

**Appeasement Debased: An Assessment of Great Britain's Adoption of Formalised  
"Non-Intervention" at the Outset of the Spanish Civil War**

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Throughout the conflict in Spain the inclination that prevailed within Britain's Cabinet was to try to isolate and extinguish both the fighting and the Popular Front government.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the National Government's affinity for the "Non-Intervention" system derived initially from fears of the domestic political consequences of failing to either fulfil the election manifesto pledge 'to uphold the Covenant' of the League of Nations as 'the keystone of British foreign policy',<sup>2</sup> or to accommodate the body of "realist-conservative" thinkers who, since the militarisation of the Rhineland in March, were increasingly interested in a policy of containment toward Nazi Germany. The National Government's sustained support for "Non-Intervention" also derived from an evaluation that it would help to restrain increasingly staunch anti-fascist inclinations among the general public, in France as well as Britain, which otherwise threatened to lead each into a firm defensive alliance with the Soviet Union. Britain's Cabinet feared that dividing the continent into *de facto* rival military alliances, equivalent to those that preceded the

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<sup>1</sup> Philip A. Williamson, 'Christian Conservatives and the Totalitarian Challenge, 1933-40', *The English Historical Review* 115, no. 462 (2000), 613; Philip Bell, *France and Britain: 1900-1940: Entente and Estrangement* (New York: Longman, 1996), 207.

<sup>2</sup> Fred Craig, *British General Election Manifestos, 1918-1966* (Chichester, Great Britain: Political Reference Publications, 1970), 76.

Great War, would precipitate the outbreak of the general war that was so widely feared and predicted. Most members of the Cabinet considered it no consolation that an Anglo-French-Soviet combination would likely win such a war, since they were convinced that even in victory Britain's exertions would fatally weaken the Empire, and thereby likely facilitate the triumphal advance of Bolshevism.<sup>3</sup>

Viewed in the full context of Britain's foreign policy during the 1930s "Non-Intervention" is best understood as a pivotal element in allowing the National Government to fundamentally realign its public approach, from ostensibly leading the international community to organise against aggression, during the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, to appreciably submitting to threats or acts of aggression, in the *Anschluss*, and the German seizures of Czech territory in October 1938, and March 1939. The importance of "Non-Intervention" in facilitating the transition in the National Government's public foreign policy posture rests principally upon the political realities in Great Britain concerning the League of Nations and collective security in the summer of 1936.

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<sup>3</sup> Phipps Private Papers, 3/3, Secretary to the Cabinet and to the Committee of Imperial Defence (Hankey) to Phipps, 9 October 1936, quoted in Gaines Post Jr., *Dilemmas of Appeasement: British Deterrence and Defense, 1934-1937* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 255; Thompson, 29; Adams, 43, 67-8; Gilbert, *Roots of Appeasement*, 179; Moradiellos, 'Appeasement and Non-Intervention', 96; idem, 'British Political Strategy in the Face of the Military Rising of 1936 in Spain.' *Contemporary European History* 1, no. 2 (1992), 127.

From the initial declaration of an “Agreement”, on 15 August 1936, until the conclusion of the “Spanish Civil War” in April 1939, the British government consistently exerted diplomatic pressure upon states throughout Europe to remain publicly committed to an institutionalised system of “Non-Intervention”, even once flagrant and ongoing violations by member states had utterly destroyed its credibility.<sup>4</sup> While the proposal for an international non-intervention pact initially met with widespread approval in the late summer of 1936,<sup>5</sup> over the course of the conflict Britain’s policy became the focus of growing controversy both within and outside the government as clear evidence of substantial intervention by Italy and Germany against the Spanish government accumulated against the backdrop of repeated aggression by Nazi Germany in central Europe.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, echoes of the fierce divisions from that time are readily apparent in the polemics that continue to characterise the historiography of Britain’s policy toward the clash

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout this essay quotation marks are used when referring to elements of the “Non-Intervention” system to caution the reader over the nature of these terms, since it is the central thesis of this paper that these phrases were rhetorical and in fact very likely deliberately chosen to misrepresent the nature of the undertakings that they denoted. While the term “Non-Intervention Agreement” has thus far made a comfortable home in the historiography of these events, no “Agreement” ever in fact existed to link or define the conduct of European states with regard to the conflict in Spain. Carefully studied, the evidence best fits an explanation that the fiction of an agreement was orchestrated and maintained not to prevent or discourage foreign intervention, but rather to conceal and facilitate it. In some specific cases, however, the terms linked to the “Non-Intervention” system are not of their nature potentially misleading. Thus, since the Committee designation within the phrase “Non-Intervention” Committee was genuine, it is excluded from the cautionary application of quotation marks. Seemingly inspired by a similar appraisal of “Non-Intervention’s” actual purpose, legal scholar George Finch also uses quotation marks to denote the “Agreement.” See George A. Finch, ‘The United States and the Spanish Civil War’, *American Journal of International Law* 31, (1937), 78. Even more compelling, however, is the use of such cautionary quotation marks in the text of Foreign Office documents regarding the construction of the system. See PRO FO 371/20575, W 10779/9549/41, minute by Charles A. Shuckburgh, 10 September 1936.

Equally, the signifier “Spanish Civil War” threatens to impede a rigorous analysis of Britain’s response to the clash of arms that took place primarily in Spain between 1936 and 1939 by implicitly downplaying the role of the many non-Spanish elements in the violence, and by implying the existence of a state of war. Under international law, however, the state of war is generally construed as being brought into being by a declaration, which in the Spanish conflict, no party nor state ever issued.

<sup>5</sup> Gerald Howson, *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War* (London: John Murray, 1998), 114; Hugh S. Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (4th ed. Toronto: Random House, 2001), 384.

<sup>6</sup> Jill Edwards, *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (New York: The Macmillan Press, 1979), 175; John Coverdale, *Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), 96.

of arms in Spain, even after the elapse of six decades.<sup>7</sup> Now as then, critics focus their attention on the fact that at a time when the fascist powers were commonly identified as menacing international peace, and specifically as the salient immediate threats to Britain's interests in Europe and the Mediterranean,<sup>8</sup> "Non-Intervention" demonstrably operated to the benefit of Italian and German military campaigns against the internationally recognised and democratically elected Spanish government.<sup>9</sup>

The dominant explanation of the motives for Britain's enduring advocacy of formalised "Non-Intervention", most prominently articulated by historians Hugh Thomas, Mary Habeck and David Carlton, is that the "Non-Intervention" system was of French conception, and that Britain adopted it in the hope that it might prevent foreign intervention in Spain. Although disappointed by the unscrupulous approach of Italy and Germany, who brazenly flaunted the "Agreement", Britain steadfastly advocated retaining the system due to the strength of the Cabinet's collective

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<sup>7</sup> Enrique G. Moradiellos, 'Appeasement and Non-Intervention: British Policy During the Spanish Civil War', in *Britain and the Threat to Stability in Europe, 1918-1945*, edited by Peter Catterall and C.J. Morris (New York: Leicester University Press, 1993), 94; David Carlton, *Anthony Eden: A Biography* (London: Allen Lane, 1981), 88; Kenneth W. Watkins, *Britain Divided: The Effect of the Spanish Civil War on British Political Opinion* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1963; reprint 1976), vii, 1-4.

<sup>8</sup> CAB 24/263, C.P. 211, memorandum by the C.I.D. C.O.S. Sub-Committee concerning 'Eastern Mediterranean', 29 July 1936, p. 8; CAB 24/259, C.P. 26, 'C.I.D. Defence Requirements Sub-Committee Programmes of the Defence Services, Third Report', 21 November 1935; vol. 20411, R 3335/226/22, minute by Lambert, 27 April 1936, cited in Lawrence Pratt, *East of Malta, West of Suez: Britain's Mediterranean Crisis 1936-39* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 40; vol. 20411, R 5839/226/22, Foreign Office memorandum, August 1936, cited in Pratt, 40; PRO CAB 63/51, memorandum by Secretary to the Cabinet and to the Committee of Imperial Defence Hankey, 8 June 1936, cited in Pratt, 38.

<sup>9</sup> Enrique G. Moradiellos, 'The Origins of British Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War: Anglo-Spanish Relations in Early 1936', *European History Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (1991), 339-340; Ricardo Miralles, 'The International Policy of the Second Republic During the Spanish Civil War', *Mediterranean Historical Review* 13, no. 1-2 (1998), 135-6; Glyn A. Stone, 'Britain, Non-Intervention and the Spanish Civil War', *European Studies Review* 9, no. 1 (1979), 129. Historians that speculate as to the victor if the two sides had enjoyed equal treatment from abroad exhibit unity in considering the Republic the more likely victor. See Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, 917; Robert Whealey, *Hitler and Spain: The Nazi Role in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 136; Ronald Radosh, Mary Habeck and Grigory Sevostianov, *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), xvii; Christian Leitz, 'Nazi Germany and Francoist Spain, 1936-1945', in *Spain and the Great Powers in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Sebastian Balfour and Paul Preston (New York: Routledge, 1999), 145, n. 3.

desire to prevent the outbreak of a catastrophic general war in which Britain could be matched against Germany, Italy and Japan simultaneously.<sup>10</sup> While scholars of this school admit “Non-Intervention” constituted “appeasement” in the classic sense, since it was intended to nurture peace, they consider it fundamentally distinct from the attempts during the late 1930s to mollify the aggressor powers through capitulation to threats and use of force that ultimately endowed the term “appeasement” with profoundly disreputable implications.<sup>11</sup> In this they receive support from most scholars of Britain’s appeasement policy of the late 1930s, who either overtly uphold this ‘traditionalist’ interpretation,<sup>12</sup> or do so implicitly by largely omitting the conflict in Spain from their writing.<sup>13</sup>

The principal revisionist challenges to this orthodoxy, developed most notably by historians Douglas Little, Enrique Moradiellos and Jill Edwards, posit that the Conservative-dominated National Government’s support for “Non-Intervention” was a calculated attempt to mollify Italy and Germany by orchestrating a passive international reaction to their military campaigns against the universally recognised Spanish government. The British government, they argue, inspired principally by the same restless fears of Bolshevik expansion in Europe that

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas, 917; Mary Habeck, ‘The Spanish Civil War and the Origins of the Second World War’, in *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered: A.J.P. Taylor and the Historians*, edited by Gordon Martel (2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 1999), 213-4; Carlton, *Anthony Eden*, 86-7.

<sup>11</sup> William N. Medlicott, review of *The Roots of Appeasement*, by Martin Gilbert, *English Historical Review* 83 (1968): 430; Frank McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain, Appeasement and the British Road to War* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 2; Ralph Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 1.

