The Potsdam Conference and the Spanish Problem

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Between 17 July and 2 August 1945, just weeks after the victory over Nazi Germany in Europe and while the fight against Japan in the Pacific continued, the leaders of the three great Allied powers held a conference in the town of Potsdam, a few kilometres from a ravaged Berlin. It was the third of these summits, following Tehran (November 1943) and Yalta (February 1945). Present were the president of the United States, Harry S. Truman (who had taken over after Roosevelt's death on 12 April 1945), the British prime minister Winston Churchill (soon to be replaced by Clement Attlee on 28 July after the Labour Party's general election victory) and the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin (consequently the only leader to be present throughout all of these meetings).[1]

The aim underlying Potsdam was the co-ordination of the policies of Allied occupation in Germany and the other liberated countries, along with the establishment of the basic outline of material reconstruction and the reorganisation of the post-war international system. The decisions of the conference were made public by means of a dense final communiqué issued on 2 August. In this, Point X, referring to 'the Conclusion of peace treaties and admission to the United Nations' Organisation', included a specific reference to Franco's Spain:

> The three Governments, so far as they are concerned, will support applications for membership [of the United Nations] from those States which have remained neutral during the war and which fulfil the qualifications set out above.
>
> The three Governments feel bound however to make it clear that they for their part would not favour any application for membership put forward by the present Spanish Government, which, having been founded with the support of the Axis Powers, does not, in view of its origins, its nature, its record and its close association with the aggressor States, possess the qualifications necessary to justify such membership.[2]

[1] For the subsequent development and eventual break-up of the Grand Alliance against the Axis see James L. Gormly, *The Collapse of the Grand Alliance, 1945–48* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987); Wilfried Loth, *The Division of the World, 1941–1945* (London: Routledge, 1988); and Pierre de Senarclens, *From Yalta to the Iron Curtain. The Great Powers and the Origins of the Cold War* (Oxford: Berg, 1995).

[2] The text of the communiqué is to be found in the minutes of the Potsdam Conference taken by the British delegation on 2 August 1945. Foreign Office Archive (FO), 'General Correspondence' series (archive key: 371), file 50867, document U6197. Henceforth referred to as FO 371/50867 U6197. All

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It was the first time that the three Great Powers had referred to Spain in a joint declaration. Previously, relations with the Franco regime had been the exclusive concern of Britain and the United States, and only on a handful of occasions had they been a priority (particularly during summer 1940, after the fall of France and the entry of Italy into the war, and in November 1942, on the occasion of the Anglo-US landing in North Africa).[3] Furthermore, this first (and last) joint reference of the Great Powers vetoed the entry of the Franco regime into the UN and virtually condemned it to international ostracism because of its anti-democratic nature and its previous support for the Axis powers.

Nevertheless, despite simple rhetorical appearances, the Potsdam declaration on the 'Spanish question' did not represent a heightening of the international rejection of the Spanish political system which dated from the end of the civil war in 1939. It was, above all, merely an explicit ratification of a previous condemnation approved by the founding conference of the United Nations held in San Francisco a few weeks earlier. It was not in vain that, on 19 June 1945, following a proposal from Mexico aimed specifically at Francoist Spain, the conference had approved a motion banning the entry into the organisation of 'the states whose regimes have been established with the help of military forces belonging to the countries which have waged war against the United Nations, as long as those regimes are in power'.[4]

Apart from categorically reaffirming this veto, the Potsdam declaration contained no effective sanctions, whether diplomatic, economic or military, against the censured Franco regime. In effect, the reference had been the result of a minimal agreement reached with great difficulty by the three Allied leaders and their advisers after arduous negotiations. Consequently, it restricted itself to the imposition of a toothless international ostracism from the jaws of which, aided by the disintegration of the Grand Alliance and its replacement by the Cold War, the Francoist dictatorship cautiously inched its way to post-war survival.

The policy towards Spain of the Great Powers on the verge of victory

During the first years of the global conflict, when the flow of battle had been unfavourable or unclear, Anglo-US policy towards Franco's Spain had been dictated by a fundamentally negative aim: to avoid its entry into the war on the German and

British archives referred to are held at the Public Record Office, Kew. The familiar US version of the conference, rather brief and lacking precision, is included in *Foreign Relations of the United States. 1945 (The Conference of Berlin)* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1960), Vol. 2. After the US version, the traditional historical source was Winston Churchill's postwar account, written in the midst of the Cold War: *The Second World War*, Vol. 6, *Triumph and Tragedy* (London: Cassell & Houghton, 1954).

