With regard to Portugal, the situation was more complex. On the one hand, there had been incidents that prevented the Portuguese representatives from attending the various meetings. One such incident was the invasion and burning of the Portuguese embassy in Spain by government militias on 31 August²⁸⁴. Conversely, the Portuguese government stipulated three conditions precedent to its participation²⁸⁵. The committee was required to demonstrate neutrality in its work, to have access to the necessary resources to complete the task at hand, and to possess clearly defined capabilities in compliance with the guidelines established by the relevant governments²⁸⁶. Although an agreement had been reached between the British and Portuguese governments, the scheduled date for the recognition of this agreement, 28 September, was not adhered to at the subsequent meeting, which was postponed to 9 October²⁸⁷. This was due to protests from the Soviet Union regarding alleged violations of the agreement by Portugal. Despite the Soviet Union's demands for an immediate investigation and control of Portuguese ports, tensions continued to mount. On 28 October, the Soviet Union declared its intention to become involved in the Spanish Civil War²⁸⁸. It asserted that the Spanish government was entitled to procure arms from abroad and that the signatories to the agreement were entitled to sell them²⁸⁹. Additionally, the Madrid government lodged a formal complaint, asserting that not only the government in question, but also the Italian government, had been involved in the conflict in a manner that contravened the principles of neutrality and impartiality²⁹⁰. The principal topic of discussion at the meetings on 4 and 5 November was the alleged

²⁸³ Vedovato, G., *Il non intervento in Spagna (31 luglio 1936- 19 aprile 1937)*, "Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali", 1982, vol. 49, issue 4, p. 533.

²⁸⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁸⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁸⁶ *Ivi*, p.534.

²⁸⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁸⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁹⁰ Padelford, N. J., *The International Non-Intervention Agreement and the Spanish Civil War*, "The American Journal of International Law", 1937, vol. 31, issue 4, p. 587.

violations of the arms embargo in Spain²⁹¹. The issue of non-intervention attracted global attention when certain states formally recognised the Francoist government.

However, Portugal was instrumental in formulating a novel strategy. The next task on the committee's agenda was to create and adopt the guidelines for managing grievances pertaining to breaches of the agreement. The delegates from Portugal said they would not serve on a committee without clear criteria²⁹². Portugal actively participated in discussions and decisions relevant to the handling of complaints and the implementation of the agreement once a just and organized procedure for resolving infractions had been established²⁹³. They unveiled the rules on September 28. It was apparent right once how severe the regulations were. The overall spirit was to minimize the submission of the complaints to the committee. The complainant should have the “undoubted ground of evidence” before bringing allegations of violations against another country²⁹⁴. If objections do surface, however, they have to come from a government that has ratified the international agreement²⁹⁵. Through this ingenious maneuver, the Committee insulated itself from examination of accusations made by private citizens, journalists, foreign organizations, the rebel government, mostly, Madrid government and government not party of the agreement²⁹⁶. The committee's authority was tightly limited. Because of its extremely restricted capabilities, it was unable to issue sanctions, publish reports, or send legal disputes to international tribunals or agencies for settlement²⁹⁷. However, this stringency reduced outside influence or manipulation of the committee's operations. These instances are simply a handful of the numerous charges that were presented to the committee;

²⁹¹ Vedovato, G., *Il non intervento in Spagna (31 luglio 1936- 19 aprile 1937)*, “Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali”, 1982, vol. 49, issue 4, p. 534.

²⁹² Padelford, N. J., *The International Non-Intervention Agreement and the Spanish Civil War*, “The American Journal of International Law”, 1937, vol. 31, issue 4, p. 586.

²⁹³ Ibidem.

²⁹⁴ Ibidem.

²⁹⁵ Ibidem.

²⁹⁶ Ibidem.

²⁹⁷ Ivi, p. 587.

none of them were found to be proof of a violation of the contract²⁹⁸. Although the agreement did not achieve its intended outcome due to breaches that were not proven, the situation was not as severe as it would have been in the absence of the agreement, as British Prime Minister Eden repeatedly emphasized in the House of Commons²⁹⁹.

3.5 Toward the formulation of a new strategy

The committee shifted its focus in November 1936 and started closely observing and learning more about Spanish circumstances in order to make better conclusions³⁰⁰. Overwhelmingly, both sides' contraband reached Spain while the chaos of the war made it impossible to regulate the influx of volunteers. A fresh proposal for neutrality control was being presented. But it began with an appeal to the League of Nations, another organization, made by the Spanish government. According to Article 11 of the Covenant³⁰¹, it was suspected that Germany and Italy were participating in the civil conflict and disrupting world peace, and that they had expressly committed the crime of declaring war without first making preparations for it³⁰². The Council demonstrated a lack of capacity to respond to the Spanish allegations and did not address the petition. As in other instances, the response was a moral resolution regarding the current implementation of the non-intervention plan and its suggested expansion. Although the Council acknowledged the applicability of international law to the internal affairs of other states, it refrained from denouncing the conduct of individual warring nations³⁰³.

²⁹⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹⁹ Padelford, N. J., *The International Non-Intervention Agreement and the Spanish Civil War*, "The American Journal of International Law", 1937, vol. 31, issue 4, p. 588.

³⁰⁰ Ibidem.

³⁰¹ Ibidem.

³⁰² Ibidem.

³⁰³ Ibidem.

The British and French offered to refine and strengthen the non-intervention system, through the control of Spanish ports and airfields and the Spanish-Portuguese border from which the Governments of Burgos and Valencia received abundant supplies of men and war material in the late 1936 and early 1937³⁰⁴. A surveillance project was presented at the plenary session on 2 December, and was subsequently accepted by all delegates of the participating states. At the same time, it was decided to send the two Spanish governments the drafted plan, which prohibited the export of arms and ammunition to Spain and the unloading and transshipment of ammunition in Spanish ports by British ships³⁰⁵. Nevertheless, the project excluded British ships registered in the dominions, mandated territories and colonies³⁰⁶. This responsibility was assigned to the British government³⁰⁷.

In a note dated 4 December, Great Britain and France reformulated the draft. The Committee proposed three recommendations: firstly, that governments should support a joint declaration stating that they will refrain from intervening directly or indirectly in the Spanish conflict; secondly, that activities should be effectively monitored to ensure that this commitment is followed; and thirdly, that there should be humanitarian efforts to mediate a settlement that would allow the Spanish people to express their will as a nation³⁰⁸. Concurrently, the aforementioned recommendations were conveyed to all the countries involved in the committee, and they responded within a month. Portugal, however, was among those who viewed this note negatively. While it supported the principle of strengthening non-intervention, it expressed scepticism about the current possibility of mediation³⁰⁹. This was due to the concern that the two warring parties were unlikely to accept such a pact. Germany and Italy held a similar viewpoint. Both governments expressed reservations about the feasibility of Spanish mediation, casting doubt on the efficacy of this proposal³¹⁰. Nevertheless, they remained

³⁰⁴ Ivi, p. 589.

³⁰⁵ Vedovato, G., *Il non intervento in Spagna (31 luglio 1936- 19 aprile 1937)*, "Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali", 1982, vol. 49, issue 4, p. 534.

³⁰⁶ Ibidem.

³⁰⁷ Ibidem.

³⁰⁸ Ivi, p.535.

³⁰⁹ Ibidem.

³¹⁰ Ibidem.

open to considering alternative proposals. The United States of America hoped that the participating governments would figure out a peaceful way to accomplish their objectives. It was emphasized, meanwhile, that this should not be seen as a departure from its long-standing policy of refraining from interfering in another people's business³¹¹. The rebel government in Burgos, led by Franco, also responded to the project by expressing its disappointment at the British government's lack of consideration for the Spanish nationalist movement³¹².

3.6 The issue of volunteers

The diplomatic efforts of the 1936 Non-Intervention Committee ultimately encountered a challenge that was identified as a significant contributor to the war: the arrival of foreign military personnel. In order to address this issue, the French and British governments, in an exchange of notes on 26 December, called for a halt to both the recruitment and departure of foreign volunteers³¹³. The first country to respond to the call was the Soviet Union, which had already expressed concern about the presence of foreign volunteers, particularly Italians and Germans, engaged in combat with the Franco army³¹⁴. The Soviet government indicated its willingness to endorse the Franco-English proposal on the condition that the relevant governments implement rigorous control measures to address the issue. Subsequently, responses were received from Italy and Germany, which urged the countries party to the non-intervention pact to address more pressing matters directly, given that they were increasingly unable to see the London Committee as an appropriate forum for their resolution³¹⁵. They also reaffirmed that indirect involvement, such as sending volunteers, should be covered by the non-intervention principle in addition to direct interference. Lastly, they emphasized the necessity of

³¹¹ Ivi, p. 536.

³¹² Vedovato, G., *Il non intervento in Spagna (31 luglio 1936- 19 aprile 1937)*, "Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali", 1982, vol. 49, issue 4, p. 536.

³¹³ Ibidem.

³¹⁴ Ibidem.

³¹⁵ Ivi, p. 537.

removing all foreign fighters and agitators from Spanish land and stated their readiness to accept a special arrangement on the matter of volunteers, subject to adequate control³¹⁶.

Nevertheless, in response to the note dated December 26, it is anticipated that a meeting on the subject of the flood of volunteers to Spain may be called. Additionally, it is anticipated that a control system will be established with the aim of separating the combatants from any outside military personnel or war supplies that may come by land or water³¹⁷. Once more, facing the possibility of international complications, the British offered to mediate the dispute; initially, on a national level, and subsequently, to the other committee members. They were the first to enact legislation, passing the British Foreign Enlistment Act on January 10, 1937³¹⁸. This legislation stipulates that it is a criminal offence, punishable by a fine or imprisonment, for a British national to accept enlistment with one of the belligerent parties or to recruit volunteers in the United Kingdom to serve in Spain³¹⁹. On the same day, they transmitted new instructions via a note, wherein it was clarified that the British government's objective in issuing these instructions was not to influence the actions of the Non-Intervention Committee, but rather to facilitate and accelerate its task in dealing with the challenging situation³²⁰.

The document is based on an extensive plan for the organization of a control in Spanish ports and on Spain's land boundaries that was created by the London Committee and given for consideration to the two parties to the conflict³²¹. The Observation Scheme is the name of this initiative. However, in order for this project to truly serve as an effective guarantee of the non-intervention agreement's

³¹⁶ Ibidem.

³¹⁷ Vedovato, G., *Il non intervento in Spagna (31 luglio 1936- 19 aprile 1937)*, "Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali", 1982, vol. 49, issue 4, p. 537.

³¹⁸ Vedovato, G. (1982). *Il non intervento in Spagna (31 luglio 1936- 19 aprile 1937)*. *Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali*, vol. 49, n. 4 (196), p. 538.

³¹⁹ Ivi, p. 538.

³²⁰ Padelford, N. J., *The International Non-Intervention Agreement and the Spanish Civil War*, "The American Journal of International Law", 1937, vol. 31, issue 4, p. 588.

³²¹ Ibidem.

application, all participating governments must show that they are genuinely committed to upholding their end of the bargain and act quickly to forbid the recruitment of volunteers on their soil, even before a control system is put in place in Spain³²². The British Government hopes that the governments involved can agree on this approach and ask the London Committee to set a date to simultaneously end the influx of volunteers³²³.

First to accept the British idea were Portugal, U.R.S.S and France. The proposal was accepted by the Portuguese government on January 14th, subject to a few requirements. Initially, it establishes the date on which all of these countries will genuinely implement these measures³²⁴. Second, it mandates that foreign nationals living or passing through each of the participating countries' territory be covered by these measures in addition to citizens of those countries³²⁵. Nonetheless, the government guarantees that these reservations won't prevent the goals from being achieved because the Portuguese Constitution permits the government to act quickly without the National Assembly's approval³²⁶. The French government has confirmed its adherence to the new measures, while also agreeing with the view that these measures, once decided and taken by the other governments, should be applied simultaneously without waiting for the formation of a complete control system. Nevertheless, there is a concern that in the absence of such a system, the proposed unilateral measures may be ineffective. In the event that an effective control plan cannot be established through consensus within a reasonable timeframe, the French government reserves the right to denounce the commitments made or to pursue alternative forms of cooperation to overcome the difficulties³²⁷. The Moscow government, however, adopted a reticent stance, indicating that control could only be

³²² Ibidem.