<sup>12</sup> Parker, 81-3, 91; Adams, 51; Richard Lamb, *The Drift to War, 1922-1939* (London: W.H. Allen, 1989), 232.

<sup>13</sup> For examples of extremely concise treatments of the Spanish Civil War in studies concerning, or closely related to, Britain’s policy of appeasement in Europe during the late 1930s, see: McDonough, 28-9, 105; Martin Gilbert, *The Roots of Appeasement* (Toronto: New American Library, 1966), 162, 179; Robert J. Caputi, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 2000), 47, 57-8.

led many British conservatives to look benignly on fascist rule in Italy and Germany,<sup>14</sup> never intended to enforce the conditions of the “Non-Intervention Agreement”, but instead merely intended it as a façade behind which amiable relations with the fascist powers might be purchased at the expense of a socialist government.

Prior to the conflict in Spain Britain’s efforts to ease European tensions centred on relieving perceived injustices in the clauses of the Treaty of Versailles, and attempting to help revive Germany’s flagging economy.<sup>15</sup> While the government’s move in June 1936 to repeal sanctions against Italy stemming from the Italo-Ethiopian War suggested some deference to aggression, Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden nevertheless publicly and repeatedly gave his ‘definite assurance’<sup>16</sup> of the government’s ‘determination . . . to rebuild the authority of the League’.<sup>17</sup> To be clear then, when open conflict began in Spain in 1936, the National Government had yet to dissociate its public posture on foreign policy from the still powerful “liberal-rationalist” element in British politics that continued to advocate collective security through the League. The problematic lack of policy options for the government was confounded by the audible shift in concern of a prominent set of “realist-conservative” politicians, which had earlier provided the sternest opposition to what they considered the dangerously unrealistic faith

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<sup>14</sup> Moradiellos, ‘The Allies and the Spanish Civil War’, 99-102, 119; Little, ‘Antibolshevism and Appeasement: Great Britain, the United States, and the Spanish Civil War’, in *Appeasement in Europe: A Reassessment of U.S. Policies* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 21-7, 31-4, 44-5; Edwards, 1-3, 214-5. For other scholars who argue for the centrality of anti-bolshevism in the construction of Britain’s policy toward the Spanish conflict, see either: Pratt, 65, or Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 17, 40-1, 43-4.

<sup>15</sup> Gilbert, *Roots of Appeasement*, 151.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Foreign Policy: The World and Peace’, *The Times*, 19 June 1936.

<sup>17</sup> *HC Deb*, 5<sup>th</sup> series, vol. 313, Anthony Eden in parliamentary debate, 18 June 1936, p. 1205-7; *[British] Documents on Foreign Affairs*, series J, vol. VIII, J 5941/84/1, ‘Speech by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs [Eden] at the Assembly of the League of Nations’, 1 July 1936, p. 63; ‘Confidence in the League: Mr. Eden on Recent Events’, *The Times*, 8 June 1936.

in the League, to a new focus upon the menacing implications of Nazi militarism.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, in the later half of July 1936, senior Conservatives made clear to Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, more forcefully than ever before, the urgency of the threat that they felt acts of unjustifiable aggression by Germany might pose to Britain's vital interests, and their consequent willingness to consider firmly aligning with other powers.<sup>19</sup>

As yet, historians have not systematically addressed the influence upon Britain's policy toward the Spanish conflict of immediate fears within the Baldwin government regarding the domestic political consequences arising from Germany's direct military intervention in Spain. To date, historians effectively dismiss any consideration of the League of Nations as a motive in Britain's response to the outbreak of the Spanish conflict and in the decision to adopt "Non-Intervention".<sup>20</sup> Indeed, many studies of international affairs in the 1930s dismiss the possibility of League action over the "Spanish Civil War" out of hand and consequently nowhere link the two concepts.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps this is the consequence of retrospective knowledge that, after the repeal of sanctions against Italy, the promises to reform and strengthen the League died on the lips of those who made them, and instead it never again stirred to organise a collective response to either punish or thwart aggression. It is probably a mistake, however, to presume that this was

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<sup>18</sup> *HCD*, 5<sup>th</sup> series, vol. 310, Winston Churchill in parliamentary debate regarding the 'European Situation', 26 March 1936, p. 1523-1530.

<sup>19</sup> Philip A. Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative Leadership and National Values* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 55; Gilbert, *Roots of Appeasement*, 139-140.

<sup>20</sup> Brian McKercher, 'The League of Nations and the Problem of Collective Security, 1919-1939', in *The League of Nations, 1920-1946: Organization and Accomplishments* (New York: United Nations, 1996), 73; Edwards, 2; Thompson, 99-101, 117-8.

<sup>21</sup> For examples see: Moradiellos, 'Appeasement and Non-Intervention'; Glyn A. Stone, 'The European Great Powers and Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939', in *Paths to War: New Essays on the Origins of the Second World War*, edited by Robert W. Boyce and Esmonde M. Robertson (London: Macmillan Education, 1989); Lamb, *Drift to War*.

inevitable,<sup>22</sup> and almost assuredly one to presume that most Britons accepted it as such at the time.<sup>23</sup>

In focusing on the conviction that the “Non-Intervention Agreement” was of French inspiration, most scholars fail to assess Britain’s influence and scope for choice in the framing of the “Non-Intervention” system. Historian Glyn Stone articulates the traditional view when he suggests that after France contacted Britain on 2 August, Britain faced a straightforward choice of ‘non-intervention alone or non-intervention in concert with the other powers.’<sup>24</sup> Yet the structurally impotent “Non-Intervention” system was not something Britain ambled into as simply the less disagreeable of two choices. Rather, the form of both the “Non-Intervention Agreement” and Committee were the result of deliberate choices by the British government, which, as a consequence of its particular leverage, above all in its relationship with France, was able to successfully orchestrate the international reaction to the onset of inter-state conflict in Spain.

In August 1936 then, Britain pursued a comprehensive diplomatic offensive aimed at leveraging France into facilitating the creation of an incipiently frail “Agreement”. Thereafter, British officials felt confident to take the lead publicly in fashioning the “Non-Intervention”

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<sup>22</sup> Frank P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1952; reprint 1967), 700-2; Charles Manning, ‘The “Failure” of the League of Nations’, in *The New International Actors: The United Nations and the European Economic Community*, edited by Carol A. Cosgrove and Kenneth J. Twitchett (London: Macmillan, 1970), 107. For an alternative opinion see: George W. Egerton, ‘Collective Security as Political Myth: Liberal Internationalism and the League of Nations in Politics and History’, *International History Review* 5, (1983), 514.

<sup>23</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 7 May 1936, cited in Daniel P. Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War, 1935-1936* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1976), 78; Waley, 78-9; James Barros, *Betrayal From Within: Joseph Avenol, Secretary-General of the League of Nations, 1933-1940* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969), 123.

<sup>24</sup> Stone, ‘Britain, Non-Intervention and the Spanish Civil War’, 134. For a similar perspective see: Reynolds M. Salerno, *Vital Crossroads: Mediterranean Origins of the Second World War, 1935-1940* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002), 16.

Committee, which was crucial in allowing the system to endure what they imagined might otherwise have become an irresistible tide of public criticism.

During the opening months of 1935, the consensus both within and between the National Government and the Foreign Office was that the security of Western Europe rested on Italian willingness to provide the added weight necessary to safely balance Germany's burgeoning power. This became increasingly tenuous as a basis for policy, however, as it became clear that Italy would attack Abyssinia and, perhaps more troubling for the government, that the results of the nation-wide "Peace Ballot", due to be released officially on 27 June, were going to show an overwhelming preference among British voters for collective economic and military action in order to enforce the Covenant of the League of Nations.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, it was the implications regarding public opinion reflected in the popularity of the "Peace Ballot" that led Baldwin to appoint Anthony Eden,<sup>26</sup> whose political reputation was rooted in support for the League of Nations,<sup>27</sup> to the Cabinet on 7 June in the newly created post of Minister for League of Nations Affairs. Since the Cabinet was already seriously concerned about its prospects for re-election in the general election that had to occur by October 1936, ministers understood the "Peace Ballot" as evidence that to win re-election it would be necessary to campaign on the basis of a definite commitment to pursue collective security through the League.<sup>28</sup> In October 1935 Baldwin chose

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<sup>25</sup> Middlemas, *Baldwin*, 836. Respondents firmly embraced economic sanctions against aggressor states, and the use of 'military measures' where it proved necessary, with 94 percent embracing the first proposition, and just over 74 percent the second. See, 'Peace Ballot', *The Times*, 28 June 1935.

<sup>26</sup> McDonough, 25.

<sup>27</sup> Middlemas, *Baldwin*, 896-7; Walters, 673.

<sup>28</sup> Thompson, 71-2; Nick Crowson, *Facing Fascism: The Conservative Party and the European Dictators, 1935-1940* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 55; Bell, 193; Parker, 45-9; McDonough, 25-6; Adams, 27; Waley, 138; Shepherd, 46.

to call the election for mid-November,<sup>29</sup> likely out of concern that the Italian war would prove an even more problematic issue if the campaign occurred at a later date.

Possessing unique leverage among the middle and lesser powers of Europe,<sup>30</sup> prompted by their domestic electoral commitments, British officials publicly led the League campaign for economic measures against Italy following the Italian invasion of Abyssinia. As a result of the governments evaluations of the balance of power in Europe, however, Baldwin's government successfully sought to ensure that the sanctions imposed were too weak to seriously punish Italy.<sup>31</sup> Despite the National Government's efforts, however, Anglo-Italian relations deteriorated to such an extent that, for the first time since 1914, policy makers began to consider the possibility that Britain might engage in hostilities with Italy. As such, the onset of overt Anglo-Italian enmity not only implied the dissolution of the deterrent Anglo-French-Italian coalition against aggression by Germany, but it furthermore threatened to overwhelm the already stressed foundations of Britain's imperial defence strategy, which was predicated upon the Royal Navy retaining the flexibility of movement afforded by secure shipping lanes through the Mediterranean.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Parker, 51-2; Walters, 666.

<sup>30</sup> Britain owed its position of particular leverage over lesser powers during the early and mid-1930s principally to its relative political and financial stability, and its powerful navy. See Parker, 25.

<sup>31</sup> Gibbs, 221-2.