[3] Javier Tusell, *Franco, España y la II Guerra Mundial* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 1995). Denis Smyth, *Diplomacy and Strategy of Survival. British Policy and Franco's Spain, 1940–41* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); and 'Screening "Torch": Allied counter-intelligence and the Spanish threat to the secrecy of the Allied invasion of French North Africa in November 1942' *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 4, no. 2 (1989) 335–56.

[4] Alberto Lleonart and Fernando M. Castiella, *España y ONU. I (1945–1946). La 'cuestión española'. Documentación básica, sistematizada y anotada.*(Madrid: CSIC, 1978), 30.

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Italian side by exploiting the acute Spanish dependence on Allied food and petrol supplies. Thus, both powers had clung to a policy of non-intervention in internal affairs and had tolerated the undercover support and official sympathy the Francoist regime gave to the Axis (as seen in the declaration of non-belligerence, the occupation of Tangier, logistical support for the enemy fleet, the sending of the Blue Division to the Russian Front, the export of strategic minerals to Germany, etc.). Nevertheless, as the war turned increasingly in their favour, that tolerance developed into a demand for stricter neutrality. The key moment in this process was the brief and sharply effective petrol embargo imposed by the United States on Spain between February and May 1944, which proved to be a notable triumph for the Allies.

On the brink of victory over the Nazis, from the end of 1944 the British government (and to a lesser extent the US administration) proceeded to re-examine the nature of its Spanish policy for the immediate future. This reassessment revealed a remarkable consensus on this matter among the British leadership, despite slight differences of perspective between the Labour ministers and their Conservative fellows in the coalition Cabinet led by Churchill.[5]

This assessment showed that it was essential to maintain a neutral or friendly Spain in order to guarantee British communications through the Strait of Gibraltar and in the north Atlantic. It was also deemed vital to protect the substantial commercial and financial relations between Great Britain and Spain, particularly in the light of the demands of economic reconstruction which would come at the end of the war. Finally, both objectives would require a politically and socially stable and peaceful Spain. As such, it was agreed that 'the long term commercial and strategic interests of His Majesty's Government require a friendly and prosperous Spain' and 'friendly relations with the Spanish Government'. However, the possibility of maintaining such relations with the Franco regime was virtually non-existent given its character, its previous conduct and the exceedingly high level of hostility towards it of British and international public opinion. As such, a managed change in Spain, involving the removal of Franco himself and the dismantling of the Falangist regime in favour of one 'based on democratic principles, moderate in tendency, stable and not owing its existence to any influences', was judged desirable. Any such change should not be brought about by direct British involvement in the internal affairs of the country, but should be the result of the Spaniards' own efforts and should involve no risk of a 'recurrence of revolution or civil war in Spain'. Above all, peace and stability in the peninsula had to be maintained and all possibility of conflict and subsequent communist expansion avoided. Churchill reminded Anthony Eden, his Foreign Secretary, of this in November 1944, when he opposed any form of economic or diplomatic sanctions:

[5] Florentino Portero, *Franco aislado. La cuestión española (1945–50)* (Madrid: Aguilar, 1989), and Qasim Ahmad, *Britain, Franco, Spain and the Cold War, 1945–50* (Kuala Lumpur: A.S. Nordeen, 1995), are particularly interesting on this subject. Neither author, however, had access to the British Delegation reports and other Foreign Office material released in 1995–6. Cf. Enrique Moradiellos, *La España aislada, 1939–1953* (Madrid: Historia 16, 1993).

