

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09045-2 - Diplomacy and Strategy of Survival: British Policy and Franco's Spain, 1940-41

Denis Smyth

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DIPLOMACY AND STRATEGY OF SURVIVAL

British policy and Franco's Spain, 1940–41

This book analyses Britain's diplomatic efforts to preserve the non-belligerency of Franco's Spain, during the period between December 1940 and the end of 1941: Spanish participation in the Axis war effort would have increased considerably the strategic odds against Britain in its already unequal struggle for survival with Hitler's Germany, fresh from its triumph over France. Making extensive use of recently available British and Spanish (governmental and private) documentary records, and material gathered from published and unpublished sources in six European languages, Denis Smyth explains how Britain's uphill struggle to secure Spanish non-belligerency had been rewarded with success by December 1940. This diplomatic goal had been attained in spite of Franco's own readiness to enter the war against her in return for satisfaction of his territorial desires, and despite Hitler's interest in recruiting Spaniards into the active ranks of the Axis camp. Rather, the economic weakness of post-Civil War Spain, and the failure of Berlin and Madrid to agree on the terms and the timing of Spanish participation in the war, stabilised Franco's neutrality by the close of 1940, in the absence of any apparently irreparable injury to the British cause. The various means which Britain employed to encourage Franco's Spain to remain at peace – measured economic support, political blandishment and even bribery of Spanish generals – are also studied.

Ironically, however, British policy-makers were unaware of the early success of their efforts to persuade Franco to avoid joining the fight against them. So they remained alert throughout 1940–1 to the danger of sudden Spanish support for, or acquiescence in, a German move across their territory against Gibraltar. London's vigilance often took the form of a concern to anticipate a possible German move against the Rock by seizing alternative naval bases in the Spanish or Portuguese Atlantic Islands. Such preventive military action would have automatically provoked Franco's belligerency, the very contingency which British policy-makers sought to avoid. Only the cautionary counsel of Britain's Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, in 1940, and its Ambassador to Spain, Sir Samuel Hoare, in 1940–1, as well as Churchill's own capacity for second thoughts on the wisdom of a pre-emptive strike against Iberian territory, rescued the British on several occasions from precipitating Spain's entry into the war.

In order to emphasise the uniqueness of the diplomatic challenge posed to British policy-makers by Franco's Spain, the principles which had governed British policy towards the Spanish Civil War of 1936–9 are also analysed and assessed. Again, by way of underlining the long-term significance of the respective diplomatic attitudes ultimately assumed by Britain and Spain towards each other in 1940–1, the conclusion notes how Spanish neutrality helped the British endure 'their finest hour' and the Franco regime survive the destruction of its former Fascist and Nazi patrons.

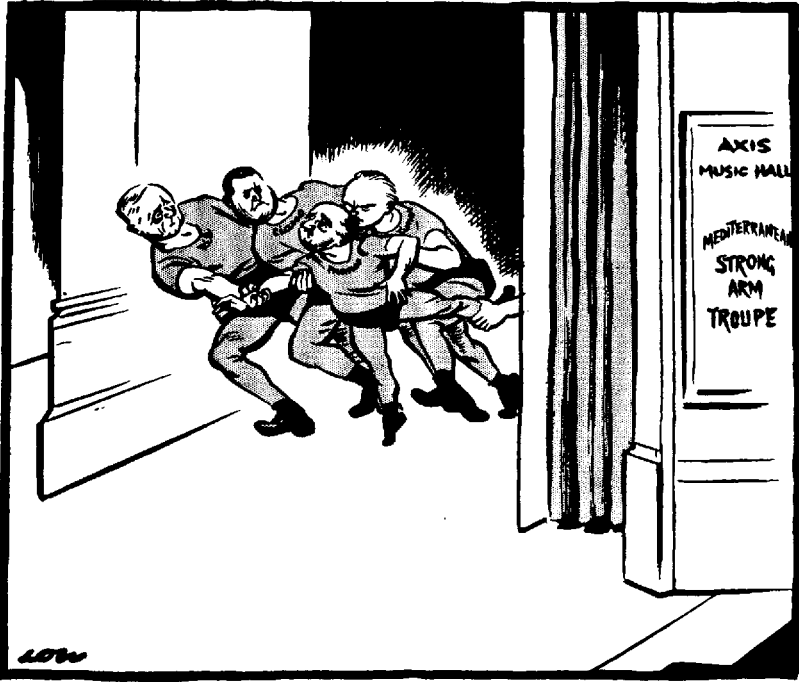
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[More information](#)



'Trouble in the Wings', a cartoon by Low from *The Evening Standard*, 21 November 1940. (Cartoon supplied by permission of *The Standard*.)