<sup>32</sup> So long as Britain possessed such control of Mediterranean sea lanes, it was felt that the Royal Navy possessed the strategic flexibility to pose a credible deterrent at once in both Europe and Asia. CAB 53/6, C.O.S. 174, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff Sir Ernle Chatfield in discussion of imperial security in the Far East, 13 May 1936, p. 10-11; Gibbs, 86-7; Paul Kennedy, 'British "Net Assessment" and the Coming of the Second World War', in *Calculations: Net Assessments and the Coming of World War II*, edited by Williamson Murray and Alan Millett (Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan, 1992), 40, 46-7.

With the potential burden of defending Britain's holdings in a global conflagration already regarded within the government as something of an unsolvable riddle<sup>33</sup> the Committee of Imperial Defence declared in November 1935 'Our defence requirements are [already] so serious that it would be materially impossible [within the next three years] . . . to make additional provision for the case of a hostile Italy.'<sup>34</sup> Consequently, in December 1935, both the Foreign Office and the Cabinet supported a move by the Foreign Secretary, Samuel Hoare, to mend relations with Italy by negotiating an end to the war on terms favourable to the aggressor.<sup>35</sup> Revelation of the negotiations and terms thereof, however, led to such a severe reaction in the British body politic that the government, despite its otherwise sizeable parliamentary majority, faced the possibility of being unseated by defeat in the House.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, in what it seems was clearly an effort to rescue the government's credibility regarding support for the League, before the public and the house,<sup>37</sup> Baldwin promoted the government's most renowned advocate of a League based foreign policy, Anthony Eden, to the position of Foreign Secretary. In doing so, however, Baldwin privately made clear to his new appointee that his ascendency to the

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<sup>33</sup> CAB 24/247, C.P. 64, 'C.I.D. Defence Requirements Sub-Committee Report', 5 March 1934, 5, 8-9; CAB 24/259, C.P. 26, 'C.I.D. Sub-Committee on Defence Policy and Requirements Report', 12 February 1936, p. 2; Kennedy, 46-7; Morewood, 'The Chiefs of Staff, the "Men on the Spot" and the Italo-Abyssinian Emergency', 101.

<sup>34</sup> CAB 24/259, C.P. 26, 'C.I.D. Defence Requirements Sub-Committee Programmes of the Defence Services, Third Report', 21 November 1935, p. 9-10.

<sup>35</sup> Brian McKercher, *Transition of Power: Britain's Loss of Global Pre-eminence to the United States, 1930-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 112; Bell, 193; Lamb, *Drift to War*, 139. For a thorough discussion of the Hoare-Laval Plan see either: James C. Robertson, 'The Hoare-Laval Plan,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 10, no. 3 (1975): 433-459, or, Robert A. Parker, 'Great Britain, France, and the Ethiopian Crisis, 1935-1936,' *English Historical Review* 89, no. 351 (1974): 293-332.

<sup>36</sup> Thompson, 89; Lamb, *Drift to War*, 163; Walters, 673.

<sup>37</sup> Amery, 191.

position was purely the consequence of expediency, and implied no enthusiasm on the Prime Minister's part to see the new Foreign Secretary pursue any affinity for the League.<sup>38</sup>

The British public's considerable sympathy for the League sprung from the desire to establish a new international order in the immediate aftermath of the Great War. By 1920, with the sharper passions stirred by the war subsiding, the British public increasingly abandoned the popular wartime explanation that the outbreak of conflict was simply the consequence of a peculiar German barbarism.<sup>39</sup> Instead, a consensus began to emerge that the pre-war system of adversarial military alliances, exacerbated by, and perhaps leading to the onset of an "arms race", had helped to establish conditions pregnant with the risk of war. Interestingly though, in contrast to the course of the debate in the United States, in Britain the deeply felt desire to prevent another war on such a scale led to extremely widespread support for the newly minted League of Nations.<sup>40</sup> Enthusiasts for the League hoped that it would become an irresistible deterrent against war by organising the mass of states with a common interest in mutually preserving peace into a vast and unconquerable alliance. Throughout the many international crises that in combination spanned most of the 1930s, at least up until the signature of the Munich Agreement, and in some quarters even thereafter, questions regarding the viability of the League, and its suitability to the pursuit of Britain's interests, provided the intellectual foundations for both

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<sup>38</sup> Middlemas, *Baldwin*, 896.

<sup>39</sup> Egerton, 502; Gilbert, *Roots of Appeasement*, 9, 29.

<sup>40</sup> E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (2nd ed. 1946. Reprint with a new introduction and additional material. New York: Palgrave, 2001), 15; PRO PREM 1/193, Austen Chamberlain in 'Record of a Discussion Which [sic] Took Place Between the Prime Minister and a Deputation from Both Houses of Parliament', 29 July 1936, p. 31.

casting and critiquing Britain's foreign policy.<sup>41</sup>

As the war in Abyssinia petered out in the spring of 1936, opinion within the Cabinet was divided as to the possibilities of repealing sanctions without facing a repeat of the crisis of December 1935. In late May and into mid-June, fears of a repeat domestic political crisis dominated cabinet discussions regarding the possible repeal of sanctions against Italy. On 29 May, the Minister for Co-ordination of Defence, Thomas Inskip expressed the opinion that eventually prevailed, and which would set the tone for Britain's policy throughout the conflict about to erupt in Spain:

The important thing was to liquidate our commitments . . . So long as sanctions were maintained we had to keep our guard in the Mediterranean, and we had not the resources to continue that indefinitely. It was essential from the point of view of the Services, to get out of it as soon as possible. . . . The question of the method of giving up sanctions he would leave to others. There were many methods. We might try to get France to take some responsibility. The effect on public opinion must not be over-rated. The essential matter for the nation was to get this commitment liquidated, to return to . . . Locarno.<sup>42</sup>

Although Inskip's pronouncement foreshadowed precisely Britain's approach toward the conflict in Spain, his opinion was a singular exception in the official record for the Cabinet meeting of 29 May. Apart from Inskip, members of the Cabinet were practically unanimous in their fears that the revocation of sanctions would be a grave political risk since they expected that such a move

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<sup>41</sup> For documentary evidence of the continuing centrality of the League in public debate regarding foreign policy during the late 1930s see: *HC Deb, 5<sup>th</sup> series*, vol. 330, Clement Attlee in parliamentary debate concerning 'Foreign Affairs', 21 December 1937, p. 1800; *HC Deb, 5<sup>th</sup> series*, vol. 332, W. Gallacher in parliamentary debate concerning 'Foreign Affairs', 22 February 1938, p. 227. Frank Walters implies the continuing centrality of the League in public debate regarding foreign policy during the late 1930s. See Walters, 712, 715-6.

<sup>42</sup> CAB 23/84, C.P. 40, Inskip in Cabinet discussion of 'The Italo-Abyssinian Dispute: Question of Sanctions', 29 May 1936, p. 12.

would cause, in the words of Lord Halifax, a ‘severe shock to public opinion’.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, Inskip’s position only prevailed after Neville Chamberlain forced the issue, seemingly taking a considerable political gamble by publicly flaunting the principle of cabinet unity on 10 June in a public speech advocating the repeal of sanctions,<sup>44</sup> which itself created genuine controversy.<sup>45</sup>

Although the considerably more placid reaction in the House of Commons to the government’s motion to repeal sanctions on 18 June, as compared to the Hoare-Laval crisis, quickly reassured the Cabinet, the same could not be said of the response by the general public. Indeed, as most of the Cabinet had feared, the decision to revoke sanctions was notably unpopular,<sup>46</sup> inspiring seemingly an equal number of critical letters as did revelation of the Hoare-Laval Plan.<sup>47</sup> Unsurprisingly then, during the brief interim between the repeal of sanctions against Italy and the outbreak of open conflict in Spain, Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden publicly declared ‘the determination of his Government and of his country to seek to rebuild the authority of the League.’<sup>48</sup> Whether or not the Cabinet was right to conclude on

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<sup>43</sup> PRO CAB 23/84, C.P. 40, Lord Halifax in Cabinet discussion of ‘The Italo-Abyssinian Dispute: Question of Sanctions’, 29 May 1936, p. 8. Other cabinet ministers particularly vocal in expressing similar concerns include: Eden, Viscount Hailsham, and Oliver Stanley. Although a substantial element of the meeting concerned domestic opinion, no one suggested that the public reaction would be anything other than intensely negative. PRO CAB 23/84, C.P. 39, Eden in Cabinet discussion of ‘the Italo-Abyssinian Dispute: Question of Sanctions’, 27 May 1936, p. 12; PRO CAB 23/84, C.P. 40, Cabinet discussion of ‘The Italo-Abyssinian Dispute: Question of Sanctions’, 29 May 1936, p. 8, 11, and 16.

<sup>44</sup> In the next Cabinet meeting after Chamberlain’s speech, Baldwin admonished his Ministers that for the time being they must refrain from any public statements on foreign affairs without first seeking his approval. PRO CAB 23/84, 42, Baldwin in Cabinet discussion of ‘Foreign Affairs: Political Speeches On’, 17 June, 1936, p. 26.

<sup>45</sup> The correspondent for *The Times* described the speech as having ‘done a good deal of mischief both at home and abroad’. See ‘Mr. Chamberlain’s Speech: Unexpected Stir’, *The Times*, 13 June 1936.

<sup>46</sup> Waley, 139.

<sup>47</sup> Waley, 81.

<sup>48</sup> *BdFA, series J*, vol. VIII, J 5941/84/1, ‘Speech by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs [Eden] at the Assembly of the League of Nations’, 1 July 1936, p. 63. For a similar declaration see ‘Foreign Policy: The World and Peace’, *The Times*, 19 June 1936.

balance that, after the Italo-Ethiopian War, the League could never realistically aspire to assert collective security against a Great Power,<sup>49</sup> in the summer of 1936 it was without confidence that either the British public, or the French government, shared this appraisal. Consequently, the position of Foreign Secretary was filled by a man appointed precisely because the general public believed that his reluctance to appease Mussolini, and to disregard the League, contrasted utterly with the foreign policy his Cabinet colleagues had preferred when they initially embraced the Hoare-Laval Plan.

On 18 July 1936 fears of a general war in Europe increased as fighting erupted throughout Spain as an attempted *coup* by reactionary elements ran headlong into staunch resistance by supporters of the left-liberal Popular Front government.<sup>50</sup> While the majority of the Army and the police declared for the rebellion, the greater part of the Navy and the Air Force remained loyal to the government. To assist the loyal military elements, the Spanish government issued a nation-wide decree that trade unions and anarchist groups be given weapons from government arsenals.<sup>51</sup> As the rebellion hardened into civil war the rebels possessed the only army units that were still functioning under military discipline, approximately 90 percent of non-commissioned and junior officers, and a majority of the army's equipment. The government and

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<sup>49</sup> PRO PREM 1/193, Baldwin in 'Record of a Discussion Which [sic] Took Place Between the Prime Minister and a Deputation from Both Houses of Parliament', 29 July 1936, p. 33; Thompson, 99-100.