³²³ Padelford, N. J., *The International Non-Intervention Agreement and the Spanish Civil War*, "The American Journal of International Law", 1937, vol. 31, issue 4, p. 589.

³²⁴ Vedovato, G., *Il non intervento in Spagna (31 luglio 1936- 19 aprile 1937)*, "Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali", 1982, vol. 49, issue 4, p. 538.

³²⁵ Ivi, p. 539.

³²⁶ Ibidem.

³²⁷ Ibidem.

achieved through corresponding measures taken by the naval forces of several or all of the countries participating in the London Committee³²⁸. This ambiguous response prompted concerns about Russia's genuine intention to take unilateral action to prevent the dispatch of volunteers to Spain. This was due to the possibility that such action could be perceived as intervention in favor of one of the contenders.

In contrast, there are countries that have expressed reservations. On 8 January, however, the governments of Italy and Germany also made their position clear by stating that they would only participate in the ban on recruiting and sending volunteers if there were greater control in the Spanish ports and borders. They had already anticipated the concerns expressed by other countries³²⁹. However, the English approach differs from the others in that it advocates for the imposition of a volunteer departure ban prior to the resolution of the control issue. This strategy is predicated on the assumption that the establishment of an effective control system would require a certain amount of time. As a consequence of this divergence of opinion, Germany and Italy's response, which was submitted on 25 January, was delayed³³⁰. In their response, they assert their intention to address the issue directly and reiterate their commitment to the removal of all foreign volunteers from Spanish territory as part of a comprehensive policy of non-intervention, as proposed by the committee³³¹.

In late January and early February, the signatory nations to the non-intervention agreement made a series of announcements introducing legislation in their own countries pertaining to the impediment to the departure of international volunteers. On February 21, the French succeeded in enacting a legislation governing the enlistment of French people overseas for the first time. However, this law

³²⁸ Ibidem.

³²⁹ Vedovato, G., *Il non intervento in Spagna (31 luglio 1936- 19 aprile 1937)*, "Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali", 1982, vol. 49, issue 4, p. 540.

³³⁰ Ibidem.

³³¹ Ibidem.

was only applicable in Spain and lasted for six months³³². The Italian government had earlier on February 15th passed a royal decree-law that essentially forbade leaving or passing through Spanish territory, including its lands in Morocco³³³. This decision resulted in the blocking of previously validated passports and the stopping of a merchant ship in Cagliari that was headed for Barcelona³³⁴. Following this, Germany banned participation in the Spanish conflict on February 18th. The Portuguese government issued an order the same day mandating the return of its people who were fighting back home³³⁵.

In the meantime, the London committee had delegated the implementation of the new legislative measures to a sub-committee, which, on 5 January, took the decision to present the draft control of the maritime and land borders of all Spanish territories³³⁶. Although the document was presented to the members of the alliance, it was not yet a complete project. In the meantime, sub-committees were studying the technical aspects. Two of the issues identified as problematic by indirect intervention were the recruitment of foreign personnel by the warring parties and the various forms of financial assistance³³⁷. The actual implementation of the strategy proposed by the London Committee then commenced. The aforementioned strategy was divided into three distinct parts. The initial step was the substitution of committee members with a corps of observers, whose role was to monitor the situation and to regulate the inflow and outflow of combatants. The strategic ports and points of entry were identified as the optimal locations for the deployment of these observers³³⁸. The principal obstacle to this course of action was the necessity of obtaining the approval of the two Spanish governments. This did not occur. Consequently, on 22 January, the sub-committee convened and,

³³² Ibidem.

³³³ Ivi, p. 541.

³³⁴ Vedovato, G., *Il non intervento in Spagna (31 luglio 1936- 19 aprile 1937)*, "Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali", 1982, vol. 49, issue 4, p. 542.

³³⁵ Ibidem.

³³⁶ Ibidem.

³³⁷ Ivi, p. 543

³³⁸ Ibidem.

cognizant of their authority to impede recruitment for military purposes, attempted to surmount this obstacle by establishing these observers in locations proximate to the conflict but outside the battlefield³³⁹.

First among the neighbors to be taken into consideration was Portugal, which immediately declared that it would not tolerate such an encroachment on its territory. With the aim of eliminating the differences, a new sub-committee was created, where technical advisors tried to propose changes to the project without losing its core³⁴⁰. A new agreement is proposed on 16 February³⁴¹. However, understanding that there will be technical circumstances that the delegates will want to change, the sub-committee invites all members to communicate their difficulties in good time. In an attempt to accommodate the Portuguese government, two meetings are held on 18 and 22 February respectively, but Portugal is strongly opposed to the control of its borders by external agents³⁴². This impasse was resolved through British intervention. Britain and Portugal signed an agreement that the Portuguese and Spanish borders would be placed under the control of officials at the British embassy in Lisbon³⁴³. It was made known to the sub-committee during the session of 22 February and was accepted by the committee and provided for an administrator, a deputy administrator and 130 observers, who could only supervise what was going on and make reports that were sent to the British ambassador in Lisbon if deemed necessary³⁴⁴. The Portuguese patrol's independence had the effect of limiting the range of its operations and efficacy. Moreover, it failed to notify the Non-Intervention Committee of any findings. In the same way, the Committee did not ask the British observers about the actions of the Portuguese patrol³⁴⁵. This implies a deficiency in the coordination and exchange of information

³³⁹ Ibidem.

³⁴⁰ Vedovato, G., *Il non intervento in Spagna (31 luglio 1936- 19 aprile 1937)*, "Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali", 1982, vol. 49, issue 4, p. 544.

³⁴¹ Ibidem.

³⁴² Ibidem.

³⁴³ Ibidem.

³⁴⁴ Padelford, N. J., *The International Non-Intervention Agreement and the Spanish Civil War*, "The American Journal of International Law", 1937, vol. 31, issue 4, p. 589.

³⁴⁵ Ibidem.

concerning monitoring activities between Portugal and the global community. It follows that Portugal's departure from these big nations' concerted efforts weakened the entire monitoring system's efficacy³⁴⁶.

The resolution adopted on 8 March 1937 by the Non-Intervention Committee set forth a written response to the ongoing concerns over the escalation of the conflict in Spain. Its purpose was to reaffirm the Non-Intervention Committee's commitment to preventing outside interference and promoting stability in the region. The resolution encompassed a number of measures, including the incorporation of certain previous agreements, such as the 16 February agreement on the prohibition of volunteers and on monitoring efforts to prevent the flow of foreign volunteers, weapons and supplies to the warring parties in Spain. Additionally, it may have also called for increased diplomatic efforts to mediate the conflict and promote peaceful resolution through a bilateral agreement between Britain and Portugal regarding the observation scheme³⁴⁷. Lastly It was decided that all commodities included in Schedules 1-14 of the Hemming classification, including weapons, ammunition, and materials of war, would not be allowed to be transferred to Spain by any party involved in the Observation Scheme in order to simplify it and guarantee consistency amongst participants³⁴⁸.

At the meeting on 8 March, a new body was also proposed, which would be responsible for initiating a system of control by land and sea on behalf of the signatory states of the pact. The entity would be designated the Bureau international de non-intervention en Espagne³⁴⁹. The body would be headed by a president, Admiral Van Dulm, a secretary and accounting agent of the international funds, namely Francis Hemmins³⁵⁰, and a chief administrator of the maritime observation plan, Dutch Rear

³⁴⁶ Ibidem.

³⁴⁷ Padelford, N. J., *The International Non-Intervention Agreement and the Spanish Civil War*, "The American Journal of International Law", 1937, vol. 31, issue 4, p. 591.

³⁴⁸ Ibidem.

³⁴⁹ Vedovato, G., *Il non intervento in Spagna (31 luglio 1936- 19 aprile 1937)*, "Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali", 1982, vol. 49, issue 4, p. 546.

³⁵⁰ Francis Hemmins was also secretary of the International Committee for the Implementation of the Non-Intervention Agreement in Spain,

Admiral Olivier. In addition to the Spanish-Portuguese border, which was subject to different regulations, the other borders were monitored by observers who collaborated with local authorities and were stationed at border crossings³⁵¹. All information pertaining to irregularities would be collated by the control heads, who would then report them to the non-intervention committee and the government of the host country. The commencement of investigations was contingent upon a formal request from the country in question, which was then submitted to the committee. Additionally, there were other bodies, such as the International Board, which established and oversaw the recruitment of an Observing Officer corps to monitor various locations³⁵². While operating under the directives of their respective states, the British, French, German and Italian naval patrols participated in pre-arranged operations³⁵³. The International Council, in collaboration with the participating states, established an International Fund to defray the costs of the programme, overseen by an accountant³⁵⁴.

The plan's second section dealt with a multinational naval patrol on the high seas, while most easily agreed upon and integrated into the proposal was the third section, which provided for the merchant ship observation system³⁵⁵. The naval problem was more nuanced³⁵⁶. The major naval powers, Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy, fought bitterly over who should coordinate the participating troops and who should participate in the patrol³⁵⁷. After the withdrawal of Portugal and the USSR³⁵⁸, Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy assumed responsibility for control in several naval zones³⁵⁹. In addition, a few of authorized ports are used for naval control, and ships passing through the zones

³⁵¹ Ibidem.

³⁵² Vedovato, G., *Il non intervento in Spagna (31 luglio 1936- 19 aprile 1937)*, "Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali", 1982, vol. 49, issue 4, p. 547.

³⁵³ Ibidem.

³⁵⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵⁵ Ibidem.

³⁵⁶ Padelford, N. J., *The International Non-Intervention Agreement and the Spanish Civil War*, "The American Journal of International Law", 1937, vol. 31, issue 4, p. 590.

³⁵⁷ Ivi, p. 591.

³⁵⁸ Ibidem.

³⁵⁹ Great Britain guards the northern and southern Atlantic coasts of Spain, as well as the African coast of Rio de Oro and the Canary Islands. France controls the north-west Atlantic coast, the coast of Spanish Morocco and the islands of Ibiza and Majorca. Germany is responsible for the south-east coast of Spain, while Italy oversees the rest of the Spanish coast up to the French border, including Menorca.

under observation are asked to dock there³⁶⁰. To ensure adherence to the non-intervention agreement, observers chosen by the Non-Intervention Committee board the ship. Interviewing the crew and passengers, checking passports and identity documents, and making sure the ships aren't transporting any weapons, supplies for the war, or volunteers are all part of the observers' duties³⁶¹. Warships from the four participating countries, Great Britain, France, Germany, and Italy, are also a part of the naval control system. The right to stop suspicious vessels and report any breach of the non-intervention agreement to the relevant countries, who will then notify the London Committee, is vested in the masters of these vessels. The direct costs of fleet maintenance will fall on the four naval powers in charge of monitoring. On the other hand, the international fund will pay Great Britain's expenses for maintaining control over the Spanish-Portuguese border.

Nonetheless, based on the information at our disposal, it is feasible to say that, generally speaking, the non-intervention committee member states surprisingly provided excellent cooperation with regard to merchant ships³⁶².

3.7 The implementation of Spain's plan for controlling its marine and land borders.

The London Committee, in complete accordance with the Powers responsible for carrying it out, fixed the date of the plan's implementation—March 13—for the control of Spain's land and maritime boundaries, its holdings, and the Spanish zone of Morocco. Despite this, a few things prevented it from taking effect until after midnight on April 19³⁶³. First and foremost, the delay resulted from Spain's complaint during a League of Nations conference, alleging infringement of her political

³⁶⁰ Vedovato, G., *Il non intervento in Spagna (31 luglio 1936- 19 aprile 1937)*, “Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali”, 1982, vol. 49, issue 4, p. 548.

³⁶¹ Vedovato, G., *Il non intervento in Spagna (31 luglio 1936- 19 aprile 1937)*, “Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali”, 1982, vol. 49, issue 4, p. 549.

³⁶² Ibidem.

³⁶³ Ibidem.

independence and territorial integrity³⁶⁴. In addition, the Republican government objected to the actions of the German and Italian governments, who were using the chaos of the war to seize Spanish lands and colonies and set up bases in the Mediterranean³⁶⁵. Despite the lack of a formal agreement between the parties, it is reasonable to assume that both Mussolini and Hitler had gone into the conflict expecting to acquire geographical gains. The ultimate driving force was the Valencian government's attempt to broker a deal with France and Britain by promising territorial benefits in Morocco, as it was in dire need of financial and military support³⁶⁶.