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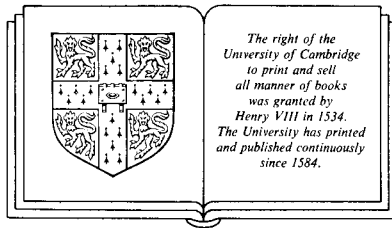
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[More information](#)

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

*For my wife, Margaret,
and in memory of my parents*

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Well,
To the latter end of a fray and the beginning of a feast
Fits a dull fighter and a keen guest. [Falstaff]

Shakespeare, *Henry IV Part One*, Act IV, Scene II

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page ix</i>
Introduction	1
1 Britain and the birth of Franco's Spain, 1936–39	10
2 Defining a policy	26
3 Opposition	52
4 The Spanish scene	72
5 Strategic diplomacy: September–October, 1940	84
6 Economic diplomacy: September–December, 1940	110
7 The Tangier crisis	133
8 The limits of attraction	173
9 The exhaustion of diplomacy	217
Conclusion	242
<i>Notes</i>	252
<i>Bibliography</i>	311
<i>Index</i>	323

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

Perhaps even more than other forms of historical investigation, diplomatic history is inevitably a collective enterprise, for all that one person is usually acknowledged as the individual author of a particular study. The group of archivists, librarians, scholars, students, typists and friends who contribute to the production of any work of history is multiplied for the diplomatic historian by the number of different countries which attract his professional attention. Although sometimes inhibited from immersion in the historical culture of a particular country, to the extent possible for the domestic historian of a given society, by the need to ascertain simultaneous developments on 'the other side of the hill', the international specialist does have his compensations. The variety of his intellectual diet and cultural experience, as he studies – often at source and *in situ* – states with varying principles and policies at play in the 'great game', expands his mind but can also enrich his whole experience. Individuals and cultures become accessible, almost in an accidental way, as the international historian conducts his researches in a succession of cities and countries.

Therefore, the intellectual indebtedness of any diplomatic historian, and of this one in particular, to many people and places is often pronounced. Such debts can hardly be repaid – the creditors are too numerous, too dispersed and always too generous to want any sort of reimbursement – but they may be acknowledged. Formal recognition of the interest invested and the energy expended by colleagues and contacts in a research project which eventually becomes one's own published work is but token recompense for many kindnesses and services rendered. However, it remains a pleasure and privilege to express my gratitude to the following individuals and institutions.

To Professor T. Desmond Williams, of University College, Dublin,

Cambridge University Press

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Denis Smyth

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

Preface

I am grateful for stimulating my interest in international history in his inimitably inspiring fashion. My thanks are also due to Professor F. H. Hinsley of the University of Cambridge for his patient and highly professional supervision of the doctoral thesis which constituted the original nucleus of this work. To Professor J. J. Lee of University College, Cork, I express my gratitude for both gainful employment and an academic working environment conducive to the pursuit and completion of this body of research and writing.

I am glad to avail of the opportunity, too, to express my heartfelt gratitude to Paul and Gabrielle Preston for providing me with hospitality and friendship on my visits to London. Indeed, Paul Preston has helped in a variety of invaluable ways, facilitating indispensable research contacts, proffering prudent scholarly advice and luring me into expanding my collection of books on Spanish history to a size so swollen as to resemble, but not seriously rival his own unique private library in this area.

Professor Angel Viñas has interrupted his busy schedule, during my sojourns in Madrid, to extend me many academic services and social courtesies for which I was, and am, very grateful.

I wish to thank the Masters and Fellows of Peterhouse for their support during my years in Cambridge and Mr Maurice Cowling, in particular, for his assistance and advice during my days as a post-graduate student in that college.

I am also grateful to the Faculty of Arts at University College, Cork for some financial support which enabled me conduct part of the research for this book.

William Davies of Cambridge University Press deserves special mention for not baulking at the prospect of contracting an Irishman to write on an aspect of Spanish history. He bore the protracted gestation of this book with considerable patience. I am also extremely grateful to my heroic and utterly exploited typists, Norma Buckley and Charlotte Wiseman.

The courteous and efficient services of the staffs of the following archival centres and libraries are gratefully acknowledged: The Public Record Office, London and Kew; The University Library, Cambridge; The Archival Section, Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Palacio de Santa Cruz, Madrid; The British Library; The British Library of Economics and Political Science; The Archives' Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge; York Public Library; The Boole Library, University College, Cork; The Library, Trinity College, Dublin; The House of Lords Record Office; The Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

xi

The archivist of the Alba collection in the Palacio de Liria, Madrid, was extremely helpful in facilitating my access to the Papers of the 17th Duke of Alba, the first time that these latter documents had been opened to an historical researcher. Sr Manuel Arroyo and Paul Preston, again, combined to provide me with this unique archival opportunity. I am very grateful to the Duke of Alba for his permission to consult and cite the papers of the 17th Duke.

Permission to quote from the Templewood collection was granted by P. E. Paget, Esq.

Permission to quote from the Dalton Papers was granted by the British Library of Economics and Political Science.

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Finally, I want to record my most profound debt of gratitude, unrepayable in kind because of the quantity and quality of assistance afforded me in my labours on this book, to a former member of the staff of the University Library, Cambridge. This book is dedicated to her and it is a gesture which only inadequately expresses my gratitude to Margaret for her support and solidarity.

Naturally, in spite of my indebtedness to the individuals and institutions mentioned above, any faults and flaws to be found in this book are all my own work.

Cork, September 1984.

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