<sup>50</sup> Isolated fighting began in Morocco on the night of 17 July. Consequently, most historians date the outbreak of the *coup* as 17-18 July. Walter Rosenberger and Herbert C. Tobin eds., *Keesing's Contemporary Archives: Weekly Diary of Important World Events With Index Continually Kept Up-To-Date*, vol. 2, 1934-1937 (London: Keesing's Limited), 2199; E.H. Carr, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Pantheon Press, 1984), 10; Glyn A. Stone, 'Sir Robert Vansittart and Spain, 1931-1941', in *Personalities, War and Diplomacy: Essays in International History*, edited by Thomas Otte and Constantine Pagedas (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1997), 133.

<sup>51</sup> Carr, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War*, 1; Little, *Malevolent Neutrality*, 17.

its supporters retained the loyal service of the bulk of the senior officer corps,<sup>52</sup> a majority of the personnel and equipment from both the navy and the air force, approximately two-thirds of Spanish territory, and a clear majority in manpower.<sup>53</sup>

The first reports of open conflict in Spain to arrive in the Foreign Office confirmed predictions from Britain's diplomatic staff that ranged back over months, that spiralling political violence would lead to open civil conflict. Such predictions had preceded Spain's national elections of February 1936, which resulted in a substantial parliamentary majority for the Popular Front,<sup>54</sup> yet they accelerated in its aftermath.<sup>55</sup>

While Spain's Popular Front government included no Communists in the Cabinet,<sup>56</sup> officials within Britain's Foreign Office nevertheless tended to regard the military revolt as the

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<sup>52</sup> Approximately 70 percent of the generals remained loyal, as did a majority of colonels. See Howson, 9-10; Paul Preston, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War* (London: Fontana Press, 1996), 167.

<sup>53</sup> Watkins, 65; J.A. Gibernau, *Triumphs and Failures of American Foreign Policy From Roosevelt to Reagan, 1936-1986: With Spain as a Case History* (Phoenix: Phoenix Books, 1986), 38; William L. Kleine-Ahlbrandt, *The Policy of Simmering: A Study of British Policy During the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), 145. For a close study of the course of the fighting in Spain between 1936 and 1939 see either: Hugh S. Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, (4th ed. Toronto: Random House, 2001), or Raymond Carr, *The Spanish Tragedy: The Civil War in Perspective*, ('new edition', London: Phoenix Press, 2000).

<sup>54</sup> *DBFP*, 2nd series, vol. XVII, W 5693/62/41, note by Montagu-Pollock, 23 June 1936, p. 1; Edwards, 4; Howson, 5.

<sup>55</sup> *BdFA*, series F, vol. XXVI, W 11051/18/41, H.M. Ambassador in Madrid (Chilton) to Foreign Secretary (Eden), 27 December 1935, 2 January 1936, p. 221-2; PRO FO 371/20521, Chilton to Eden, 22 April 1936, quoted in Moradiellos, 'The Origins of British Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War', 351; PRO FO 371/20522, W 5256/62/41, Consul-General in Barcelona (King) to Madrid (Ogilvie-Forbes), 5 June 1936, enclosed in Ogilvie-Forbes to Eden, 9 June 1936, quoted in Little, *Malevolent Neutrality*, 212-3; PRO FO 371/19736, W 11051/18/41, minute by Vansittart, 2 January 1936, quoted in *ibid.*, 186. For an alternative opinion, that officials at the Foreign Office were indeed caught off guard, see: Anthony Peters, *Anthony Eden at the Foreign Office, 1931-1938* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 228. The Popular Front's strong majority in the assembly belied its narrow victory over the rightist National Front in the aggregate vote. Ann Van Wynen Thomas and A. J. Thomas Jr., 'International Legal Aspects of the Civil War in Spain', in *The International Law of Civil War*, edited by Richard A. Falk (Baltimore: The American Society of International Law, 1971), 113. Historian Anthony Rhodes offers an assertion, which has not become widely accepted or cited in the historiography, that the right in fact received a slightly greater proportion of the ballots cast. See Anthony Rhodes, *The Vatican in the Age of the Dictators, 1922-1945* (Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973), 122.

<sup>56</sup> The Duchess of Atholl, *Searchlight on Spain* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1938), 54-5; Carr, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War*, 3; Howson, 5.

legitimate response by patriotic conservatives to the government's inaction or complicity amid endemic political street violence,<sup>57</sup> which they presumed was of "Bolshevik" origin.<sup>58</sup> In the early days of the military uprising, reports to Whitehall from British officials and businessmen consistently upbraided the Republican government for arming groups of workers that were terrorising Spain's conservative elite.<sup>59</sup> Such testimony enhanced scepticism toward the Republican government among British officials in London, where most felt that Spain's liberal politicians, by arming the workers movements, had forfeited the right to govern by creating a revolutionary force that would establish Spain as a Soviet satellite if the military revolt were defeated.<sup>60</sup> As a result, opinion within the Foreign Office tended to coalesce around an expectant hope that the mutinous army would win a speedy victory and then impose order on the lately chaotic Spanish political landscape.<sup>61</sup>

With public opinion considered to be an insurmountable brake on intervening on behalf

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<sup>57</sup> Atholl, 62-6; John Dreifort, *Yvon Delbos at the Quai D'Orsay: French Foreign Policy During the Popular Front, 1936-1938* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1973), 31.

<sup>58</sup> PRO FO 371/20575, W 10779/9549/41, minute by Assistant Under-Secretary of State Mounsey, 12 September 1936; idem, minute by Vansittart; *B DFA, series F*, vol. XXVII, W 8371/62/41, Consul-General in Barcelona (King) to Foreign Secretary (Eden), 12 August 1936, p. 15; PRO FO 371, W 8538/62/41, Consul in Oporto (Gudgeon) to Ambassador in Lisbon (Dodd), 7 August 1936, enclosed in Dodd to Seymour, 8 August 1936, quoted in Little, *Malevolent Neutrality*, 242.

<sup>59</sup> *B DFA, series F*, vol. XXVII, W 7485/62/41, Consul-General in Barcelona (King) to Foreign Secretary (Eden), 29 July 1936, p. 6-7; *ibid.*, W 8337/62/41, memorandum by Vice-Consul (Innes), 6 August 1936, p. 16; PRO FO 371, W 8121/62/41, report from Ambassador in Madrid (Chilton), 10 August 1936, quoted in Edwards, 8. While these reports were broadly accurate in themselves, they nevertheless created a false picture since they were only later balanced by similar reports detailing the systematic massacres performed by the supporters of the *coup*.

<sup>60</sup> Ambassador to Spain (Chilton) in Zarauz to Foreign Secretary (Eden), 30 July 1936, W 7812/62/41, *DBFP, 2nd series*, vol. XVII, 44; Little, *Malevolent Neutrality*, 230.

<sup>61</sup> *B DFA, series F*, vol. XXVII, W 8371/62/41, Consul-General King (Barcelona) to Foreign Secretary (Eden), 9 August 1936, p. 15; Moradiellos, 'Appeasement and Non-Intervention', 99; Edwards, 1-5, 10. Spain's pronounced political instability dated back at least to 1931, and the establishment of the Republic, which had thereafter been characterised by weak and short-lived coalition governments. See Atholl, 43-5.

of the rebels,<sup>62</sup> and with no inclination to assist government forces, from the outset, the overwhelming preference among Britain's policy makers was to avoid direct involvement in the Spanish conflict. Consequently, Britain's influence in support of the *coup* was initially limited to rather peripheral acts such as facilitating the use of the telephone exchange at Gibraltar for rebel communications, and denying ships with crews loyal to the Spanish government the right to purchase fuel.<sup>63</sup> As a matter of public policy, however, officials admitted with apparent frustration that there was no legal basis to justify refusing arms sales to what remained the universally recognised Spanish government.<sup>64</sup>

While according to its Covenant the League of Nations was not obligated to act, so long as the fighting in Spain constituted a purely civil conflict,<sup>65</sup> Baldwin was nevertheless concerned by possible domestic and international complications that could arise from the conflagration.<sup>66</sup> Consequently on 22 July, when French Prime Minister Léon Blum attended a previously arranged conference in London concerning the possibility of reconstructing a Locarno-type

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<sup>62</sup> *Chatfield Papers*, CHT/3/1, Vansittart to Chatfield, 16 February 1937, quoted in Stone, 'Sir Robert Vansittart and Spain,' 141. Stone's citation in note 53 gives 1936 as the date for said letter, however, given the events discussed therein, it seems this is clearly an error in transcription, and the correct date is 1937.

<sup>63</sup> Edwards, 14.

<sup>64</sup> Exasperated at the apparent absence of legal justification for preventing Spain's Republican government from purchasing arms in Britain, Eden minuted to his Foreign Office colleagues; 'I hope that we shall be able to avoid supplying [arms], by some means or other.' *DBFP, 2nd series*, vol. XVII, W 7174/62/41, Foreign Secretary (Eden) to Ambassador in Madrid (Chilton), 28 July 1936, p. 34.

<sup>65</sup> Norman J. Padelford, *International Law and Diplomacy in the Spanish Civil Strife* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939), 121.

<sup>66</sup> Baldwin's concerns by themselves, however, implied the relevance of Article 11 of the Covenant, wherein the League proclaimed 'any war or threat of war, . . . a matter of concern to the whole League.' See John F. Williams, 'The Covenant of the League of Nations and War', *The Cambridge Law Journal* 5, no. 1 (1933), 7, 19.

security arrangement for Western Europe,<sup>67</sup> Baldwin privately informed him that Britain would not honour its commitment to defend France against unprovoked aggression so long as France continued to supply weapons to the Spanish Republic.<sup>68</sup>

Concern in London must have mounted on 25 July following the receipt of a report from His Majesty's Ambassador in Paris, George Clerk, that French officials were asserting that German military aircraft were aiding the insurgency in Spain.<sup>69</sup> If true, Germany was in clear violation of Article 10 of the League's Covenant,<sup>70</sup> which decreed that states must 'respect and preserve as against external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all Members of the League.'<sup>71</sup> In turn, if it could be established that the Republic was the victim of aggression from foreign powers it would trigger the automatic mechanisms of Article 16, which decreed that all members of the League must impose full economic sanctions upon the aggressors, stating:

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<sup>67</sup> Originally the meeting was supposed to include Italy and Germany. When both refused to attend British policy makers nevertheless chose to still meet with Belgian and French officials in what they generously termed a "Three Power Conference", which they hoped could help establish some preliminary common ground to expedite negotiations with Italy and Germany. *DBFP, 2nd series*, vol. XVI, C 5052/4/18, note by Halifax, 13 July 1936, p. 591-8; *ibid.*, C 5417/4/18, conclusions of Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy, 15 July 1936, p. 604-7; *ibid.*, C 4846/4/18, Consul in Geneva (Edmond) to Foreign Office, 4 July 1936, p. 555; *D[ocuments] D[iplomatiques] F[rançais], 2e série, tome II*, no. 472, Delbos to French ambassadors in London & Brussels, 17 July 1936, p. 719-20.