Despite the project being de facto suspended, there are still ongoing national and international initiatives³⁶⁷. Even though the border control plan had already received general organization, a sizable number of technical and advisory subcommittees were still required at the international level³⁶⁸. The goal of these groups, which were made up of experts selected by the representatives of the participating countries, was to make the plan experimental and flexible enough to alter based on experience³⁶⁹. The plan's operational components were carried out, with particular focus on the selection of chief and subsidiary administrators from a range of maritime and border control countries³⁷⁰. As a result, a number of related issues arose, including legal issues regarding the transfer of Spanish assets abroad, flag flying by ships traveling through areas included in the plan, and procedures for foreign ship visits and seizure by adversarial groups within Spain³⁷¹. For instance, there was discussion over whether Spanish control could extend to British ships outside of Spain's territorial seas. Committees made up of specifically appointed legal experts looked into and discussed

³⁶⁴ Ivi, p. 550.

³⁶⁵ Ibidem.

³⁶⁶ Vedovato, G., *Il non intervento in Spagna (31 luglio 1936- 19 aprile 1937)*, "Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali", 1982, vol. 49, issue 4, p. 559.

³⁶⁷ Ibidem.

³⁶⁸ Ibidem.

³⁶⁹ Ibidem.

³⁷⁰ Ibidem.

³⁷¹ Ivi, p. 560.

these issues³⁷². In a similar vein, action was taken to prevent flag abuse and to deal with instances in which the right to visit and seize foreign ships was violated. By following these methods, the border control plan was ensured to be effective and any potential problems that may have emerged during its execution were addressed³⁷³.

On the other side, internal collaboration was also required for the control plan to succeed. All states, both parties to the non-intervention pact and those not, were required to uphold border security³⁷⁴. It was also imperative to emphasize that financial and military support to the factions at war in Spain was forbidden³⁷⁵. The situation's evolution was further supported and strengthened by new laws. The various governments gathered to prescribe merit-based measures. In light of this, Italy approved a decree-law on April 13 that concerned the transfer of weapons, war materiel, and troops to Spain or its holdings in accordance with international agreements³⁷⁶. Between April 19 and 20, agreements were defined regarding commercial terms and the ports from which observers may embark³⁷⁷.

3.8 No legal standing

The lack of clauses prohibiting governments from unilaterally leaving the pact was a serious weakness in the non-intervention plan³⁷⁸. Ideally, the proposal would have had stipulations requiring member governments to abide by it for a predetermined amount of time, possibly until the Spanish civil war ended. The resolution passed on March 8 says that the Powers are "resolved to maintain the scheme," but its language is sufficiently ambiguous to allow any Power to withdraw from any or all

³⁷² Ibidem.

³⁷³ Ibidem.

³⁷⁴ Vedovato, G., *Il non intervento in Spagna (31 luglio 1936- 19 aprile 1937)*, "Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali", 1982, vol. 49, issue 4, p. 561.

³⁷⁴ Ibidem.

³⁷⁵ Ibidem.

³⁷⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷⁷ Ibidem.

³⁷⁸ Padelford, N. J., *The International Non-Intervention Agreement and the Spanish Civil War*, "The American Journal of International Law", 1937, vol. 31, issue 4, p. 598.

of the plan at any time³⁷⁹. Furthermore, the London Committee has no legal standing, and the resolution is not enforceable as an international commitment, even though the Powers enthusiastically endorsed the resolution and plan within the Committee in London and later passed national legislation to support their policies³⁸⁰. The non-intervention plan is essentially based on a policy agreement, from which any Power may deviate at any moment for reasons related to national policy. This flaw compromises the plan's viability and efficacy, particularly in light of shifting geopolitical conditions and national priorities³⁸¹.

Nevertheless, there are instances where it becomes evident that there was no legal justification for imposing sanctions on members in the event of a failure to fulfil their obligations. One concerns the decision of Portugal and France to suspend border observation on 3 and 13 July, respectively³⁸². The second instance is the decision by Germany and Italy to withdraw from the naval patrol on 23 June. The latter is a response to an incident involving a series of attacks on German warships. On June 12, an airplane from Valencia, Spain, bombed the German battleship *Deutschland*. Following this episode, Britain, France, and Italy forged a special arrangement with Germany, possibly anticipating more confrontations³⁸³. This agreement stated that the signing states would confer on the appropriate course of action if any naval patrol vessels were attacked in the future. Simultaneously, they sent letters to the parties in Spain requesting guarantees for the security of the patrol boats, to which just the rebels gave assurances of safety, because Valencia refused to do so³⁸⁴. Germany was thus forced to intervene when it was claimed that on June 15 and 18, torpedoes targeted the German cruiser *Leipzig* off the coast of Spain³⁸⁵. Subsequently, Germany sent strong protests and a naval

³⁷⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁸⁰ *Ibidem*.

³⁸¹ Padelford, N. J., *The International Non-Intervention Agreement and the Spanish Civil War*, "The American Journal of International Law", 1937, vol. 31, issue 4, p. 599.

³⁸² *Ibidem*.

³⁸³ *Ibidem*.

³⁸⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁸⁵ *Ivi*, p. 600.

demonstration off the coast of Valencia to the other powers involved in the Four-Power Agreement³⁸⁶. But before taking coercive actions, other nations, like Britain and France, voiced questions about the accuracy of the German assertions and recommended an international probe. On June 23, 1937, Germany and Italy formally withdrew from the naval patrol after their request to terminate the naval patrol and recognize belligerent rights was rejected³⁸⁷. Furthermore, the Berlin-Rome delegates secured a small measure of political revenge. They chose to refuse to agree to the British and French representatives' proposal on June 29, meaning placing neutral observers on board the naval patrols³⁸⁸.

3.9 New proposition

During a subcommittee on July 2, a counter proposal was put forward: Germany and Italy proposed granting belligerent rights to both parties in Spain, terminating the naval patrol and allowing the Spanish authorities to exercise control over vessels, both from non-intervening powers and those of Spanish and non-European nationality and retaining the existing land and ship observation schemes³⁸⁹. According to the German government, recognizing belligerent rights would instantly advance the non-interventionist strategy. They said that while illegal shipping involved in arms smuggling would be curtailed by the Spanish party themselves, legitimate shipping, which had observing personnel on board, would continue³⁹⁰. Yet Britain and France objected to these measures, claiming that they were biased and partial, much as Germany and Italy had when they objected to previous proposals³⁹¹. The Committee resolved on July 9 to ask the British Government to take control of the various suggestions and create a new plan that would be acceptable to all parties

³⁸⁶ Ibidem.

³⁸⁷ Ibidem.

³⁸⁸ Padelford, N. J., *The International Non-Intervention Agreement and the Spanish Civil War*, "The American Journal of International Law", 1937, vol. 31, issue 4, p. 600.

³⁸⁹ Ibidem.

³⁹⁰ Ibidem.

³⁹¹ Ivi, p. 601.

concerned because there had been no agreement reached throughout the meetings³⁹². On July 15, this revised plan was subsequently released. Even if the Committee did not approve this idea right once and there were some conditions that the Spanish parties had to follow, it nevertheless spurred debate and study about its characteristics and possible benefits³⁹³.

The new plan, devised by the British, still provided for control of ships in the Mediterranean and Spain's neighboring territories, but proposed changes to the naval patrol plan, specifically international patrol officers in Spanish ports, and recognition of belligerency, subject to qualifications. These changes presupposed the agreement of the two Spanish factions. Regarding the first issue, an attempt had already been made to get them to agree to the establishment of patrol officers in Spanish ports in December 1936. Reaching their consent was considered as difficult at the time. Additionally, the proposal for aerodrome observers was rejected³⁹⁴. The reason for the objection was of a practical nature, as it was felt that assigning officers only to certain ports would allow uncontrolled illegal traffic. Instead, the committee considered it more useful that naval patrols off the Spanish coast would allow general control of maritime trade with Spain³⁹⁵. As for the German-Italian desire to see the belligerence of the Spanish recognised, the British draft included it but with some significant caveats. As a condition of recognition, the belligerents must agree to treat only those goods that are included in the Hemming schedules or as the Non-Intervention Committee may decide to classify as contraband of war³⁹⁶.

There are several unclear aspects and practical difficulties with the new strategy as it is offered. The first issue is from the incapacity of the Spanish authorities to discern between foreign ships that are

³⁹² Ibidem.

³⁹³ Ibidem.

³⁹⁴ Padelford, N. J., *The International Non-Intervention Agreement and the Spanish Civil War*, "The American Journal of International Law", 1937, vol. 31, issue 4, p. 601.

³⁹⁵ Ibidem.

³⁹⁶ Ibidem.

participating in non-neutral actions and those that are attempting to breach a blockade³⁹⁷. It also questions how the Spaniards are expected to discern the intentions of foreign ships passing along Spain's coast without the ability to inspect them³⁹⁸. In parallel, vessels engaged in the transportation of military personnel were prohibited from traversing Spanish territory and were unable to carry observers on board³⁹⁹. Another issue was the prohibition on warring factions from obstructing the passage of neutral ships that traversed the Spanish coastline but were not engaged in maritime traffic with the country⁴⁰⁰. Once more, it was challenging to discern the intentions of foreign vessels navigating along the Spanish coastline. This was particularly the case with regard to whether they were merely passing through in a non-threatening manner or attempting to smuggle into Spain. Moreover, it was argued that the limitation of normal belligerency rights was unrealistic and might not be acceptable to the Spanish⁴⁰¹. This passage critiques the fact that certain actions were permitted to be taken by grateful states to protect their national ships. These actions include intervening if the Spaniards attempt to search for contraband not on the agreed list, harass vessels carrying observers even if there's proof of contraband aboard, and interfere with suspicious-looking vessels passing along the coast⁴⁰². Conversely, one aspect of the revised plan that was deemed to be valid was the prohibition of vessels authorised to fly the flags of participating governments from transporting prohibited products from any port to Spain⁴⁰³. This constituted an endorsement of the merchant ship legislation enacted by England in December 1936⁴⁰⁴.

³⁹⁷ Ibidem.

³⁹⁸ Ivi, p. 602.

³⁹⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁰⁰ Padelford, N. J., *The International Non-Intervention Agreement and the Spanish Civil War*, "The American Journal of International Law", 1937, vol. 31, issue 4, p. 602.

⁴⁰¹ Ibidem.

⁴⁰² Ibidem.

⁴⁰³ Ivi, p. 603.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibidem.

4. The Agreement of 2 January 1937: the Mediterranean problem

On 2 January 1937, Italy and Great Britain met to sign an agreement concerning the Mediterranean. It is commonly referred to as a gentlemen's agreement, which is an informal and not enforceable by law agreement when they involve two or more parties. The foundation of the agreement is the parties' honor to promise to uphold it, even if it is usually oral. But in this instance, it's written. A diplomatic agreement between Italy and Britain was signed by the Italian foreign ministers, Galeazzo Ciano, and the British ambassador, Eric Drummond, with the intention of easing tensions and fostering better relations between the two nations. Anglo-Italian tensions were rising at the time of the agreement's negotiation, especially in light of Italy's involvement in the Abyssinian Crisis and its deepening alliance with Nazi Germany.

After the London Naval Conference in 1930, efforts to come to a similar accord were pursued for more than seven years. France was the catalyst for this, having on multiple occasions recommended the start of talks but ultimately been rejected in favor of a bilateral deal between the two maritime powers. Surprisingly, this agreement is a component of a much larger framework. The answers to more general issues, whose causes have little to do with the Mediterranean, are sought after in this region through the agreement⁴⁰⁵. Even though they were later left out of any talks, a number of Mediterranean nations contributed to the Anglo-Italian agreement, an element that is frequently disregarded⁴⁰⁶.

Despite being widely recognized, its roots are obscure; its true breadth will be understood in the context of Italy and Britain's mending relations, as it will be recreated below.

⁴⁰⁵ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibidem*.

4.1 The importance of the Mediterranean Sea

The Mediterranean Sea has traditionally been an essential artery between Europe, Africa, and Asia. For a long time, there has been a struggle for dominance over this water. However, as Gaspare Ambrosini, Fascist-leaning nationalist scholar, reminded in 1941 out the Mediterranean can only be dominated by its people. Various powers sought to establish their dominance there⁴⁰⁷. Everything failed. The author believes that only Italy can claim inherent predominance in the Mediterranean⁴⁰⁸.