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What you are proposing to do is little less than stirring up a revolution in Spain. You begin with oil: you will quickly end in blood. . . . Already we are accused in many responsible quarters of handing over the Balkans and Central Europe to the Russians, and if we now lay hands on Spain I am of opinion that we shall be making needless trouble in ideological matters. Should the Communists become masters of Spain we must expect the infection to spread very fast both through Italy and France. . . . It would be far better to allow these Spanish tendencies to work themselves out instead of precipitating a renewal of the Civil War which is what you will do if you press the matter. . . . I should of course be very glad to see a Monarchial and Democratic restoration, but once we have identified ourselves with the Communists' side in Spain which, whatever you say, would be the effect of your policy, all our influence will be gone for a middle course.[6]

Within these terms, British policy was based on the adoption of an attitude of 'cold reserve' towards the Franco regime interspersed with occasional 'pin-pricks'. This was done in the hope that it would be forced to consider its voluntary withdrawal from government, with the agreement of, indeed at the insistence of, the military high command, in favour of an alternative government structured around the figure of the pretender to the throne, Don Juan de Borbón, with the support of monarchist groups and the moderate left (Socialists, left Republicans and other non-communist groups).

At the beginning of April 1945, the Democrat administration under President Roosevelt adopted this policy as its own and agreed to co-ordinate its initiatives on the triple bases of rejection of the Franco regime, respect for the principle of non-intervention in internal affairs and the desire not to provoke a 'recurrence of civil strife in Spain'.[7]

Significantly, the US authorities also expressed their fears regarding the danger of communist expansion which might accompany a sudden fall of the regime as a result of Anglo-US pressure. In May 1945, the British ambassador in Washington wired the Foreign Office that the State Department had again examined the Spanish question and had told him:

that whilst in full agreement with our policy *in principle*, State Department feel *in practice*, if we are *too* stiff with Franco we may give undue encouragement to Communist elements. In the present mood of Moscow they might well turn out to be as inimical to our long term interests as the Falange itself. Mr Armour [the new US ambassador in Madrid] apparently has an instruction to hasten the demise of the regime. The State Department are now thinking of telling him to ease any pressure he may have been exerting and, while doing nothing to encourage Franco to believe that anything less than drastic reforms are necessary if his Government is to gain the confidence of the democratic world, at least to desist for the time being from giving active encouragement to the opposition elements.[8]

[6] Minute from Churchill dated 10 November 1944, Cabinet Archive (CAB), 'Ministry of Defence' series (archive code: 120), file 692, henceforth, CAB 120/692. The earlier quotes are taken from the memo on Spain from Mr Hoyer-Millar, chief of the Western Europe Department in the Foreign Office, 10 March 1945, FO 371/49612 Z8401. The outline of policy towards Spain had been decided in the Cabinet meeting of 27 November 1944, Cabinet Archive (CAB), 'War Cabinet minutes' series (archive code: 65), file 48, henceforth, CAB 65/48.

[7] Memo dated 7 April 1945 from the Department of State for the Foreign Office regarding policy towards Spain. FO 371/49611 Z4450.

[8] Telegram from the ambassador in Washington to FO, 17 May 1945. FO 371/49611 Z6002.

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The new Anglo-US policy was, consequently, built on two premises that were not totally compatible: the public rejection of the Franco regime and respect for the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of another country. Additionally, the drawing up and implementation of this policy were subject to an increasingly all-consuming factor in the diplomatic planning and global strategy of both powers: namely, the mistrust of the intentions in Europe of their Soviet ally after their joint victory over Nazism. It was precisely the growing influence of this factor that would increasingly reveal the contradictory nature of the policy of 'pin-pricks' and 'cold reserve' towards Franco's Spain.

Certainly, the British authorities (to a greater extent than the Americans) were conscious that their attitude of formal rejection of the Franco regime had little prospect of forcing Franco to give up power voluntarily. Towards the end of January 1945, the British military attaché in Madrid had sent back a confidential report on this matter:

> Most of the Generals, including Franco himself, are now convinced of a forthcoming allied victory. Where they differ, is that many of them fear a dangerous and detrimental isolation for Spain if peace finds Franco and Falange still in power; while Franco complacently thinks that it will suit the allies' book to have a quiet and orderly Spain, that they will not interfere in Spain's internal politics anyway, and that that being so he can carry on as he is indefinitely. At the worst, he thinks that he could save himself by sacrificing Falange.[9]

A similar diagnosis emerged from a report regarding an interview held with the Duke of Alba, Spanish ambassador in London and a supporter of the restoration of the monarchy. According to the duke's admission to the British representative in Madrid:

> Franco maintained that with the defeat of Germany (which he thought would inevitably come in two or three months) the only virile nations left in Western Europe would be Great Britain and Spain, France and Italy being in a state of chaos. Great Britain would then need Spain's assistance against Russia. Any change in regime would weaken Spain's ability to meet specific Russian pressure after the war. He had every intention of restoring the Monarchy but at the appropriate time which was not yet. Falange was based on the best Spanish traditions and perfectly suited to the country. . . . In reply to the Duke's warning that if Franco continued on these lines Spain would find herself isolated after the war, Franco said that this would not matter. The only important thing was that Spain should remain strong.[10]

If Franco's refusal to let go of the reins of power rendered the condemnatory declarations of the democratic powers largely useless, the adherence to the principle of non-intervention in Spanish affairs made achieving the Anglo-US policy of bringing about peaceful change in Spain still more unlikely. It avoided both the exertion of effective pressure on Franco to force him to step aside and any stimulus or support for the opposition forces to enable them to overcome their differences and coalesce into a coherent alternative. The reports received in London indicating that the opposition both inside Spain and in exile was riven by virtually irreconcil-

[9] Report from Brigadier-General W. Torr, 30 January 1945. FO 371/49587 Z1595.

[10] Telegram from R. J. Bowker, chargé d'affaires in Madrid, to the FO, 13 February 1945. The interview had occurred on 8 February. FO 371/49610 Z2099.

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able differences and lacked the strength to depose Franco were not exaggerated. As regards the Republican opposition, the differences between the followers of Juan Negrín (the last Republican premier) and his opponents, as between communists and anti-communists, condemned them to sterile paralysis. In January 1945 a senior official of the British Foreign Office noted harshly:

> On the whole, I feel these Spanish exiles can be left to quarrel among themselves. Franco's chief strength lies in the hopeless quarrels of his opposition. Much as one dislikes Franco, one can only despise these careerist exiles who cannot unite in opposition.[11]

The attitude to the activities of the generals and conservative politicians inside Spain who were lobbying for a monarchist restoration in the person of Don Juan was no more benign. Their dithering, their fear of using force against Franco and, above all, their horror at the prospect of a possible return by the vengeful defeated republicans, left them hamstrung and easily outmanoeuvred by Franco. The lack of confidence in their prospects was clearly revealed in a memo by a British diplomat dated 1 July 1945:

> The moderate elements, notably the monarchists, have become more vocal but remain as ineffective as ever, and it has become apparent that the only elements in Spain who could remove General Franco from power are Army Generals. Many of these it is true have been showing signs of restiveness and have been talking of the necessity for a change of Government; but for all their talk they are doing nothing about it, and General Franco seems to be able to dominate the Generals by his stronger character. Besides he has been careful to place his trusted men in key positions. Eventual action by the Generals is not, indeed, to be excluded, but the general impression conveyed by reports from Madrid is that General Franco is at present more firmly established in power than ever.[12]

As a result of these briefings, at the beginning of July 1945 the British authorities were aware of the failure of their aim of expelling Franco by peaceful means through rhetorical 'pin-pricks'. In fact, as a Foreign Office analyst accurately pointed out by then, 'in these circumstances, therefore, the most that could be hoped for would be for the modification of the present regime and the suppression of its more objectionable elements'. This would be precisely the strategy adopted by Franco to ensure the political survival of his regime during these critical months and subsequently. A senior British diplomat noted with resignation and some sorrow:

> The iniquities and horrors of the Franco régime are going on behind the scenes all the time. A certain amount of eyewash is being thrown up, such as the Bill of Rights, to bemuse the United Nations. At the same time Franco is skilfully playing with the Monarchists, as with the Generals, just as he is with Alba. Such is the individualism of the Spaniards that none of these elements can combine in themselves, let alone with one another. Franco, therefore, remains in power. But we have no reason to intervene. Our general policy of non-intervention in internal affairs must apply to Spain also. Spain is fortunately not a menace to the peace or to her neighbours' integrity. She is only a danger and a disgrace to herself.[13]

[11] Minute from Oliver Harvey, under-secretary of the Department of Western Europe, 21 January 1945. FO 371/49553 Z161.

[12] Memo by Mr Garran, the civil servant responsible for Spain at the FO, 1 July 1945. FO 371/49612 Z8559.