<sup>68</sup> Pierre Renouvin, 'La Politique extérieure, du Premier Ministère Léon Blum', in Edouard Bonnefous, *Histoire politique exteneur de la Troisième République*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965) vol. VI, 400. Alternatively, historian David Carlton argues that Baldwin issued no substantial warning at the conference. See David Carlton, 'Eden, Blum and the Origins of Non-Intervention', *Journal of Contemporary History* 6, no. 3 (1971), 45.

<sup>69</sup> PRO FO 371/20524, W 6960/62/41, ambassador in Paris (Clerk) to British government in London, 25 July 1936, cited in Edwards, 19. The French reports, although definitively phrased, in fact predated the commencement of German air operations in Spain by approximately three days. Whealey, 7.

<sup>70</sup> Barros, 148, 151-2. When the Republic finally succeeded in bringing the matter to a vote at the League of Nations, in October 1937, members voted overwhelmingly in favour of a formal pronouncement that the Covenant was being so violated. *B DFA, series J*, vol. VIII, W 19261/7/41, 'Viscount Cranborne to Mr. Eden', 6 October 1937, p. 161-2.

<sup>71</sup> Padelford, 121.

Should any Member of the League resort to war . . . it shall *ipso facto* be deemed to have committed an act of war against all other Members of the League, which hereby undertake immediately to subject it to the severance of all trade or financial relations, the prohibition of all intercourse between their nationals and the nationals of the covenant-breaking State, and the prevention of all financial, commercial or personal intercourse between the nationals of the covenant-breaking State and the nationals of any other State, whether a Member of the League or not.<sup>72</sup>

Whereas by July 1936 the Cabinet were strongly inclined to avoid ever again pursuing a League based security policy, unless compelled by public opinion, they decidedly did not say so publicly. In all probability due to fears of a meltdown in electoral support, the furthest the National Government had gone by July 1936, in preparing the British public for the abandonment of the League, was to declare an intention to strengthen it through ‘reform’.<sup>73</sup> While support for the League was certainly shaken prior to July 1936, Neville Chamberlain’s proclamation of 22 February 1938, that ‘the League . . . is unable to provide collective security for anybody’,<sup>74</sup> was considerably bolder than the public positions adopted by British ministers in this regard during the summer of 1936. By the time Chamberlain felt comfortable to make such an announcement, the conflict in Spain had helped to facilitate Anthony Eden’s exit from the post of Foreign Secretary, and had continually undermined the League’s credibility for 19 months.<sup>75</sup> Contrary to received wisdom, the fear of being pressed into a position of upholding the Covenant

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<sup>72</sup> In paragraph 2 of Article 16, the League Council reserved judgement on using force to compliment these steps in order to enforce the Covenant, stating; ‘It shall be the duty of the Council in such case to recommend to the several Governments concerned what effective military, naval or air force the Members of the League shall severally contribute to the armed forces to be used to protect the covenants of the League.’ See, The Avalon Project at Yale Law School, ‘The Covenant of the League of Nations,’ <<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/leagcov.htm>> (1 January 2003).

<sup>73</sup> Nicolson diary, 1936, fo. 94, 99, quoted in Waley, 80; Thompson, 100.

<sup>74</sup> *HC Deb*, 5<sup>th</sup> series, vol. 332, Neville Chamberlain in parliamentary debate regarding ‘Foreign Affairs’, 22 February 1938, p. 227.

<sup>75</sup> Walters, 721.

of the League of Nations was an important factor in the British government's adoption of the "Non-Intervention Agreement".

On 26 July, one day after word reached the British government of evidence of German involvement in the fighting against the Spanish Government, Baldwin instructed Eden, in terms that allowed for no compromise in view of the Foreign Secretary's reputation for pro-League proclivities, that 'on no account, French or other, must he bring us in to the fight on the side of the Russians'.<sup>76</sup> Suspecting that Germany was in all likelihood acting in what scholar of international law James Garner soon termed the absence of any 'reasons commonly recognised as justifying intervention',<sup>77</sup> Baldwin's uncharacteristic and categorical foray into the realm of foreign policy<sup>78</sup> could well have been inspired by concern that Nazi Germany's move threatened to unite previously divided advocates of alternative 'liberal-rationalist' and 'conservative-realist' approaches to Europe's growing security crisis.

Baldwin possessed strong grounds for concern that his government might be faced with another domestic crisis if it were to pursue a conciliatory policy in the face of aggression against Spain. In July 1936 Adolf Hitler's leadership inspired considerably greater concern, and altogether less affection, among Britain's Parliamentary representatives than did Mussolini's in September 1935.<sup>79</sup> Equally, the elected government of Republican Spain was bound to inspire

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<sup>76</sup> Diary entry, 27 July 1936, Jones, 231.

<sup>77</sup> James Garner, 'Questions of International Law in the Spanish Civil War', *American Journal of International Law* 31, (1937), 67.

<sup>78</sup> Baldwin was famously reticent to become involved in foreign affairs. See Viscount Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1954; reprint 1970), 291; Duff Cooper, *Old Men Forget* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1953), 205; Anthony Eden, *Foreign Affairs* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), 301-2; Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin*, 298; Middlemas, *Baldwin*, 962-3.

<sup>79</sup> Thompson, 38, 40; Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin*, 55; Pratt, 15-6, 39-40.

considerably greater public sympathy than the slave-holding regency in Abyssinia had.<sup>80</sup> Finally, the government's pronouncements on the League of Nations invariably declared a desire to see it become regionally based,<sup>81</sup> which, for Britain, implied commitment to the League based on its original *raison d'être* of safeguarding peace and stability specifically in Europe.<sup>82</sup>

Since the immediate threat of a revolt by backbench members was the sharpest point of the crisis that followed disclosure of the Hoare-Laval Plan,<sup>83</sup> Baldwin had reason to be concerned over the implications of the German intervention in Spain for a previously arranged two-day meeting with a delegation of senior Conservative parliamentary backbenchers, slated for 28 and 29 July.<sup>84</sup> A group, featuring such prominent Conservatives as Winston Churchill, Austen Chamberlain, and Leo Amery, had formally requested the meeting as a forum to impress their concerns upon the Prime Minister regarding the profound menace to British security presented by the rising threat of German aggression.<sup>85</sup> In the interim between agreeing to the meeting and its advent, however, the government received firm indication that Nazi Germany's armed forces were for the first time engaged in hostile military action against a sovereign member of the League, which was a country of distinct strategic significance to the British

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<sup>80</sup> For an example of a public argument against unrestrained support for Abyssinia on the basis of its feudal socio-political order see: *HCDeb, 5<sup>th</sup> series*, vol. 305, Winston Churchill in parliamentary debate regarding the 'International Situation', 24 October 1935, p. 365.

<sup>81</sup> 'The British Part', *The Times*, 4 June 1936.

<sup>82</sup> Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, 31; *HCDeb, 5<sup>th</sup> series*, vol. 3, Winston Churchill in parliamentary debate regarding 'Disarmament', 7 November 1933, p. 141-2; Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. 1, *The Gathering Storm* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1948), 13.

<sup>83</sup> Lord Crathorne, interview by Daniel P. Waley, 9 February 1971, cited in Waley, 69; Waley, 49-70.

<sup>84</sup> PRO PREM 1/193, letter from Churchill to Baldwin, 22 July 1936, p. 1; idem, A. Chamberlain in 'Record of a Discussion Which [sic] Took Place Between the Prime Minister and a Deputation from Both Houses of Parliament', 29 July 1936, p. 31.

<sup>85</sup> PRO PREM 1/193, letter from Churchill to Baldwin, 22 July 1936, p. 1.

Empire.<sup>86</sup>

When the meeting took place Baldwin made no mention of Germany's involvement in Spain, which others in attendance were not privy to, but nevertheless moved the debate in such direction as to allow him to assess and enhance his chances of avoiding a crisis in the House if the government were to at once openly renege on pledges to uphold the League's Covenant. Baldwin told his gathered audience, ostensibly in general terms that centred on the Franco-Soviet combination for the containment of Nazi Germany:

I am not going to get this country into a war with anybody for the League of Nations . . . There is one danger, of course, which has probably been in all your minds - supposing the Russians and the Germans got fighting and the French went in as the allies of Russia owing to that appalling pact they made, you would not feel you were obliged to go and help France would you? If there is to be any fighting in Europe to be done [sic] I should like to see the Bolsheviks and Nazis doing it.<sup>87</sup>

Aware that the dominant perspective among Conservative back-benchers was that the Popular Front governments in France and Spain were only superficially democratic, and were in fact "Trojan Horses" fashioned by the Comintern to act as forerunners to Bolshevik Revolution,<sup>88</sup> Baldwin attempted to encourage the influential gathered caucus to consider the importance of acquiescing before Nazi Germany's aggression where and when it took a primarily anti-Bolshevik direction.

On 29 July the international implications of the conflict in Spain grew considerably as

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<sup>86</sup> CAB 24/264, C.P. 234, the C.I.D. C.O.S. Sub-committee report on the 'Western Mediterranean: Situation Arising from the Spanish Civil War', 24 August 1936, p. 5; PRO CAB 23/87, C.P. 11, C.O.S. report on 'possible strategic repercussions of Spanish Civil War on Spanish Morocco', 10 March 1937, p. 2; Watkins, 4-8.

<sup>87</sup> PRO PREM 1/193, Baldwin in 'Record of a Discussion Which [sic] Took Place Between the Prime Minister and a Deputation from Both Houses of Parliament', 29 July 1936, p. 33.

<sup>88</sup> Diary entry, 8 August 1936, Nicolson, 270; Edwards, 10; Little, 'Antibolshevism and Appeasement', 21; Carley, "'A Fearful Concatenation of Circumstances'", 66-7; Moradiellos, 'British Political Strategy in the Face of the Military Rising in Spain', 124; Keeble, 135; Roi, 132.