Unlike the other maritime countries, Italy requires the Mediterranean for its own security and survival. It develops its trade, politics, expansionist will, and even its culture. Italy's basic existence is closely linked to the Mediterranean like no other⁴⁰⁹. While countries like the United Kingdom have access to other seas and oceans, Italy is “an island in the Mediterranean” with no other options⁴¹⁰. The Italian people have an absolute need to move freely inside their sea and be able to enter and exit it in order to communicate with other countries. This sea represents Italy's only means of expansion and international trade⁴¹¹.

The Duce's speech, which he gave in Milan on November 1, 1936, was specifically focused on this topic. He emphasized that Italy needed to take back the lead in the Mediterranean and break free from foreign hegemony within its own borders⁴¹². He focused a great deal of his remarks on the significance of the location aspect. Italy has not been able to utilize its innate leadership abilities, despite having an advantageous location in the middle of the Mediterranean compared to the other powers.

⁴⁰⁷ Ambrosini, G., *La situazione nel Mediterraneo e la sua funzione direttiva spettante all'Italia*, “Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali”, 1941, vol. 8, issue 1\2, p. 18.

⁴⁰⁸ Ivi, p. 19.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibidem.

⁴¹⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹¹ Ivi, p. 20.

⁴¹² Ivi, p. 30.

However, it was able to expand its influence to the coast of North Africa, including the acquisition of Libya, due to the expansionism of the Fascist and, to some extent, Risorgimento movements⁴¹³. Therefore, the Duce desired to reclaim and ultimately wield the leadership position he had lost during the fall of the Roman Empire⁴¹⁴.

In the post-war period, Mussolini argued that Italy had been severely weakened on the international stage. None of the pacts it had signed with the Western powers, France and Britain, had been implemented. This was a devious policy, against which Italy tried to rebel on several occasions without obtaining any redress. The unbearable consequence, however, was that the power of the two powers in the Mediterranean increased, limiting Italy's "life" and bringing advantages to France and Great Britain. Italy, although part of the Allied Powers, felt insulted by the peace treaties, particularly the Treaty of Versailles⁴¹⁵. As a result, Italian nationalist sentiments were inflamed by perceived territorial injustices, leading to tensions with its former allies.

Nonetheless, relations between these three nations were marked by frequent alliance changes, diplomatic difficulties, and sporadic collaboration between the conclusion of World War I until the 1930s. In 1930, the Mediterranean countries sought a meeting place and a fresh start with the London Naval Conference⁴¹⁶. The Mediterranean's stability and security were critical. The French government introduced this idea, seeing potential for a "Mediterranean Locarno" alliance structure⁴¹⁷. This thought originated during a period when France felt alone in the world following the installation

⁴¹³ Ambrosini, G., *La situazione nel Mediterraneo e la sua funzione direttiva spettante all'Italia*, "Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali", 1941, vol. 8, issue 1\2, p. 31.

⁴¹⁴ Ibidem.

⁴¹⁵ We are referring to the Sykes-Picot agreement and the S. Giovanni di Moriana agreement.

⁴¹⁶ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 4.

⁴¹⁷ Ivi, p. 5.

of a socialist regime. One could argue that this Mediterranean pact served only as a means of securing assurances from London on the protection of France's borders⁴¹⁸.

On several occasions Paris took up the initiative, trying to convince potential participants of its concern for disarmament and of the intense rivalry between France and Italy⁴¹⁹. It was evident, nevertheless, that Great Britain, which had no interest in defending French borders, remained the crucial nation, without which there would have been no purpose in approving the pact. British officials responded negatively, seeing no benefit to such an arrangement⁴²⁰. British plans and priorities did not include involvement in a "Mediterranean Locarno" since there was no sense of an impending threat⁴²¹. The British world's relationship with Italy was, of course, another important aspect⁴²². Tensions stemming from peace treaties and ongoing territorial conflicts made relations between France and Italy complex⁴²³.

The enmity between the two remained so strong that they did not want to recognise the mutual benefits that this Mediterranean pact would bring. Another source of tension in Franco-Italian relations was the emergence of a Republican government in Spain, with which there was a fear of a close alliance against Italy, especially in North Africa⁴²⁴. It was only with the advent of Hitler that a change of course took place and the disagreements began to be overcome. Mussolini began to believe that cooperation in Europe and the Mediterranean was necessary to counter the German threat in Africa⁴²⁵. It was in 1934 that the moment seemed to have come for a thaw in Franco-Italian relations, thanks to the mediation of Foreign Minister Barthou, who wanted to extend the "Mediterranean

⁴¹⁸ Ibidem.

⁴¹⁹ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 30.

⁴²⁰ Ivi, p. 32.

⁴²¹ Ibidem.

⁴²² Ivi, p. 41.

⁴²³ Ibidem.

⁴²⁴ Ivi, p. 45.

⁴²⁵ Ibidem.

Locarno” plan to include the “Eastern Locarno” in order to protect himself fully against the Nazi threat⁴²⁶. However, it was the death of the minister that ended the British interest, which had only recently begun. The baton would be passed to Laval, who would implement the Franco-Italian rapprochement, leading to a new conflict, this time in Ethiopia⁴²⁷.

The Abyssinia crisis will outline a clash between London and Rome over the Mediterranean. On the one hand, Britain would discover the weakness of its naval defences; on the other, Italy would have confirmation that all access to the Mediterranean was controlled by the British⁴²⁸. In principle, neither government was prepared to compromise relations between the two powers⁴²⁹. The Italian dictator tried to contain this unease by proposing a Mediterranean agreement that would safeguard both British and English interests, but London's position had to take account several factors⁴³⁰. Firstly, what would be the reaction of public opinion, especially at election time, and then not wanting to show weakness to neighbouring countries, especially to the Fascist government which could have had full control of the negotiations⁴³¹. These factors undermined the conclusion of an agreement and London preferred to ally itself with France, Greece and Turkey by strengthening mutual assistance pacts in the Mediterranean⁴³². This had serious consequences, because although they had gained the possibility of using new bases in the Mediterranean by not having to make any concessions to Italy, the latter was inclined towards a new friendship with Germany. This possible arrangement could be, and for a time was, blocked by Great Britain⁴³³.

⁴²⁶ Ivi, p. 55.

⁴²⁷ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 56.

⁴²⁸ Ivi, p. 57.

⁴²⁹ Ivi, p. 60.

⁴³⁰ Ibidem.

⁴³¹ Ivi, p. 68.

⁴³² Ibidem.

⁴³³ Ibidem.

Nonetheless, France may suggest a Mediterranean mutual guarantee with the goal of uniting the Italian peninsula under the control of the Western countries, so relieving the tensions.⁴³⁴ The bilateral relationship between Italy and Germany, as well as the concern it also causes the French, upset the British government, which will not be pleased with this new renewal of an accord. London made progress against the aggressor nation only after the Ethiopian struggle came to a conclusion⁴³⁵. It will be suggested to lift the sanctions and loosen the restrictions outlined in the numerous mutual aid agreements in order to mend the rift with Italy⁴³⁶. The foreign minister must simultaneously work to calm down the responses of the nations that had embraced an anti-Italian stance and reassure them so that they, too, would not decide to pledge their security to Germany, the resurgent power⁴³⁷.

Eden's answer to resolving these differences is a unilateral guarantee for the smaller nations—all save France—which is required in the uncertain aftermath of the sanctions against Italy being lifted⁴³⁸. It is evident, therefore, that this is really an excuse to maintain the gains earned with these nations prior to learning about their connection to Italy⁴³⁹. Since Germany and Japan are posing a threat to British territories, there is a significant desire on the part of the British to return relations to how they were prior to the Ethiopian crisis. London had to consider the necessity to balance multiple efforts when making this choice⁴⁴⁰. In order to preserve its hegemonic status in the Mediterranean, it sought to avoid talks with France and Yugoslavia while simultaneously hoping to preserve the alliance with Greece and Turkey⁴⁴¹.

⁴³⁴ Ivi, p. 70.

⁴³⁵ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 72.

⁴³⁶ Ibidem.

⁴³⁷ Ibidem.

⁴³⁸ Ivi, p. 75.

⁴³⁹ Ivi, p. 78.

⁴⁴⁰ Ivi, p. 80.

⁴⁴¹ Ibidem.

In both cases Italy's reaction is being closely watched. There is a strong desire not to irritate the Italian government, which is broadly supported by the Foreign Office, as Mussolini seems determined not to accept any agreement as long as there are secret pacts in the anti-Italian coalition⁴⁴². It is from this point that a compromise solution will emerge: Drummond will propose to the Italian government to reassure the Mediterranean countries with an official declaration⁴⁴³. This was welcomed by the Italian Foreign Minister. The Abyssinian question thus seemed to have been resolved, with the three European powers, for the most part, overcoming their hostilities⁴⁴⁴.

4.2 The Emergence of a New Equilibrium and Initial Diplomatic Efforts

The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War put an end to the much-hoped-for rapprochement between Britain and Italy. The conflict highlighted the emergence of a new equilibrium, a new dimension, the political implications of which were still to be assessed. On this occasion, too, a new Mediterranean Pact was proposed, once again at the insistence of the French government, whose main purpose would be to secure the maritime borders of the participating countries⁴⁴⁵. One of the reasons for wanting an agreement was the fear of the drift of Italy, which the British Cabinet valued so highly⁴⁴⁶. The German-Italian friendship, the policy of understanding towards Italy and the departure of the Home Fleet were all signs that the French Foreign Minister would interpret and use as a pretext to continue investing in this project, so that London would finally agree to negotiate⁴⁴⁷. The time seemed ripe, but there was no willingness on the British side to consider Delbos's proposal⁴⁴⁸.

⁴⁴² Ivi, p. 83.

⁴⁴³ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 85.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁴⁵ Ivi, p. 99.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁴⁷ Ivi, p. 101.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibidem.

This agreement was considered uncertain, as it could involve the unwanted participation of the Soviet Union, which was unprofitable and difficult to implement. The response from London was viewed as disingenuous⁴⁴⁹. Eden had no interest in a Mediterranean alliance at all. In making this decision, the Committee of Imperial Defence's position was highly valued. It emphasized that, given the uncertainty surrounding the result of the Spanish crisis and its potential to upset the already fragile balance in the Mediterranean, there would likely be more benefits than drawbacks to such an agreement with the Mediterranean countries⁴⁵⁰.

As early as the beginning of August, reports emerged indicating the possibility of an agreement between the Burgos rebels and the Italian government⁴⁵¹. It was rumored that the Italian government's interest in the Spanish Civil War was due to the possibility of obtaining Spanish possessions, mainly control of Gibraltar and the Balearic Islands⁴⁵². This possibility did not result in a convergence of views between London and Paris⁴⁵³. By this point, it was evident that there was a divergence of strategic interests between the two capitals, as well as a diversity of political interests⁴⁵⁴. In contrast to the French government, the British government did not appear to be concerned about the potential concessions or an alliance between Franco and Mussolini. Conversely, it was considered unlikely that such a cession would occur, given Franco's nationalism. The British attitude demonstrated a lack of consideration for the Duce's policy⁴⁵⁵. It was not considered possible that a close link between Rome and Berlin would prejudice an Italo-British agreement⁴⁵⁶.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁵⁰ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 103.

⁴⁵¹ Ivi, p. 104.

⁴⁵² Quartararo R., *Politica fascista nelle Baleari: 1936-1939*, Quaderni della Fiap, vol. 23, 1977.

⁴⁵³ Ivi, p. 105.

⁴⁵⁴ Ivi, p. 106.

⁴⁵⁵ Ivi, p. 107.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibidem.

The primary concern of the British government was the potential realization of another socialist government in the region, which they believed would result in an excessive Soviet presence in the Mediterranean⁴⁵⁷. This fear served to reinforce the already existing alliance between Britain and Italy, both of whom were opposed to the emergence of a pro-communist bloc in Western Europe⁴⁵⁸. In light of the Italian claims, they opted to prioritize the maintenance of their relationship with Italy over the potential consequences of aligning with France, which could have resulted in a direct intervention in the Spanish matter. These assessments were also the result of a strong conviction of the island's key role in European affairs⁴⁵⁹. London was convinced that it could at any time succeed in undermining the friendship between Berlin and Rome in favor of an agreement with it. It subsequently became evident that Italy would have derived greater economic and political benefits from British assistance than from German support⁴⁶⁰. Conversely, there remained considerable distrust of the fascist government, despite the fact that the Spanish conflict had demonstrated the existence of shared views between the two countries⁴⁶¹.