[13] Minute from Oliver Harvey, 1 July 1945. FO 371/49589 Z738. The previous quotation comes

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The 'Spanish Question' and the Shadow of the Soviet Union

The virtual confirmation of the failure of the policy of rhetorical pressure on Franco was accompanied by a heightening of the anxiety at any Soviet initiative on the subject. Throughout the war, Stalin had refrained from all diplomatic or military action against Francoist Spain, despite the ideological hostility between the two states and the assistance of the Blue Division to German troops on the Russian front. However, as the Nazi defeat approached, symptoms of Soviet interest in the future of the regime began to manifest themselves.

In February 1945 the Foreign Office received the first notification of this. During General de Gaulle's visit to Moscow the previous December, Stalin's advisors had maintained that Anglo-French non-intervention in the Spanish civil war and their blind eye towards Italian–German aid to Franco had been 'one of the principal causes of the World War'. They also added that they intended to address the Spanish question 'as soon as the war was over' and that they would regard French support in this matter, 'along with the Polish question', as being 'the touchstone of the Franco-Russian alliance' The British response to this news could hardly have been more revealing: 'I hope Franco goes before the Russians have time to get round to Spain'.[14]

British (and US) anxiety regarding Soviet intentions towards Spain was accentuated in the critical weeks following the Yalta conference (4–12 February 1945). It has been well said that 'the Cold War began between the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences with respect to Poland'.[15] Effectively, after the appearance of the agreement arrived at in Yalta by the three powers (symbolised by the Declaration on Liberated Europe, which guaranteed the self-determination of the liberated countries through democratic elections),[16] the profound differences between the Anglo-US bloc and the Soviet Union progressively undermined the Grand Alliance against the Axis. Victory in Europe on 8 May 1945 intensified that process as a result of the removal of the common enemy whose presence had managed to bring together British imperialism, US capitalism and Soviet communism in a single front.

The core of the problem was the political structure of the states of eastern Europe, whose liberation had been brought about almost solely by the grinding advance of the Red Army. During the war, Stalin had reiterated the Soviet right to re-establish the 1941 borders (which included eastern Poland, the Baltic States, and Bessarabia) and to guarantee the security of the USSR by means of the establishment

from the same memo referred to in the earlier footnote. For Franco's attitude during this period see Paul Preston, *Franco* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), Chs. 20 and 21.

[14] Minute from Hoyer-Millar attached to a telegram from Bowker (Madrid), 10 and 13 February 1945. FO 371/49610 Z2003.

[15] Anton W. Deporte, *Europe between the Superpowers. The Enduring Balance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 92. See also Stephen E. Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism; American Foreign Policy since 1938* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), Ch. 4; and de Senarclens, *From Yalta to the Iron Curtain*, *passim*.

[16] J. A. S. Grenville and B. Wasserstein, *The Major International Treaties since 1945. A History and Guide with Texts* (London: Methuen, 1987), 28–9.

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of 'friendly' neighbour states. The Western allies had tacitly accepted these demands and, as regards Britain, an agreement had been reached over the sharing of influence in the Balkans in October 1944 (Rumania and Bulgaria to be in the Soviet sphere, Greece in Britain's, Hungary and Yugoslavia to be shared).[17] During spring 1945, with his victorious troops controlling an arc running from Berlin in the north to Sofia in the south, passing through Vienna, Stalin proceeded to ensure his hegemony in Poland, Rumania and Bulgaria by the imposition of communist-dominated pro-Soviet regimes.

The establishment of such regimes in those countries and the profound Soviet influence in the other countries liberated by the Red Army (Finland, Hungary, Austria, Czechoslovakia and eastern Germany) caused deep concern in London and Washington. Poland became the principal bone of contention in this bickering among the countries which were still fighting as allies in the war against Japan. Essentially, the Soviet insistence on guaranteeing its territorial security by means of a strict recognition of each side's sphere of influence was confronted by Western claims to keep the doors open and to execute the declaration on liberated Europe in the East in order to maintain their presence in that zone. But there was no way to reconcile both demands: 'Given the traditions, prejudices, and social structures of East Europe, any freely elected government would certainly be anti-Russian.'[18] Stalin's response to Anglo-US pressure was a curt reminder of his strict respect for the agreement on spheres of influence in Europe. On 24 April 1945 he wrote to Churchill that the 'Soviet Union cannot agree to the existence in Poland of a Government hostile to it' and, in turn, 'nor does it claim the right to interfere [in Belgium and Greece], because it realises how important Belgium and Greece are to the security of Great Britain'.[19]