France released evidence of the crash of three Italian aircraft in French Morocco that morning, which were plainly on their way to assist rebel forces in Spanish Morocco.<sup>89</sup> Consequently, British officials looked with interest on a French draft proposal for a limited non-intervention pact, which they received on 2 August,<sup>90</sup> not because they believed that it provided justification under international law for denying the Republic the right to purchase arms, but rather because it could publicly resemble a justification, in Britain, France, and beyond. Specifically the French proposed an agreement to commit the Italian and Portuguese governments,<sup>91</sup> which were plainly pro-Nationalist, to neutrality, in return for identical guarantees from Britain and France.<sup>92</sup> Britain replied positively in general terms, mindful that the pact promised a basis for publicly justifying the government's furtive policy of specifically preventing arms exports to Spain,<sup>93</sup> but instructed the French to construct a radically more expansive agreement.<sup>94</sup>

The day after the French government received Eden's reply, Britain and France launched

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<sup>89</sup> The aircraft were part of Italy's first military intervention in the conflict. Richard Lamb, *Mussolini and the British* (London: John Murray, 1997), 170.

<sup>90</sup> *DDF*, 2e série, tome III, no. 60, French *Chargé d'Affaires* in London (Roger Cambon) to 'M. Delbos, Ministre des Affaires Etrangères', 2 August 1936, p. 101.

<sup>91</sup> The French suggestion was an innovative improvisation, seemingly prompted by a combination of British pressure, and by the development of a fierce domestic political controversy arising from their own arms deliveries to the Republicans. Anthony P. Adamthwaite, *Grandeur and Misery: France's Bid for Power in Europe, 1914-1940* (New York: Arnold, 1995), 206; David A. Levy, 'The French Popular Front, 1936-37', in *The Popular Front in Europe*, edited by Helen Graham and Paul Preston (London: Macmillan Press, 1987), 73; Glyn A. Stone, 'From Entente to Alliance: Anglo-French Relations, 1935-1939', in *Anglo-French Relations in the Twentieth Century: Rivalry and Cooperation*, edited by Alan Sharp and Glyn A. Stone (New York: Routledge, 2000), 189; Parker, 81; Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 401.

<sup>92</sup> *DBFP*, 2nd series, vol. XVII, W 7504/62/41, note from French *Chargé d'Affaires* in London (Cambon) to the British Foreign Secretary, 2 August 1936, p. 49; *ibid.*, Foreign Office to ambassador in Rome (Drummond), W 7808/62/41, 5 August 1936, p. 59-60; *DDF*, 2e série, tome III, no. 56, French Minister of Foreign Affairs (Delbos) to diplomatic representatives in London and Rome, 1 August 1936, p. 97-8.

<sup>93</sup> Moradiellos, 'Appeasement and Non-Intervention', 97; Edwards, 34-5. Historian Anthony Peters claims that Eden 'suggested to the Cabinet that an informal embargo could be applied if the Service Ministries were to lay prior claim to all British armament production under the pretext of accelerating the British rearmament program'. See Peters, 229.

<sup>94</sup> *DBFP*, 2nd series, vol. XVII, Foreign Secretary to French *Chargé d'Affaires* in London (Cambon), 4 August 1936, p. 58-9; *DDF*, 2e série, tome III, no. 71, Cambon to Minister of Foreign Affairs (Delbos), 4 August 1936, p. 114-5.

a co-ordinated diplomatic effort to canvass Europe in support of an international accord that would pledge signatories to refrain from intervening in the Spanish conflict.<sup>95</sup> Simultaneously, however, Blum sent Vice-Admiral Jean Darlan, France's *Chef de Cabinet Militaire*, to London with instructions to impress upon Britain's Admiralty their mutual strategic interest in preventing a Nationalist victory in Spain. Although the choice of emissary initially seems bizarre, Blum's choice was very likely an imaginative if ultimately futile attempt to overcome what he perceived as ideologically based obstacles to clear strategic analysis within the British government, by appealing directly to senior military figures, on strategic grounds, to challenge the course of Britain's policy.

In his meeting with leading members of the British Admiralty Darlan appealed that it was 'in the urgent interest of Great Britain to oppose, as . . . [France was] attempting [to do] . . . the establishment of a Francist [sic] regime in Spain allied with Italy and Germany.' Darlan emphasised that France's military position would inevitably deteriorate if it was forced to shift resources to safeguard its Southern frontier as a consequence of the establishment of a pro-German regime in Spain. Further, he emphasised the perilous strategic implications for France of the possible establishment of Italian bases in the Balearic Islands, since they would be ideally positioned to dominate the shipping lanes that France intended to use to conduct its considerable colonial garrisons from North Africa to mainland France in the event of a general European

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<sup>95</sup> *DBFP, 2nd series*, vol. XVII, W 7808/62/41, 'Foreign Office to' H.M. Ambassador in Rome (Drummond), 5 August 1936, p. 59-60; *ibid.*, W 7918/62/41, Acting Counsellor and *Chargé d'Affaires* British Embassy at Lisbon (Dodd), 7 August 1936, p. 68-70; *D[ocuments on] G[erman] F[oreign] P[olicy]*, series D, vol. III, 'Memorandum by the Foreign Minister' (von Neurath), 4 August 1936, p. 29-30.

war.<sup>96</sup>

Hoare, now First Lord of the Admiralty, responded with a sharp rebuff that he captured in a memo he issued to the Foreign Office later that day:

For the present it seems clear that we should continue our existing policy of neutrality. . . . When I speak of ‘neutrality’ I mean strict neutrality, that is to say, a situation in which the Russians neither officially or [sic] unofficially give help to the Communists. On no account must we do anything to bolster up Communism in Spain, particularly when it is remembered that Communism in Portugal, to which it would probably spread . . . would be a grave danger to the British Empire’.<sup>97</sup>

Hoare’s extraordinarily forceful and undiplomatic response, which can hardly be deemed a “reply” since he contemptuously ignored the specific detailed strategic concerns raised by Darlan, belied his experience as Foreign Secretary, where he had of necessity known full well how to decline proposals in a civilised manner. The most reasonable conclusion, in such case, is that Hoare delivered his response with the specific intention of impressing upon the French that the ideological concerns in the Admiralty matched those which had thus far prevailed in the crafting of Britain’s policy, and of reinforcing the existing warnings against action in support of the Spanish Republic.<sup>98</sup>

For the remainder of August 1936, as what came to be known as the “Non-Intervention Agreement” took shape, British officials applied a comprehensive regime of pressure upon the

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<sup>96</sup> *DDF*, 2e série, tome III, no. 87, record of discussions with the British Admiralty, 5 August 1936, p. 131-3. In the event of full mobilisation for war in continental Europe, troops shipped from North Africa would have amounted to fully one third of France’s land army. Pierre Cot, *Triumph of Treason: Contre Nous de la Tyrannie*, translated by Sybille Crane and Milton Crane (New York: Ziff-Davis Publishing, 1944), 342.

<sup>97</sup> *DBFP*, 2nd series, vol. XVII, W 7781/62/41, ‘Note by Sir S. Hoare’, 5 August 1936, p. 62-3; *Les événements survenus*, vol. I, testimony of Blum, 23 July 1947, p. 218, quoted in Moradiellos, ‘The Allies and the Spanish Civil War’, 103.

<sup>98</sup> Alternatively Carlton argues that the tenor of the British Admiralty’s response to Darlan’s warnings was unimposing, and ought not have made any real impression on the French. Carlton, ‘Eden, Blum, and the Origins of Non-Intervention’, 47-9.

French government. On 7 August, with the basis of international support for an unspecified form of agreement established, Clerk met with French Foreign Secretary Yvon Delbos. In their meeting Clerk impressed upon Delbos that in the event that war broke out between France and either Italy or Germany, while France was giving material support to the Republic, Britain would not honour its commitments to defend France against unprovoked aggression. This *demarche*, apparently ordered directly from the Foreign Office but sent through informal channels, with the approval of then Deputy Under-Secretary Alex Cadogan, helped to convince the French government to publicly declare its commitment to non-intervention on 8 August.<sup>99</sup>

On 15 August, Britain and France issued a joint conditional declaration of “Non-Intervention” in ‘the tragic events of which Spain is the theatre’,<sup>100</sup> which, in combination with extensive diplomatic lobbying, influenced twenty-five further European states to issue similar pledges on or before 3 September. Although the sum of declarations were referred to collectively as the “Non-Intervention Agreement”, this was a substantially misleading signifier. Indeed, rather than signing any form of “Agreement” the states involved each issued varying individual non-binding declarations.<sup>101</sup> What was announced publicly as the “Non-Intervention Agreement” was more accurately a set of generally similar public statements of intent – conditional “moral pledges” at the very best - from most European states, to generally refrain from involvement in the Spanish conflict, or from supplying either side with most forms of

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<sup>99</sup> Historian Jill Edwards’ account of these events is particularly measured and well reasoned. See Edwards, 24-7. Surviving official documents are published in the *Documents on British Foreign Policy* series. See *DBFP, 2nd series*, vol. XVII, W 8055/62/41, ambassador in Paris (Clerk) ‘to Foreign Office’, 8 August 1936, p. 77-8. Alternatively, Carlton argues that Clerk’s intervention was not authorised by senior personnel in the Foreign Office. Carlton, ‘Eden, Blum, and the Origins of Non-Intervention’, 44-5, 49-53.

<sup>100</sup> Padelford, 57, 205-6.

<sup>101</sup> Padelford, 60.

military equipment.<sup>102</sup> Germany and Italy, however, along with four other states, adhered to the “Non-Intervention” system by issuing declarations that did not prohibit them from sending their own armed forces to fight in the conflict.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, Portugal, also a staunch supporter of the uprising, made such reservations in its declaration that its commitments became automatically void if any other state aided either side in Spain, including in a number of mild forms, which even most states that had issued declarations of adherence to “Non-Intervention” had not committed to refrain from.<sup>104</sup>

Effectively, the “Non-Intervention” system represented a series of promises from states across Europe to revoke the Republic’s rights to purchase military equipment on international markets, and not to grant such rights to the Nationalist insurgents. While this was arguably the appropriate legal course in treating the rebels for the duration of the war,<sup>105</sup> it was at all times an unmitigated violation of the rights of the Republican government then universally recognised as

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<sup>102</sup> Stone, ‘Britain, Non-Intervention and the Spanish Civil War’, 129; Edwards, 222-3. Switzerland, the only sizeable European state not to adhere to the “Non-Intervention Agreement”, announced it would take ‘autonomous action to conform with the policy of non-interference’, but refused to issue a statement directly linked with the “Agreement” on the grounds that it could undermine its national tradition of neutrality. Padelford, 59. For a similar explanation of Swiss policy see Thomas, 382.