4.3 Challenges and Negotiations for Mediterranean Stability

The prospect of a Mediterranean pact being realized in France was becoming increasingly remote. London remained unwavering in its determination to maintain the status quo⁴⁶². However, in Eden's view, while seeking a bilateral agreement with Italy, it was necessary to avoid repeating the same mistake twice. In the context of the Ethiopian question, his government was accused of not having forcefully stated its position on the invasion and conquest of a sovereign country and member of the

⁴⁵⁷ Ivi, p. 108.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibidem.

⁴⁵⁹ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 105.

⁴⁶⁰ Ivi, p. 107.

⁴⁶¹ Ibidem.

⁴⁶² Ivi, p. 109.

League of Nations⁴⁶³. It was therefore necessary to consider the possibility that the Duce might take actions that could be considered subversive towards himself. Consequently, on 19 August, a memorandum was shared with the Foreign Office in which it was declared that no alterations to the status quo in the western Mediterranean would be tolerated following consultation with the British government⁴⁶⁴.

This position, however, could be perceived negatively by Italy⁴⁶⁵. The delay in responding to the non-intervention committee's proposal was a source of concern for Great Britain, which had already begun to outline a policy to improve relations with Italy by mid-August⁴⁶⁶. The most efficacious method of communication with Italy appeared to be through a discussion between Ingram⁴⁶⁷ and Ciano, primarily concerning the Balearic Islands. In this meeting, however, there was an opening on the matter of the changes to the Mediterranean set-up that had been decided by both countries⁴⁶⁸. The British proposal was to resolve the Mediterranean issues through a bilateral agreement, with France excluded. In order to be able to do this, it was necessary for Britain to strengthen its position in the Mediterranean through the re-establishment of old friendships in the Mediterranean⁴⁶⁹ and the acquisition of strategic positions⁴⁷⁰. Concurrently, Italy also espoused this same idea, and in order to fortify its bargaining position, it unreservedly leveraged its alliance with Germany⁴⁷¹. This was a double-edged sword for the British, as it had the potential to be beneficial or detrimental to their interests.

⁴⁶³ Ibidem.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁶⁵ Ivi, p. 110.

⁴⁶⁶ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 112.

⁴⁶⁷ Edward Ingram was counsellor at the British Embassy in Rome.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibidem.

⁴⁶⁹ We are referring to Greece, Turkey and Yugoslavia.

⁴⁷⁰ Ivi, p. 117.

⁴⁷¹ Ibidem.

The Italian government perceived a shift in the British cabinet's stance towards Italy. The discussions between Vansittart and Grandi during this period made it evident that, despite the lack of unanimous agreement, it was imperative for the British side to reassure Italy that they were prepared for rapprochement⁴⁷². While Eden and Ingram were opposed to this manipulation, it was Vansittart who advocated for an agreement to meet Rome's demands, prioritizing Italian friendship over British pride⁴⁷³. The final blow to the British position was Ciano's visit to Germany. By this point, the desire to conclude a bilateral Anglo-Italian agreement could no longer be concealed⁴⁷⁴.

In a speech delivered in Avellino on 30 August 1936, Mussolini articulated a desire for a policy of peace that could only be achieved with the assistance of Britain⁴⁷⁵. The alliance between Rome and Berlin was increasingly perceived as a hindrance to the pursuit of a more favorable foreign policy⁴⁷⁶. Despite Ciano's interest in pursuing a more assertive foreign policy towards Berlin, there was still a prevailing belief in a policy that aimed to restore Italy's role in the Western world. In essence, all actions were undertaken with the sole objective of securing European and international recognition of Italy's Mediterranean and imperial interests⁴⁷⁷.

One of Vansittart's allies was Grandi. In their discussions in September, Grandi's objective was to clarify any potential misunderstandings between Rome and London⁴⁷⁸. This indicated that the Italian government was willing to pursue a policy of engagement on both fronts. Ciano was responsible for managing relations with Berlin, while Grandi was tasked with handling those with London⁴⁷⁹. A

⁴⁷² On the one hand, there are those who view the prospects of the Italo-German friendship in a positive light. On the other hand, there are those who believe that further reassurance should not be provided to the opportunism demonstrated by the fascist government.

⁴⁷³ *Ivi*, p. 118.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷⁵ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 119.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ivi*, p. 121.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibidem*.

series of discussions were held between the two parties. Mussolini informed Grandi that there was a willingness to resume a cordial relationship with the British government, but this was contingent upon a symbolic gesture by Eden or his cabinet to arouse the Italian public's interest in a reconciliation⁴⁸⁰. In light of these considerations, Grandi conveyed in a telegram to the Italian foreign minister that, following a discussion with Eden, the latter was opposed to a policy of friction with Italy because his own government was seeking to reach an understanding on the possibility of future collaboration in both the Mediterranean and Africa⁴⁸¹. Therefore, in view of the recent anti-Italian activities of the British, the Ambassador expressed the need to match words with deeds⁴⁸². Once more, Vansittart played a pivotal role in this process. The undersecretary for foreign affairs was aware that Eden was reluctant to accede to Grandi's request, yet he could not discount the possibility that pro-German circles in Italy might gain the upper hand⁴⁸³. He was concerned that if this declaration was not made, Mussolini would extend his hand to Nazism⁴⁸⁴.

In the final days of September, Paris made a final attempt to bring about the formation of a Mediterranean pact⁴⁸⁵. It was now prepared to identify a formula that would restrict the agreement to the Mediterranean region alone, excluding the USSR, and that would include Italy⁴⁸⁶. With regard to Spain, the possibility of its eventual inclusion was left open⁴⁸⁷. The exclusion of the USSR and Spain represented a significant gesture on the part of the French, indicating their willingness to engage with the British. This was insufficient. Similarly, the potential consequences of a British refusal were also highlighted, including the possibility of exiting the London Naval Treaty and the resumption of

⁴⁸⁰ Ivi, p. 122.

⁴⁸¹ DDI, 1935-1936, Octave Series, vol. V, Roma, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1936, p. 98.

⁴⁸² DDI, 1935-1936, Octave Series, vol. V, Roma, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1936, p. 15. We are referring to the journey of the King, the journey of Sir Samuel Hoare, the sending of troops to Palestine, the visit of the Turkish fleet to Malta.

⁴⁸³ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 123.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁸⁵ Ivi, p. 124.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibidem.

regional pacts⁴⁸⁸. The foreign minister was uninterested and had always been so. The British objective in the immediate term was to restore relations with Italy⁴⁸⁹. The discussions between Ciano and Ingram served to illustrate this point. The British Chargé d'Affaires informed Ciano of the prevailing discourse within British political circles regarding the situation in the Mediterranean. He indicated that there was a desire for rapprochement with Italy and that any suggestion of an anti-Italian policy was being dispelled⁴⁹⁰. This was an important indication that Mussolini's strategy was proving effective. He occupied a pivotal position within European politics and was courted by Britain with the intention of reaching an agreement on his desired outcome: the assurance of a free exit from the Mediterranean⁴⁹¹.

On the Italian side, the intention was to resume diplomatic relations with London. However, there was little encouraging news regarding the German-Italian friendship, particularly Mussolini's inclination to prioritize this relationship as a means of impeding the expansionist aspirations of the Nazi dictator⁴⁹². The British government was concerned that negotiations with the Italians would be more challenging and therefore decided to await clarification of the Duce's demands before commencing discussions⁴⁹³. The Italian government's objective was to achieve a limitation of naval armaments in the Mediterranean. The extent of this request was not immediately apparent, and it was not feasible for the British High Command, which had been contemplating accelerated rearmament since the previous year, to accept it⁴⁹⁴. Instead, the concept of a more political agreement, such as a non-aggression pact, emerged⁴⁹⁵.

⁴⁸⁸ Ivi, p. 125.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁹⁰ DDI, 1935-1936, Octave Series, vol. V, Roma, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1936, p. 131.

⁴⁹¹ Ivi, p. 126.

⁴⁹² Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 126.

⁴⁹³ Ivi, p. 127.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁹⁵ Ivi, p. 128.

4.4 Shifts in British Policy and Italian Responses

There was a significant discrepancy between Mussolini's proposals and Eden's willingness to concede. It was resolved to defer the conclusion of an agreement with Mussolini and to ascertain the Duce's genuine intentions⁴⁹⁶. This indicated that the British were not taking the matter of their involvement with Berlin seriously, and that their attitude was characterized by inconsistency. On the one hand, there were those who advocated for a rapprochement with Italy, while on the other hand, there were those who were reluctant to concede too much ground to Italian interests⁴⁹⁷.

On 7 October, in a conversation between Drummond, the British ambassador in Rome, and Ciano, London signaled its intention to continue the rearmament program⁴⁹⁸. This was conveyed through the declaration that it did not want Europe to split into two blocs and that it wanted Italian cooperation in this direction. The conditions set forth by Drummond indirectly indicated a willingness to address Mediterranean issues through bilateral agreements, with the Italo-British relationship serving as the framework for these negotiations⁴⁹⁹. The conditions of these agreements would be determined by the British government. The friendship between Mussolini and Hitler did not cause concern in Britain. Indeed, this relationship could be exploited in conjunction with Italy's extreme interest in a Mediterranean pact for its own benefit⁵⁰⁰.

The Italian response was the rearmament of the country's military forces, despite the country's serious economic difficulties. This decision was a consequence of the lack of trust in Drummond and Ingram⁵⁰¹. In particular, it is evident that the Italian-German approach was not comprehended. The

⁴⁹⁶ Ivi, p. 129.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibidem.

⁴⁹⁸ Ivi, p. 133.

⁴⁹⁹ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 133.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibidem.

⁵⁰¹ Ivi, p. 134.

British attitude demonstrated a lack of respect for Italian aspirations and a disregard for their concerns, prompting the Italian government to seek reassurance from Germany and restore relations with the Little Entente⁵⁰². It was Grandi who was most concerned about this issue. It seems that he was acting independently of the instructions he had received from the head of government and the foreign minister. He demanded assurances from the British side to prevent the specter of fascism from materializing⁵⁰³. Nevertheless, it appeared that London's conduct towards Italy remained unchanged. Ultimately, the strategy proved to be successful. A German newspaper provided clarification of Italian intentions with regard to the Mediterranean Pact⁵⁰⁴. Mussolini asserted that he was disinclined to enter into a general agreement, but was amenable to signing a Mediterranean agreement that would sanction friendship and cooperation between the two countries⁵⁰⁵. In mid-October, there was a noticeable shift in the Italian press's stance towards Britain⁵⁰⁶.

Towards the end of October, British policy changed. Following the dissemination of information regarding the dialogue between Ciano and Hitler concerning the establishment of a new Locarno, the Foreign Office commenced to express concern⁵⁰⁷. On 21 October, Drummond requested a clarification from Mussolini and demonstrated a willingness to reach an agreement on the Mediterranean, with the primary objective of accepting his demands⁵⁰⁸. He was convinced that the Duce was no longer interested in an arms limitation and would be content with a non-aggression pact or a declaration securing Italy's position in the Mediterranean⁵⁰⁹. Concurrently, the ambassador sought responses from his government, urging for a prompt resolution in this matter. In particular, it was demanded that the foreign minister express words of appreciation in public or private about the

⁵⁰² Ivi, p. 136.

⁵⁰³ Ibidem.

⁵⁰⁴ Ivi, p. 138

⁵⁰⁵ Ibidem.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibidem.

⁵⁰⁷ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 141.

⁵⁰⁸ ibidem

⁵⁰⁹ Ivi, p. 143.

actions of the Italian government⁵¹⁰. Nevertheless, Eden was reluctant to take any action that might have appeared to indicate a lack of strength on his country's part and might have provided an advantage to the Italians. Mussolini's speech on 1 November 1936 represented a significant setback for the planned course of action⁵¹¹.

4.5 Mussolini's Strategic Speech

Mussolini's speech inaugurated a new phase in the relationship between Rome and London. On the one hand, he announced the Rome-Berlin axis, and on the other, he presented a foreign policy program which explicitly invited the British to enter into a Mediterranean agreement⁵¹². This plan set aside the previously proposed simultaneous disarmament as being unfeasible and instead addressed the issue of the relationship with France. Following the conflict in Abyssinia, the relationship between Italy and France was significantly strained, primarily due to the formation of the Popular Front and their subsequent policy towards Spain, rather than their stance during the Wal Wal incident⁵¹³. Mussolini's actions indicated a certain degree of concern regarding the potential for expansionist policies. During this period, his policy was aimed at establishing closer ties with countries that could act as a barrier to German expansion. This is evidenced by the commencement of negotiations with Bucharest and Belgrade⁵¹⁴. An alliance between Mediterranean countries would have established a security system capable of countering Hitler's expansionist policies in the Balkans⁵¹⁵. London failed to comprehend this Italian policy and attempted to impede Mussolini's plans, particularly in Yugoslavia, on the assumption that an anti-British coalition would be formed in the Adriatic⁵¹⁶. The

⁵¹⁰ Ibidem.

⁵¹¹ Ibidem.

⁵¹² Ivi, p. 144.

⁵¹³ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 145.

⁵¹⁴ Ivi, p. 146.

⁵¹⁵ Ibidem.

⁵¹⁶ Ivi, p. 147.

United Kingdom is keen to maintain its influence in these regions, with the intention of utilising them as a potential alternative in the event of a further deterioration in its relationship with Italy⁵¹⁷.

The British response to this statement was, on the whole, positive. Sir Orme Sargent, Assistant Undersecretary at the Foreign Office, interpreted this speech in a highly favorable manner⁵¹⁸. He was convinced that the Duce had set aside the idea of adding some sort of guarantee within the Mediterranean pact, as evidenced by the public denunciation of the collective protection system and the League of Nations itself. Furthermore, the possibility of extending the pact to other countries had been dismissed, as it was deemed more appropriate to address the dispute between Rome and London⁵¹⁹. This represented a significant advantage, particularly in light of the persistent French pressure to engage in similar negotiations. The exclusion was not due to London⁵²⁰. Consequently, Sargent urged Eden to adopt a more concrete approach to the English proposal⁵²¹. It was also necessary to act by means of a formal response, as the technique of silence or postponement in this case would have had consequences in the Rome-Berlin relationship.

4.6 Moving towards agreement

In order to avoid creating impassable obstacles between the two nations, the moment had come to start negotiations with an eye toward taking into consideration Italian offers. The High Command considered that the most effective approach to resolving the issues in the Mediterranean would be to engage with Italy, with the objective of securing Rome's compliance with the terms of the London Naval Treaty⁵²². To this end, Eden had to set aside the Duce's arrogant demeanor and rhetoric and

⁵¹⁷ Ibidem.

⁵¹⁸ Ivi, p. 148.

⁵¹⁹ Ibidem.

⁵²⁰ Ivi, p. 149.

⁵²¹ Ibidem.

⁵²² Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 149.

take the initiative. In the British cabinet meetings, it was resolved to definitively restore amicable relations with Italy. The specific terms of the agreement and the manner of its implementation were similarly determined⁵²³. While Sargent was of the opinion that the form and content of the 1907 declaration on Mediterranean status should be used, incorporating Turkey into the pact at the appropriate time⁵²⁴. Such a solution, however, would have been frowned upon by the Duce, who by then had expressed his desire for no outside interference⁵²⁵. It turns out that this was a boost for Mussolini. He had been able to persuade the great empire to make a deal with him. At this point, the problem was approached differently by commissioning Drummond to conduct informal surveys to better understand the situation. It was found that it was safer to propose an improvement in the relations of the two maritime powers before talking about the hot issue of the Mediterranean⁵²⁶. It was made clear at once that a limitation of naval armaments would not be tolerated⁵²⁷.

Despite the brief period of tension caused by the article in Italy's newspaper on 2 November⁵²⁸, in the following days both Earl Halifax and the Foreign Secretary publicly expressed their support for Italy. The Lord Privy Seal declared to the House of Lords that he was willing to reconcile English and Italian interests in the Mediterranean⁵²⁹. Eden, meanwhile, asserted that Italy's Mediterranean policy, which did not include the threat to communication routes, was well regarded in London. Indeed, it was the same as England's. Both countries sought to exploit the Mediterranean for their own interests and trade, without the intention of hindering or threatening other countries. Eden's divergence of opinion with Rome reveals a more accommodating and less inflexible stance on the part of the British government, yet it was still necessary to persuade the foreign minister to adopt a more accommodating approach and to recognize that the only viable course of action was to reach an

⁵²³ *Ibidem*.

⁵²⁴ *Ivi*, p. 150.

⁵²⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵²⁶ *Ivi*, p. 151.

⁵²⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁵²⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁵²⁹ The text of the speech given by Viscount Halifax can be found in *Documents of International Politics 1936*, p. 439-440.

agreement⁵³⁰. There was no alternative course of action. The High Command emphasised the necessity of strengthening its bases in the Mediterranean, but these initiatives were to be conducted in accordance with a policy of cooperation with Rome⁵³¹. Eden accepted this prospect, although with some reluctance, and was keen to underline that the Mediterranean was not a key element in Italian foreign policy and that the problem of the recognition of the Italian empire would be postponed as long as possible⁵³². Nevertheless, this initiative was not definitively excluded.

The willingness to enter into an agreement, to sign trade agreements and, of utmost importance, also the withdrawal of British guard troops from Ethiopian territory⁵³³ represented a significant effort to overcome the disagreements of recent years⁵³⁴. Nevertheless, Mussolini remained dissatisfied. The two diplomats, Grandi and Drummond, were understandably concerned about the potential consequences⁵³⁵ of their efforts to negotiate an agreement⁵³⁵. They were convinced that there would be significant benefits to be gained from restoring diplomatic relations and urged their governments to take the plunge. Both governments were reluctant to proceed⁵³⁶. Grandi was disheartened to realize that he had been unable to persuade the Duce to take the initial step. He therefore urged Vansittart to embark on a diplomatic mission with the objective of initiating negotiations and persuading the Duce of the British government's benevolence towards him⁵³⁷. These concerns proved to be unfounded, and on 9 November, the Duce reiterated his desire for conciliation with Britain through a *gentlemen's agreement*. This formula entailed an exchange of mutual assurances on the respect of the interests of

⁵³⁰ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 153.

⁵³¹ *Ibidem*.

⁵³² *Ibidem*.

⁵³³ We are referring to the

⁵³⁴ DDI, 1935-1936, Octave Series, vol. V, Roma, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1936, p. 426.

⁵³⁵ DDI, 1935-1936, Octave Series, vol. V, Roma, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1936, p. 403.

⁵³⁶ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 154.

⁵³⁷ *Ivi*, p. 155.

both powers, which would be beneficial to all parties involved by avoiding any potential sources of contention⁵³⁸.

4.7 The inaugural discussions

During the whole month of November, preliminary negotiations commenced with a view to concluding the agreement⁵³⁹. Upon becoming aware of the Italian proposals, it was necessary to determine the most appropriate course of action for the British government. An initial response was provided by Baldwin, who, during a discourse in Guildhall, expressed optimism about the potential benefits of the new trade agreements⁵⁴⁰ and the prospect of restoring traditional diplomatic relations with Italy. In a telegram to Minister Ciano, Grandi articulated how Baldwin's words constituted the inaugural public endorsement of an accord to resolve the differences between Italy and Great Britain. This assertion gains further credence when one considers that this address was among the inaugural remarks delivered by the newly constituted government⁵⁴¹. However, it was widely assumed that the negotiations, which were discussed in official speeches, would not result in any tangible outcomes. It was appropriate for London to initiate the negotiations, and Drummond was duly appointed to lead the talks⁵⁴². Eden's stance towards Rome differed from that of the entire cabinet. In his estimation, there would be no strategic advantage to be gained from such an agreement, but merely a political one⁵⁴³. Moreover, he was the sole advocate for a more substantial presence in the Mediterranean, while the others sought to reinforce British positions in the Far East⁵⁴⁴. From this perspective, it is possible to comprehend the concerns of the Foreign Minister, who did not place much confidence in

⁵³⁸ Ivi, p. 156.

⁵³⁹ Ibidem.

⁵⁴⁰ Ivi, p. 157

⁵⁴¹ DDI, 1935-1936, Octave Series, vol. V, Roma, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1936, p. 430.

⁵⁴² Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 159.

⁵⁴³ Ivi, p. 160.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibidem.

an agreement that would only address a portion of his own concerns, leaving significant uncertainties regarding Turkey and the Soviet Union⁵⁴⁵.

The Foreign Office was convinced that it had to reassure the Italian foreign minister of its good intentions towards his country and therefore entrusted Drummond with this task⁵⁴⁶. Drummond, for his part, considered it superfluous, preferring to wait until he had received instructions before commencing negotiations⁵⁴⁷. In the interim, the Marquis Theodoli conveyed the content of Mussolini's proposed agreement. First and foremost, Rome was determined not to propose a written pact; rather, it was planned to put a series of official declarations as the basis of the agreement. In respect of three strategic points for Britain, namely Ethiopia, Sudan and the Gambela region, extensive reassurances were forthcoming⁵⁴⁸. Moreover, Italy was disinclined to consider a reduction in its naval forces. Drummond also emphasized that the future agreement should not be in an anti-French function⁵⁴⁹.

On 14 November, Vansittart informed Grandi of the extent to which the Duce's declarations had reassured the British political spheres⁵⁵⁰. He also revealed that the entire cabinet, not just Baldwin and Eden, were prepared to sign the gentlemen's agreement, which they considered to be an ideal solution for their circumstances⁵⁵¹. On the same day, the Foreign Office transmitted a communication indicating its readiness to respond to Mussolini's proposals⁵⁵². The solution was to issue a parallel declaration on the non-conflictuality and complementarity of the two countries' interests⁵⁵³. Nevertheless, it appeared that this solution did not fully address the underlying differences between

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ivi*, p. 161.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴⁹ DDI, 1935-1936, Octave Series, vol. V, Roma, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1936, p. 430.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ivi*, p. 162.

⁵⁵¹ DDI, 1935-1936, Octave Series, vol. V, Roma, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1936, p. 454.

⁵⁵² Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 162.

⁵⁵³ *Ibidem*.

Britain and Italy⁵⁵⁴. It was plausible that the Italian government would present counter-proposals. At the time, Rome was informed of the consequences of the resumption of good relations with Italy and the content of the British demands⁵⁵⁵. The terms of the agreement were as follows: the status quo in the Mediterranean was to be accepted unconditionally; an end was to be put to anti-British propaganda⁵⁵⁶, especially in the Middle East and North Africa; the Montreux Convention⁵⁵⁷ and the London Naval Treaty were to be adhered to; and finally, Italy was to become a member of the League of Nations once more⁵⁵⁸. In return, Britain was willing to grant its renewed friend both the non-assumption of new commitments in the Mediterranean and the adoption of measures that would not create suspicion with other countries. Furthermore, it was willing to limit naval forces and reduce fortifications in the Mediterranean⁵⁵⁹. These are the fundamental prerequisites for Eden, which must underpin the restoration of the relationship with Italy. Without them, the process would be futile.

A crucial aspect that was not addressed was the matter of the empire's recognition⁵⁶⁰. The British were resolute in their intention to defer the matter as long as possible and, above all, to address it separately. Of the aforementioned demands, only that pertaining to the maintenance of the status quo in the Mediterranean merited written documentation. For the remaining requests, even a mere assurance would have sufficed⁵⁶¹.

⁵⁵⁴ Ivi, p. 163.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibidem.

⁵⁵⁶ We are referring to the anti-british propaganda of Radio Bari. Marzano A., *Onde fasciste. La propaganda araba di Radio Bari (1934-1943)*, Roma, Carrocci editore, 2015, p. 219; Arielli N., *Fascist Italy and the Middle East, 1933-1940*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 9.

⁵⁵⁷ Montreux Convention is an agreement concerning the Dardanelles strait, the Sea of Marmara, and the Bosphorus strait. At their meeting in Montreux, Switzerland, the signatories to the Treaty of Lausanne and others decided to hand back military control of the zone to Turkey in response to its request to refortify it. In times of conflict, the pact gave Turkey the authority to blockade the straits to all warships while allowing commerce ships unrestricted access.