<sup>103</sup> Padelford, 58. For an alternative assertion that the adherence of Italy and Germany to the “Non-Intervention Agreement” did overtly proscribe them from direct military involvement in Spain, see: Garner, 67.

<sup>104</sup> Padelford, 59-60.

<sup>105</sup> A number of legal scholars suggest that by regularly killing prisoners of war throughout the conflict the Nationalists failed to conduct hostilities in accordance with the Geneva Convention of 27 July 1929, thereby forfeiting any claim to belligerent rights. See Dietrich Schindler, ‘State of War, Belligerency, Armed Conflict’, in *The New Humanitarian Law of Armed Conflict*, edited by Antonio Cassese (Napoli: Editoriale Scientifica, 1979), 3; Richard A. Falk ‘Janus Tormented: The International Law of Internal War’, in *International Aspects of Civil Strife*, edited by James N. Rosenau (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1964), 223. Indeed, according to at least one legal scholar, the Nationalists officially continued to impose punishment that transgressed the laws of armed conflict, on those who fought on behalf of the Spanish Republic, until November 1966. See Van Wynen Thomas, 120-1. For an alternative opinion that once the rebels established a viable governmental structure the most appropriate legal course was to grant belligerent rights to both factions, see either: Padelford, 119; Garner, 70. Despite the lesser standing in legal circles of the scholars who decried the relevance of humanitarian law, their opinion is the one that has thus far made a home in the writing of historians. See: Churchill, 214; or Richard P. Traina, *American Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1968), 50-1.

the sovereign power in Spain.<sup>106</sup> This abrogation of the Republic's rights was in no way justified by the existence of a state of insurgency following a failed *coup d'état*. In fact, so long as foreign states did not grant the Nationalists belligerent rights, laws of neutrality were inapplicable to the fighting in Spain, since for legal purposes it constituted an 'insurgency' rather than a 'war'. As such, since the foundation of order in the international state system is the equality of states, countries were obliged by customary law to at least continue to grant the recognised Spanish government the rights afforded all sovereign states.<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, the Republic's rights should in no way have been compromised by aid received in the form of the International Brigades, or by the receipt of Soviet weapons, advisors and even combatants. The right of sovereign states, under customary international law, to request and receive assistance in suppressing insurrection, as well as in defence against external aggression, was manifestly clearly established.<sup>108</sup>

The inherent weakness of the "Agreement", however, mitigated the likelihood that it could, by itself, have any sustained restraining influence on public opinion. Consequently, Britain set about organising a "Non-Intervention" Committee as an ongoing body,<sup>109</sup> which, on the face of it, could be appealed to upon revelations of foreign intervention, thereby giving a form of tangible real-world evidence of the existence of an "Agreement". In discussions with

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<sup>106</sup> Van Wynen Thomas, 141-3. See also, PRO FO 371/20575, W 10779/9549/41, minute by Mounsey, quoted in Moradiellos, 'The Origins of British Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War', 360; PRO FO 371/20575, W 10779/9549/41, minute by Vansittart, quoted in *ibid.*, 364; Padelford, 119. In December 1937, Neville Chamberlain publicly conceded as much. See *HC Deb*, 5<sup>th</sup> series, vol. 330, Neville Chamberlain in parliamentary debate concerning 'Foreign Affairs', 21 December 1937, p. 1808.

<sup>107</sup> Padelford, 4.

<sup>108</sup> Van Wynen Thomas, 143.

<sup>109</sup> Lamb, *Mussolini and the British*, 198.

German officials concerning the establishment of the “Non-Intervention” Committee, British officials made clear that their concerns centred on the system’s public reputation rather than its effectiveness. As Prince Bismarck, the German *Chargé d’Affaires* in London, reported back to his country’s Foreign Ministry, British officials were clear when asserting that their initiative to establish a committee was not inspired by hopes of creating an effective body to restrain or prevent foreign intervention in Spain, but rather because, inevitably, ‘sooner or later accusations would be made against one country or another as having violated the arms embargo.’<sup>110</sup>

In attempting to convince Hans Dieckhoff, Germany’s acting foreign secretary, that his country need have no hesitations about joining the “Non-Intervention” Committee, Britain’s *Chargé d’Affaires* in Berlin, Basil Newton, made clear that it would be a debating chamber and that only. Newton stated:

There was no question of setting up the committee in London as an independent body which would have to make decisions or whose jurisdiction might later be extended in any way; it was a question only of organizing loosely the diplomatic representatives . . . The British Government itself by no means intended to go beyond this and to create a new international organ but was really confining itself to making available a meeting place . . . The committee was not to have the task either of exercising control powers or of making majority decisions.<sup>111</sup>

Immediately following the committee’s first meeting, held at the British Foreign Office on 9 September 1936,<sup>112</sup> Germany’s deputy representative, Prince Bismarck, reassured the foreign ministry in Berlin that there was every reason to believe that Britain’s aim was indeed the establishment of an inherently powerless committee. Bismarck reported that the actions of the

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<sup>110</sup> *DGFP, series D*, vol. III, ‘The *Chargé d’Affaires* in Great Britain [Bismarck] to the Foreign Ministry’, 25 August 1936, p. 57.

<sup>111</sup> *DGFP, series D*, vol. III, ‘Memorandum by the Acting State Secretary’ (Dieckhoff), 2 September 1936, p. 68-9.

<sup>112</sup> *DBFP, 2nd series*, vol. XVII, W 11115/11115/41, notes of the First Meeting of the Non-Intervention Committee, 9 September 1936, p. 233-248.

British and French representatives at the meeting indicated that their governments did not intend to take ‘actual steps’ but rather were attempting to ‘pacify . . . the aroused feelings of the Leftist parties . . . by the very establishment of such a committee.’<sup>113</sup>

While the tone in Germany’s foreign ministry was positive following the first meeting of the Committee, it stood in contrast to the unease in Britain’s Foreign Office. The day after the first meeting of the “Non-Intervention” Committee, writing in response to a complaint by the Spanish government, an official in the Foreign Office minuted warily:

It is difficult to think of an answer to this appeal, except that the political consequences of giving the legal government the facilities to which it is undoubtedly entitled would have been too grave to be risked. It has not escaped the notice of a number of the smaller governments that “non-intervention” means in fact denying to the legitimate Govt the means of combatting [sic] a rebellion. The Romanian, Turkish & Yugoslav Govts drew attention, in their replies, to the French Govt., to the importance of not allowing this to become a precedent. Undoubtedly similar views and fears will be expressed at Geneva if the Spanish Govt. raise the matter, + on a purely legalistic basis at any rate the Spanish representative will be on strong ground. N.B. The point was referred to in passing by the Netherlands minister at the first meeting of the International Committee.<sup>114</sup>

At the second meeting of the Committee, on 14 September, those lesser states depicted as reticent toward the system in the memorandum were excluded from the decision making process, as a select working sub-committee, comprising Belgium, Britain, Czechoslovakia, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and the Soviet Union, effectively supplanted the broader Committee.<sup>115</sup>

Rules on hearing evidence of foreign intervention were not adopted until 28 September,<sup>116</sup> and

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<sup>113</sup> *DGFP, series D*, vol. III, ‘The *Chargé d’Affaires* in Great Britain [Bismarck] to the Foreign Ministry’, 9 September 1936, p. 84.

<sup>114</sup> PRO FO 371/20575, W 10779/9549/41, minute by Charles A. Shuckburgh (Second or Third Secretary in the Foreign Office), 10 September 1936.

<sup>115</sup> Non-Intervention Committee records, 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting, cited in Thomas, 385; Howson, 115.

<sup>116</sup> Padelford, 70.

then they seemed ideally constructed to ensure that as few complaints as possible were raised in Committee, with testimony regarding foreign intervention limited to diplomatic officials from member states. Meetings were closed to the press and the public, and members were banned from publicising evidence of intervention outside the Committee.<sup>117</sup>

As official “Non-Intervention” took shape, the steady flow of Italian and German troops and equipment, contrasted with the constriction of supplies to the Republic, was instrumental in allowing the Nationalists to link their otherwise scattered forces, and then launch an offensive that left them on the cusp of capturing Madrid. At this point, Eden and the Cabinet looked expectantly toward the Nationalist capture of the capital, which they anticipated would deliver a mortal blow to the Republic.<sup>118</sup> In early October, however, the Soviet decision to openly provide the Spanish Republic with the weapons necessary to sustain their resistance simultaneously thwarted British hopes for a short war while dealing a powerful blow to “Non-Intervention’s” already fragile credibility.<sup>119</sup> The “Non-Intervention” Committee made no response to the open Soviet declaration that they would henceforth sell arms to the Republic.

In November, while most in the Foreign Office remained convinced that “Non-Intervention” would serve Britain’s interests, Laurence Collier, head of the Foreign Office’s

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<sup>117</sup> Howson, 115.

<sup>118</sup> PRO FO 371/20584, W 15341/9549/41, ‘Foreign Office minutes’, 16-17 October 1936; Parker, 84.

<sup>119</sup> On 7 October Soviet officials informed the “Non-Intervention” Committee that their country would abandon the Agreement unless immediate steps were taken to halt foreign assistance to the Nationalists. *DBFP, 2<sup>nd</sup> series*, vol. XVII, W 13242/9549/41, note from Soviet counsellor in London (Cahan) to Plymouth, 7 October 1936, p. 367-9; *DBFP, 2<sup>nd</sup> series*, vol. XVII, W 13672/9549/41, letter from Cahan to Plymouth, 12 October 1936, p. 404-5. On 23 October the Soviet delegate to the ‘Non-Intervention’ Committee, Ivan Maisky, issued a written declaration stating: ‘the Agreement . . . has ceased in practice to exist. . . . the Government of the Soviet Union . . . [will hereby] return to the Spanish Government the right and facilities to purchase arms . . . it cannot consider itself bound by the Agreement for Non-Intervention to any greater extent than any of the remaining participants’. *DBFP, 2<sup>nd</sup> series*, vol. XVII, editors note, p. 467, n. 4; Maisky, 47-9. Evidence of Soviet involvement was apparent in any case since Soviet shipments were readily observable as they passed through the Dardanelles, and since it was primarily sent in chartered British shipping. See Watt, 112; Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, 53.