⁵⁵⁸ Ivi, p. 164.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibidem.

⁵⁶⁰ Ivi, p. 165.

⁵⁶¹ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 167.

As interest in the agreement was initially high on the part of Britain, efforts to comprehend Italy's subsequent actions were intensified⁵⁶². While Drummond was proactive in his approach and maintained regular communication with Ciano to ascertain the specifics of the Italian demands, Eden and Vansittart exerted pressure on Grandi, who had been kept in the dark about the negotiations and was unable to clarify them⁵⁶³. The tone of their discussions had become more accommodating and amicable, although Eden's feelings towards Italy had not changed. He was, however, satisfied with the progress of the negotiations, particularly with regard to France⁵⁶⁴. In his memoirs, he recalls how the understanding with Rome was important at the time, as they could not afford to be enemies in a hot situation like the 1930s⁵⁶⁵. In particular, the undemanding manner in which they came to an agreement was important. Indeed, this individual granted the two countries complete freedom of action in their dealings with other countries. London maintained the option of concluding agreements with countries in the Adriatic and eastern Mediterranean, particularly in the event that the agreements with Rome were unclear⁵⁶⁶. Consequently, these countries were obliged to rely on Britain to a considerable extent.

The British stance was gradually becoming more amenable to the prospect of negotiations. According to Drummond, on 17 November the Foreign Office was informed of Mussolini's possible demands⁵⁶⁷. According to his observations, the Duce was not inclined to place any obligations on the British with regard to the Mediterranean, nor was he interested in entering into an agreement with a country that would have the effect of limiting British naval armaments⁵⁶⁸. Similarly, Rome would not have risked a pact in order to be recognized as an empire. Although he was able to envisage the nature of the Italian demands, the ambassador was uncertain as to how to predict the Italian government's

⁵⁶² *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶³ *Ivi*, p. 169.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ivi*, p. 170.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ivi*, p. 173.

⁵⁶⁸ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 174.

subsequent impressions and responses⁵⁶⁹. One of the commonalities of the two policies was the maintenance of the status quo. However, some of the British demands would be difficult to agree to. Firstly, it was unlikely that the Italian government would adhere to the Montreux Convention, given that Mussolini had previously demonstrated his displeasure at Italy's non-participation in such an important pact⁵⁷⁰. This was a snub to Italy's prestige, and a late participation would have been viewed negatively by Germany as well. The adherence to the London Naval Treaty and re-entry into the League of Nations were matters that were not included in the content of the Mediterranean Pact⁵⁷¹.

Although Drummond had ruled out negotiating with Rome on most points of interest to London, the Foreign Office placed great confidence in him, entrusting him with the task of managing the negotiations⁵⁷². They listened to his suggestions without objection. On the British side, it was time for an official conversation. Both Drummond and Eden were eager to conclude the gentlemen's agreement⁵⁷³. On 20 November, the ambassador was informed that he was to continue the negotiations with Rome, despite the fact that a new interlocutor had been appointed, namely Ciano, who had assumed control of the negotiations, leaving Grandi out⁵⁷⁴. Drummond wasted no time in initiating the negotiations, despite the lack of precise instructions. He requested to deal directly with the Duce on the same day⁵⁷⁵. Nevertheless, Ciano was disinclined to have the negotiations conducted with the head of government and in a country other than Italy⁵⁷⁶.

The foreign minister was adamant that he was the most suitable interlocutor to avoid the press being informed, and that it was necessary to proceed with caution as nothing had yet been decided and the

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ivi*, p. 175.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁷² *Ivi*, p. 176.

⁵⁷³ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁷⁵ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 177.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

situation was delicate⁵⁷⁷. Similarly, he proposed that Rome was the optimal location for negotiations due to its proximity to the Duce, who could therefore be kept apprised of developments in real time⁵⁷⁸. This marked the first concession made by the British government. This was a reckless decision, influenced by the fear of compromising the ongoing negotiations⁵⁷⁹. The concern in London about offending the Foreign Secretary and the Italian government was so pronounced that Eden, during a Commons session, defended the Italian actions in Spain, noting that it was not the only country to have intervened in the Spanish conflict⁵⁸⁰. Italy was accorded considerable understanding, yet this willingness would have a detrimental impact on the progress of negotiations, as the Duce perceived that he could leverage the depth of their friendship to extract concessions.⁵⁸¹ It is evident that the British government is cognizant of the fact that it will bear the brunt of the consequences of the agreement. Furthermore, there is a possibility that their policy on the Mediterranean, which has been a point of contention in recent years, may be compromised⁵⁸².

4.8 Strategic Divergence and Concerns

As the negotiations progressed, from the end of November and the beginning of December, London demonstrated a greater degree of flexibility and a more accommodating stance towards Italy⁵⁸³. The British government was becoming aware that the prospective agreement would confer significant advantages upon the government, a result that was disappointing from the perspective of Britain⁵⁸⁴. Eden sought three quid pro quos from Rome: an end to anti-British propaganda, respect for the

⁵⁷⁷ Ivi, p. 178.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibidem.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibidem.

⁵⁸⁰ Ivi, p. 179.

⁵⁸¹ Ibidem.

⁵⁸² Ibidem.

⁵⁸³ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 179.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibidem.

borders of British Somaliland, and a check on Italian policy in Yemen⁵⁸⁵. The polls requested by Drummond indicated that they would be challenging to resolve. With regard to the issue of anti-British propaganda, Eden was aware that this problem would not be resolved, given the difficulty in gathering evidence that the government was behind this propaganda⁵⁸⁶. Moreover, it was not possible to consider the promises made by Marquis Theodoli, as by the time Ciano assumed control of the negotiations, he had also disavowed both the Marquis and Grandi⁵⁸⁷. Consequently, the British government did not anticipate that the Italian side would respect Somalia's borders⁵⁸⁸.

Italian friendship had become of paramount importance to London. However, the Foreign Office was compelled to adopt a defensive posture, as it was imperative to address the issues that had been identified. Moreover, it was of paramount importance to ensure that the Turkish, Greek, and Yugoslav governments, and most significantly, the Egyptian government, were kept apprised of the discussions between Rome and London⁵⁸⁹. Another significant international actor that required safeguarding was France⁵⁹⁰. There was a shift in British conduct towards France at a time when the French press expressed some concern at the realisation that the Italian press's improvement in relations with London was linked to a deterioration in relations with Paris. According to the French Prime Minister, London was obliged to take the initiative in re-establishing cordial relations between Rome and Paris⁵⁹¹. Initially, there was no concern that an agreement between the two maritime powers to the exclusion of France might show less solidity in the Franco-British relationship. However, Eden was convinced that this Mediterranean pact would undermine the Italian-German friendship⁵⁹². This did not occur.

⁵⁸⁵ Ivi, p. 180.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibidem

⁵⁸⁷ Ibidem.

⁵⁸⁸ Ivi, p. 181.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibidem.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibidem.

⁵⁹¹ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 182.

⁵⁹² Ibidem.

The Italian position became increasingly robust, and Mussolini capitalized on the British government's willingness to engage⁵⁹³. The Duce was relinquishing the initiative to the Foreign Office in order to avoid potential complications and to enhance his bargaining position. In this context, the instructions to Drummond were received on 2 December⁵⁹⁴, which stated that it was the ambassador's responsibility to attempt to associate France with the British-Italian declaration⁵⁹⁵. Furthermore, no point in the pact was to harm the interests of the other British allies, including Greece, Yugoslavia, Turkey and Egypt⁵⁹⁶.

The instructions presented precise demands on which the ambassador would have to contend with Ciano⁵⁹⁷. According to the British, the Mediterranean Pact was to take the form of an exchange of letters between Ciano and Drummond, in which the commitment to respect the maintenance of the status quo in the Mediterranean was confirmed⁵⁹⁸. Furthermore, it was of paramount importance to address the issue of propaganda, which was considered the most significant cause of conflict with Italy. However, it was also crucial to resolve the dispute over Ethiopia, specifically the fact that Rome was to reiterate the content of the 1906 and 1927 agreements⁵⁹⁹. Finally, Drummond was obliged to elucidate the Italian stance on the boundaries of British Somaliland, Kenya and Sudan⁶⁰⁰. The issues of the Montreux Convention, Italy's re-entry into the League of Nations and accession to the London Naval Treaty were set aside. In comparison to previous directives, the British government

⁵⁹³ Ivi, p. 183.

⁵⁹⁴ The British government's stance towards France underwent a transformation. It is likely that the Foreign Office had considered it necessary to maintain the traditional alliance in light of the introduction of a new element. However, this issue was not treated with the requisite conviction. Indeed, there was the impression that Mussolini would not accept the possibility of associating France with such a treaty, nor did it make sense to introduce it into this pact. It is evident that this was to be viewed in the context of a potential future rapprochement between Rome and Paris, which London was hoping for.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibidem.

⁵⁹⁶ Ivi, p. 184.

⁵⁹⁷ Ivi, p. 186.

⁵⁹⁸ DDI, 1935-1936, Octave Series, vol. V, Roma, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1936, p. 579.

⁵⁹⁹ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 186.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibidem.

demonstrated a less accommodating stance and a determination to exploit the advantages that this pact was to have⁶⁰¹.

On 6 December, the initial results were disappointing. The promises made by Theodoli and Grandi were not fulfilled⁶⁰². The Italian foreign minister adopted a more inflexible stance and was unwilling to permit France's involvement, nor was he prepared to commit himself to mitigating the hostile press coverage directed towards the French⁶⁰³. The British foreign minister's repeated requests to Ciano to include France in a three-way pact were unsuccessful. This was because the Italian government was reluctant to enter into the examination of particular Mediterranean issues and wanted the pact to be of a general nature. This would have been the case had France been included⁶⁰⁴.

Another objection was based on the formula that the British considered the agreement should have. Ciano reserved the right to make changes and proposed a formula that suited Italian interests during their conversation⁶⁰⁵. The declaration was to have the following formula: an exchange of ideas regarding the relationship between the two countries, which stated that the two had complementary interests in the Mediterranean, directed towards the improvement of their relations, but also towards peace and security in the Mediterranean⁶⁰⁶. The agreement stipulated that both parties would recognise freedom of access and communication and trade. In the event of any differences, the two countries would engage in friendly consultations to resolve them⁶⁰⁷. Furthermore, Ciano denied his own government's responsibility for anti-British propaganda and did not expound on the possible participation in the London Naval Treaty⁶⁰⁸.

⁶⁰¹ Ivi, p. 187.

⁶⁰² Ivi, p. 188.

⁶⁰³ Ibidem.

⁶⁰⁴ DDI, 1935-1936, Octave Series, vol. V, Roma, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1936, p. 619.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibidem.

⁶⁰⁶ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 189.

⁶⁰⁷ In his telegram of 15 December, Drummond pointed out to Eden that it was not necessary to insist on the inclusion of the commitment to consultation as suggested by Ciano. D. B. F. P., Series II, Vol. XVII, D. 482.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibidem.

A confluence of factors contributed to the shift in Italy's stance, with the role of key interlocutors in the government being a significant factor⁶⁰⁹. First and foremost, Eden had left a considerable degree of flexibility in the matter. The foreign minister had undergone a significant shift in his stance, moving from a rejection of Italy and the possibility of an agreement to a vocal endorsement of Italian friendship. He even went so far as to justify Italian interference in Spain publicly⁶¹⁰. Vansittart himself was culpable; he was so eager for rapprochement that he promised Grandi recognition of the empire after the signing of the agreements⁶¹¹. Similarly, Drummond was culpable for having been excessively accommodating towards the Duce and the Italian foreign minister⁶¹². Consequently, he had not even attempted to resolve the French question. Finally, the British military also had responsibilities. Their pressure had prevented a more cautious approach to the negotiations⁶¹³. The only remaining option for London was to adopt a more inflexible stance and demand that Italy address the issues identified as a matter of urgency⁶¹⁴. This would require Italy to concede to British demands. The English were dissatisfied with the current situation and this led to a re-evaluation of the entire situation⁶¹⁵.