Northern Department, lashed out at his colleagues who advocated retaining the “Agreement” in spite of its blatant abuse by the fascist powers, accusing them of acting as ““Conservatives first and Englishmen afterwards” . . . conniving at Signor Mussolini’s now avowed policy of spreading Fascism throughout the world as an antidote to Communism.’<sup>120</sup> Owen St Clair O’Malley, the Foreign Office’s designated Italian expert reacted with incredulity to Collier’s criticism, commenting: ‘Mr. Collier takes the Non-Intervention Committee more seriously than I supposed anyone did,’ and admonishing his colleague that, lest he lose sight of the bigger picture, ‘the Soviet government . . . had . . . been asking for trouble . . . in a great many countries including Spain and for many years back’.<sup>121</sup>

Upon learning of Collier’s criticism Vansittart sided forcefully with O’Malley,<sup>122</sup> convinced that Britain’s immediate objective in foreign policy ought to be to come to terms with Mussolini. Eden, however, was increasingly wary of Italian policy, despite engaging in an ongoing series of negotiations with Italy, that culminated in the rather bland ‘Gentleman’s Agreement’ of 2 January 1937.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, Eden’s rising distrust for Italian policy had led him to conclude, in contrast to Vansittart, that Britain ought to make an attempt to come to terms with Germany, but take a resolute approach towards Italy. Apparently principally as a consequence of their divergent views on the immediacy of the Italian threat, by December Eden was actively attempting to shift Vansittart from the post of Permanent Under Secretary at the Foreign Office,

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<sup>120</sup> *DBFP, 2<sup>nd</sup> series*, vol. XVII, W 16391/9549/41, minute by Collier, 24 November 1936, p. 590, n. 4.

<sup>121</sup> PRO FO 371/20586, W16391/9549/41, 30 November 1936, quoted in Douglas Little, ‘Red-Scare 1936: Anti-Bolshevism and the Origins of British Non-Interventionism in the Spanish Civil War’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 23, no. 2 (1988), 305-6.

<sup>122</sup> PRO FO 371, W 16391/9549/41, minutes on War Office report, 23 November 1936, cited in Edwards, 137.

<sup>123</sup> Richard Lamb, *Mussolini and the British*, 175.

and continued to do so until succeeding in January 1938.

When Eden learned that Italy had considerably increased its troop deployment in Spain only two days after the signature of the Anglo-Italian Agreement, he resolved that Britain had to act to punish what he considered clear evidence of Mussolini's incorrigible disrespect for British power.<sup>124</sup> Eden believed that states were increasingly willing to challenge Britain, as he believed Mussolini had done, due to a marked deterioration in Britain's prestige stemming from a recent pattern of equivocating and submissive responses to various provocations. Consequently, on 8 January, Eden issued a memorandum to the Cabinet urging a comprehensive re-evaluation of British policy towards Spain, Italy and Germany, arguing that, for the time being at least, Italy should no longer be considered a force in defence of international order. Furthermore, he argued that far from complementing appeasement, "Non-Intervention" was undermining it by giving Germany free reign where none was merited. As such, Eden suggested, German policy makers would be led to regard even conciliatory approaches to their legitimate grievances as being inspired by weakness rather than decency. Eden stated:

The Spanish civil war has ceased to be an internal Spanish issue and has become an international battle-ground. The character of the future Government of Spain has now become less important to the peace of Europe than that the dictators should not be victorious in that country. . . . It is above all important to visualise this Spanish problem in relation to Germany, and we have received many indications that the more cautious influences in Germany are opposed to the Spanish adventure. Of these influences the Army and the Foreign Office are the most important. It was these same influences that opposed the German reoccupation of the Rhineland last March. They were over-ruled, and since that *coup* was successfully realised by Germany, their over-ruling was held in German eyes to have been well justified. If on this occasion again no attempt is made to check this further German adventure, then we may be certain that when on a

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<sup>124</sup> *DBFP, 2nd series*, vol. XVIII, W 408/7/41, Foreign Secretary (Eden) to H.M. ambassador in Paris (Clerk), 5 January 1937, p. 14; *ibid.*, W 1613/1/41, Eden in notes of a meeting of cabinet ministers, 8 January 1937, p. 42-3; Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 433.

subsequent occasion the Nazi party [sic] urges extreme courses the more cautious influences will have no opportunity to make themselves felt. . . . It is . . . my conviction that unless we cry a halt in Spain, we shall have trouble this year in one or other of the danger points . . . It follows that to be firm in Spain is to gain time, and to gain time is what we want. We cannot in this instance gain time by marking it. It is to be remembered that in the language of the Nazi Party any adventure is a minor adventure. They spoke thus of the Rhineland last year, they are speaking thus of Spain today, they will speak thus of Memel, Danzig or Czechoslovakia tomorrow. It is only by showing them that these dangerous distinctions are false that we can hope to avert a greater calamity. In these conditions I consider it imperative that we should spare no effort to put a stop to intervention in Spain.<sup>125</sup>

Later that day, in an emergency unofficial meeting of the Cabinet,<sup>126</sup> held specifically to consider the proposals in the memorandum, Eden began the discussion by outlining his desire to use the Royal Navy to immediately establish a blockade of Spain that would enforce actual non-intervention by foreign states in the Spanish conflict. In the ensuing debate Hoare held the floor for much of the discussion as he delivered an unremitting attack, which embraced a number of different topics and objections, upon Eden's proposal. Hoare complained that the Great War had underlined that 'no blockade was ever quite watertight', and that since 'merchant ships had large holds', this was especially true in the modern age. Hoare argued further that, even with the full co-operation of France, the length of the coastline rendered a blockade against Spain particularly impossible.<sup>127</sup> Moving on, Hoare then revealed his staunch opposition to the objects of Eden's attempted policy shift, warning his colleagues 'we appeared to be getting near a situation where, as a nation, we were trying to stop General Franco from winning', and reminding them that they

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<sup>125</sup> *DBFP, 2nd series*, vol. XVIII, W 1612/1/41, memorandum by Eden, 8 January 1937, p. 37-8; PRO CAB 24/267, C.P. 6, memorandum concerning Spain by the Foreign Secretary, no date, p. 1-4.

<sup>126</sup> Technically the discussion was not considered a cabinet meeting, although it demonstrably served the same purpose, and its minutes appear in the officially released 'Cabinet Papers' series.

<sup>127</sup> PRO CAB 23/87, S.S. 1, 'The Situation in Spain', 8 January 1937, p. 3-6.

ought to be ‘very anxious that the Soviet should not win in Spain.’<sup>128</sup> In discussions prior to the meeting Eden understood Baldwin as having promised to support the proposal.<sup>129</sup> During the meeting, however, the Prime Minister terminated the discussion by ultimately weighing in to roundly reject the proposal.<sup>130</sup>

Baldwin's final instruction to Eden in concluding the meeting, to find ‘some method for making non-intervention effective’ that was acceptable to both Italy and Germany,<sup>131</sup> entailed an unmitigated rejection not only of Eden's proposal, but also of his underlying proposition that Britain ought to seek stability in Europe by upbraiding rather than accommodating the aggression of the fascist powers. Eden had pressed for the meeting in order to obtain clearance to respond actively to what he characterised as the threat to Britain's interests represented by aggression by Germany and Italy in Spain. During the meeting, however, not only was Eden’s specific proposal rejected, but perhaps more revealingly, the Cabinet engaged in no discussion of other possible avenues for positive action. Rather, Baldwin directed Eden not to reinforce the “Non-Intervention” system in any way that did not receive the prior assent of the states that Eden had depicted as aggressors that were exhibiting persistent and increasingly unashamed bad faith.

Seemingly thoroughly unconvinced by Hoare’s various arguments, Eden concluded that his proposal was not defeated on its merits, but rather that the prevailing balance of opinion within the Cabinet would prevent any attempt to construct British foreign policy on the basis of

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>129</sup> Carlton, *Anthony Eden*, 99; Middlemas, *Baldwin*, 1023; Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 435-6.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3-6, 12-3, 16; *DBFP, 2nd series*, vol. XVIII, W 1613/1/41, ‘meeting of Ministers’, 8 January 1937, p. 42-51; Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 435-6.

<sup>131</sup> PRO CAB 23/87, S.S. 1, ‘The Situation in Spain’, 8 January 1937, p. 17-8; Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 436.

collective security. Consequently, following the meeting, Eden came to believe that his only opportunity to pursue his preferred foreign policy would come only with the widely expected retirement of Baldwin, and the accession of a new Prime Minister.<sup>132</sup>

From the end of the Great War until the outbreak of World War II, the consensus on foreign policy within the British government rested on hopes for a peaceful, balanced and stable Europe. By the outbreak of the conflict in Spain, in July 1936, however, there was a substantial division between the professional foreign policy making community in the Foreign Office and Britain's ruling politicians as to how best to try and fashion lasting peace in Europe. Whereas there was an increasing trend in British politics, even among conservatives, toward embracing a policy of containment toward Nazi Germany, the Cabinet considered preventing the development of antagonistic military alliances the most likely method of safely moderating Nazi belligerency. While the policy of fostering peace in Europe by remedying German grievances received widespread support for more than a decade prior to the onset of Nazi rule, the belief that Hitler aimed to dominate Europe by force soon convinced the senior civil service figures in the Foreign Office that the bedrock for Britain's policy towards Nazi Germany ought to be containment, rather than conciliation. This came to a head over the conflict in Spain, and resulted in a comprehensive defeat for the advocates of containment, helping to isolate and then oust first Vansittart, and then Eden.

"Non-Intervention" was neither a well-intentioned nor a naïve failure as it has often been cast, but rather a success, which fulfilled its *raison d'être* by maintaining and exacerbating the divisions between diverse domestic and international forces that were inclined to organise an

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<sup>132</sup> Avon Papers, cited in David Dutton, *Anthony Eden: A Life and Reputation* (New York: Arnold, 1997), 82.

international coalition, founded on an Anglo-Franco-Soviet combination, to resist aggression by the fascist powers in Europe. In so doing, “Non-Intervention” became a catalyst in the transition of appeasement, from a measured endeavour to remedy injustice, to a stuttering attempt to mollify fascist expansionism through capitulation. “Non-Intervention” played an important role in dividing advocates of collective security within the British government itself. As such it had substantial consequences by establishing the conditions in British policy making circles that allowed Neville Chamberlain the leeway, bare though it was, to dismantle the Franco-Czech-Soviet coalition for containing Nazi Germany at the Munich Conference. Perhaps the full measure of the success of the “Non-Intervention” scheme is best understood by its ability to conjure away the responsibilities of the League of Nations in the Spanish conflict, not only from the minds of many British politicians and members of the public at the time, but even from the vast majority of those who have crafted the historical record over the past six-and-a-half decades.