One of the initial concerns was the participation of France in the agreement. In a final attempt, Eden sought the complicity of Grandi⁶¹⁶. The British minister informed Grandi of the reasons behind his country's desire to integrate France, emphasizing the significance of the historical Franco-British friendship⁶¹⁷. However, Ciano entirely excluded Grandi from the negotiations and was in complete control of the situation. Eden's necessity to include the French government was largely contingent

⁶⁰⁹ Ivi, p. 190.

⁶¹⁰ Ibidem.

⁶¹¹ Ibidem.

⁶¹² Ibidem.

⁶¹³ Ibidem.

⁶¹⁴ Ivi, p. 191.

⁶¹⁵ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 191.

⁶¹⁶ DDI, 1935-1936, Octave Series, vol. V, Roma, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1936, p. 462

⁶¹⁷ Ibidem.

upon the influence Italy was exerting in Spain, particularly in the Balearic Islands⁶¹⁸. On 14 December, the issue that had caused concern to the British foreign minister was examined. The Italian approach to the Iberian Peninsula was a cause for concern among European countries, their press and public opinion, particularly in light of the perceived complicity with Germany in these territories⁶¹⁹. Consequently, Eden was adamant about obtaining reassurances regarding the question of the Balearic Islands, which must remain Spanish territory and not fall into enemy hands. From the British perspective, the only viable option is to pursue further negotiations with Rome, with the hope that any commitment to the maintenance of the status quo in the Mediterranean will not result in alterations to the territorial arrangement⁶²⁰. Grandi reassured the Foreign Office by requesting reassurances from Ciano regarding the Balearic issue⁶²¹.

The discussion of Spanish integrity would be addressed in a cursory manner, as it was the French who were most concerned about the fate of Spain⁶²². Mussolini himself was of the opinion that the Italian intervention in the civil war was of little consequence⁶²³. This was due to the fact that the issue had not been raised until the conclusion of the negotiations. Conversely, the most pressing issue was Italian activity in the Arab world⁶²⁴. At this juncture, the Italian government was able to avoid any potential exposure, and Britain was left with no alternative but to trust Mussolini's good faith that he would not compromise the renewed friendship in order to continue his penetration into Yemen and Arabia⁶²⁵.

4.9 The final phase of the negotiations

⁶¹⁸ Ivi, p. 193.

⁶¹⁹ Ibidem.

⁶²⁰ Ivi, p. 194.

⁶²¹ DDI, 1935-1936, Octave Series, vol. V, Roma, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1936, p. 528.

⁶²² Ibidem.

⁶²³ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 195.

⁶²⁴ Ibidem.

⁶²⁵ Ivi, p. 196.

On 18 December, the final phase of the negotiations commences. The consequences of the British conduct have now become apparent, and they are of a gravity that is difficult to overstate⁶²⁶. Drummond was furnished with the final instructions to negotiate with Ciano. The British government asserted that it was imperative to address the clauses pertaining to communication and freedom of access to the Mediterranean⁶²⁷. First and foremost, it is imperative to reaffirm the Spanish sovereignty over the Balearic Islands and to ensure that this guarantee is given the utmost importance. It is therefore proposed that the declaration should no longer address the status quo, but rather the 'national status of territories'⁶²⁸. This formula ensures that there are no changes to the sovereignty of the Balearic Islands. This declaration concerning Spain was of the utmost importance⁶²⁹.

A more robust commitment is required of Drummond, who must reiterate all British demands and obtain some quid pro quo before signing this friendship⁶³⁰. The ambassador drew the ambassador's attention to the necessity of resolving the problem of anti-British propaganda in the Middle East, adherence to the London Naval Treaty and the Montreux Convention, and the inclusion of France⁶³¹. Nevertheless, Eden did not consider these issues to be insurmountable obstacles to the agreement, as the British minister was keen to conclude the agreement itself⁶³².

On 21 December, Ciano became aware of the British plan. The Spanish question was immediately set aside. Ciano was not motivated to offend Franco by signing an agreement in which Italy would

⁶²⁶ Ibidem.

⁶²⁷ Ibidem.

⁶²⁸ No documentation has been discovered in the Italian archives pertaining to the conversation between Ciano and Ambassador Drummond during which the exchange of notes took place. For further information, please refer to the account of British diplomatic documents. Documents on British Foreign Policy, Second Series, vol. XVII, p. 483.

⁶²⁹ Ivi, p. 197.

⁶³⁰ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 197.

⁶³¹ Ibidem.

⁶³² Ibidem.

determine whether or not a sovereign country should relinquish a territory of its own⁶³³. Furthermore, the minister highlighted the difficulty in translating the desired formula, namely 'national status of territories', into his native language. A modification was proposed that was considered more easily translatable, as it no longer necessitated the Italian side mentioning Spain, as this would not be included in their declaration. Ciano therefore put forth the proposal of "territorial status quo"⁶³⁴. The Italian stance on the remaining demands remained unchanged. Despite maintaining its denial of responsibility for press criticism of Britain's actions in the Arab world, Italy opened a potential avenue for collaboration with France⁶³⁵. The Italian minister saw no reason to cease the traditional cordiality once the Spanish conflict was over. In evaluating this, the Italian government anticipated the conclusion of the Blum government and the end of the French Socialist Party's tenure in power in Europe⁶³⁶.

The British response to the concessions extracted from Ciano was favourable. The Foreign Office was generally satisfied with the outcome, although there was a single point of contention regarding the interpretation of certain terms⁶³⁷. Eden was insistent on the inclusion of the phrase "status quo as regards the national sovereignty of the territories" in the declaration⁶³⁸. The Italian minister indicated that the translation was challenging, yet Eden was only willing to concede on the phrase "particularly the territories of Spain"⁶³⁹. Faced with the constraints of parliamentary and public opinion, Drummond, under Eden's guidance, was compelled to insist on the assurance regarding the Spanish territory⁶⁴⁰. The British proposal was to introduce into the pact an exchange of notes between Ciano

⁶³³ Ivi, p. 198.

⁶³⁴ Ibidem.

⁶³⁵ Ivi, p. 199.

⁶³⁶ Ibidem.

⁶³⁷ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 199.

⁶³⁸ Ibidem.

⁶³⁹ Ibidem.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibidem.

and Drummond reiterating respect for the integrity of Spain. With regard to the other proposed amendments by Italy, these were prepared to be granted⁶⁴¹.

On the first of January, Drummond presented Ciano with the text, which had been modified in accordance with his instructions, and proposed an exchange of letters regarding Spain⁶⁴². The intervention of the Duce resulted in the resolution of the Spanish problem. However, it was requested that the agreement and the exchange of letters be dated differently. The former would have the date of 2 January and would be published on the 4th of the same month, while the latter would have the date of 31 December⁶⁴³. This proposal was not accepted by the British government. The British Foreign Minister had made arrangements with the French Ambassador in London, Corbin, to safeguard the understanding between the two governments in the eyes of the public⁶⁴⁴. Eden undertook to make the content of the pact known before it was made public in order to prepare for the reaction of the people, but above all to ensure that there would be a declaration from Italy concerning Spain⁶⁴⁵. However, it was unwise to reveal one's intentions before the agreement had been formally signed. Consequently, Eden proposed that the agreement be made public two days after the signing, allowing sufficient time for it to be communicated to Paris⁶⁴⁶.

In response to this proposal, Ciano requested a change in the dates of both documents, namely the exchange of notes and the declaration⁶⁴⁷. The Italian government sought an interval between the two documents, with the first being the agreement and the second being the exchange of letters with Spain⁶⁴⁸. This was because the Italian government was convinced that public opinion would be more

⁶⁴¹ Ibidem.

⁶⁴² Ivi, p. 200.

⁶⁴³ Ibidem.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁶⁴⁵ Brundu Olla, P., *L'equilibrio difficile: Gran Bretagna, Francia e Italia nel Mediterraneo 1930-1937*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1980, p. 201.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibidem.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibidem.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibidem.

interested in noting the significant achievements of the gentlemen's agreement than in worrying about the Spanish question. Conversely, the British government desired the simultaneous publication of the two documents in order to emphasise the successful conclusion of negotiations with Italy regarding the Spanish question⁶⁴⁹. Mussolini and Eden reached an agreement: Italy would publish the two documents separately and on different days, while Britain would publish them simultaneously⁶⁵⁰. Consequently, London achieved a victory and fulfilled its commitment to Paris, thereby removing the shadow cast over the traditional cooperation and friendship between the two countries. The Anglo-Italian Pact was greeted with approval by France and Germany⁶⁵¹.

The signing of the gentlemen's agreement on 2 January 1937 marked a re-establishment of the friendship between Britain and Italy. The friendship had been costly to the British side, which had gained nothing more from the negotiations than a rapprochement between the two countries. Italy, however, had achieved notable gains. In addition to the formal recognition of friendship, Italy secured the freedom of access to the Mediterranean, a matter of vital importance to the Fascist government.

⁶⁴⁹ Ivi, p. 202.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibidem.

⁶⁵¹ Ibidem.

Documentary Appendix

ITALO-BRITISH AGREEMENT OF 2 JANUARY 1937

(a) Italo-British Declaration concerning the Mediterranean.

Rome, 2 January 1937

The Government of Italy and the Government of His Majesty in the United Kingdom; animated by the desire to contribute more and more, in the general interests of peace and security, to the improvement of relations among themselves and among all the Mediterranean Powers, and resolved to respect the rights and interests of those Powers;

recognize that freedom of entry, exit and transit in the Mediterranean is a vital interest of both Italy and the various parts of the British Empire, and that these interests are in no way opposed to each other;

exclude any intention to alter or, as far as they are concerned, to see altered the status quo with regard to the national sovereignty of territories in the Mediterranean basin;

undertake to respect each other's interests and rights in this area;

agree to make every effort to prevent any activity likely to jeopardize the good relations which this Declaration is intended to consolidate.

This Declaration is addressed to the ends of peace and is not directed against any Power.

Eric Drummond-G. Ciano

(b) Exchange of notes concerning the status quo in the Western Mediterranean, 31 December 1936.

Sir Eric Drummond to Count Ciano

Excellency,

As your Eminence will recall, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs was interposed on 16 December to the House of Commons to inquire whether he was prepared to communicate to the House the precise terms of the assurances given to HM Government by the Italian Government concerning the occupation of the Balearic Islands by Italian nationals.

To this question, Mr Eden replied that the assurances to which the questioners were referring were given orally. He added that the British Chargé d'Affaires in Rome informed the Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs on 12 September, in accordance with instructions received, that 'any change in the status quo in the western Mediterranean would be a matter of the gravest concern to the British Government'. Mr. Eden further stated that on taking note of this communication the Italian Foreign Minister assured Mr. Ingram that the Italian Government had neither before nor after the revolution in Spain begun negotiations with General Franco with a view to changing the status quo in the western Mediterranean, nor did it intend to proceed with such negotiations in the future. This assurance,' added the Secretary of State, 'was subsequently and spontaneously reconfirmed to the British Naval Attaché in Rome by the Italian Ministry of the Navy, and the Italian Ambassador in London gave similar verbal assurances on several occasions.

In view of these assurances HM Government in the United Kingdom considers that as far as Italy is concerned the present territorial integrity of Spain will in all circumstances remain intact and unaltered. The British Government would, however, be grateful if Your Excellency could formally confirm the accuracy of the foregoing, and I consequently have the honour to ask if Your Excellency can provide me with such confirmation.

I take this opportunity to offer Your Excellency the assurance of my highest consideration.

Eric Drummond

Count Ciano to Sir. Eric Drummond

Mr. Ambassador,

I have the honour to acknowledge receipt of your Excellency's note of today's date, in which you draw my attention to a question put to the House of Commons on the 16th of December, and to the answer given by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs regarding the assurances given orally by the Italian Government on the status quo in the Western Mediterranean.

Referring to the communication of the British Chargé d'Affaires of 12 September, V.E. recalled how I had assured Mr. Ingram that the Italian Government had neither before nor after the revolution in Spain begun negotiations with General Franco with a view to changing the status quo in the Western Mediterranean, and that the Italian Government did not intend to proceed with such negotiations in the future either.

I have consequently no difficulty in confirming on behalf of the Italian Government that the British Government is correct in its belief that as far as Italy is concerned the present territorial integrity of Spain must remain intact and unaltered under all circumstances. Please accept, Mr. Ambassador, the acts of my highest consideration.

G. Ciano

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