Unable to alter the situation by force, in May the Western powers ended by accepting the Soviet claim over Poland in exchange for co-operation in the setting up of the United Nations. Not impeding the Pacific war effort was also crucial. Nevertheless, the Polish crisis radically intensified Anglo-US misgivings over the reasons behind the Soviet stance: was it purely a question of security realpolitik or did it reveal a desire for territorial expansion fed by subversive Marxist-Leninist ideology? In either case, to the mind of the Western governments, it was evident that a firm stance would have to be maintained in the face of future Soviet demands. In Truman's words, 'the Russians needed us more than we needed them' with regard to the reconstruction of that devastated country.[20] Additionally, the United

[17] The agreement on the Balkans had been achieved by Churchill and Stalin during their interview in October 1944. W. S. Churchill, *Triumph and Tragedy*, 252.

[18] Quoted in Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism*, 53.

[19] Quoted in de Senarclens, *From Yalta to the Iron Curtain*, 30. The Soviet policy is covered in Vojtech Mastny, *Russia's Road to the Cold War: Diplomacy, Warfare and the Politics of Communism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); William McCagg, *Stalin, Embattled, 1943–1948* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978); and Geoffrey Swain, 'Stalin and Spain, 1944–1948', in C. Leitz and J. Dunthorn, *Spain in an International Context, 1936–1959* (Oxford: Berghan Books, 1999), 245–264; and 'Stalin's Wartime Vision of the Postwar World', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol. 7, no. 1 (1996), 73–96.

[20] Truman's statement was made in a meeting with advisors on 20 April 1945, as quoted in

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States' military supremacy had been incontestably shown by the successful atomic bomb tests carried out on 16 July at Alamogordo (New Mexico).

The Potsdam Conference, called after the Nazi defeat to co-ordinate the Allied occupation of Germany and to deal with the political and territorial reorganisation of Europe, was to be the first stage on which this new policy of Western firmness towards the USSR would be applied. Of course, in a context of increasing tension, neither London nor Washington had any intention of broaching the thorny question of Franco's Spain in the course of the meeting. However, as the following British memo of 1 July 1945 reveals, it was not clear that Stalin would follow this discreet course:

> So far, there are, I think, no indications that Soviet Russia is directly interfering in Spanish internal affairs, but it is not to be expected that she will remain aloof for long. This may well lead in due course to a serious disturbance of the peace in the Peninsula.[21]

Potsdam: the moment of truth

The first plenary session of the Potsdam Conference began on the afternoon of 17 July 1945 and had as its sole aim the agreement of an agenda for the discussion of the numerous and complex questions to be resolved. Led by Truman, Churchill and Stalin, the three delegations consisted of nine individuals and included the respective Foreign Secretaries: James F. Byrnes, Anthony Eden, Vyacheslav Molotov.[22]

The agenda proposals put forward by each delegation served to highlight the differences between Stalin and his Western allies which would burden the proceedings of the conference.[23] The Americans proposed a brief list of items: the creation of a Council of Foreign Ministers in charge of preparing the matters to be discussed in full session and of drawing up the peace treaties with the defeated countries; the co-ordination of the occupation of Germany; the definition of a policy towards Italy; the examination of the application of the Yalta declaration on liberated Europe. The British list included those points and added equally polemical items: the definition of the western frontier of Poland; the situation of the Balkan states; the Russia–Turkey conflict on the control of the Straits; the Allies' withdrawal from Persia. In short, it was an agenda based on the problems created by the political and military hegemony of the USSR in eastern Europe.

For its part, the Soviet delegation presented what amounted to an alternative

Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism*, 57. Cf. John L. Gaddis, *Russia, the Soviet Union and the United States. An Interpretative History* (New York: MacGraw-Hill, 1990).

[21] Minute from Garran, 1 July 1945. FO 371/4961 Z8559.

[22] Truman was also advised by the diplomat Joseph E. Davies, Admiral William D. Leahy and W. A. Harriman, the US ambassador to Moscow. Churchill was accompanied by the Labour Party leader Clement Attlee in his capacity as deputy prime minister, the Permanent Under-Secretary to the Foreign Office, Sir Alexander Cadogan and the British Ambassador in Moscow, Sir Archibald Clark Kerr. With Stalin were the subsecretary to the Ministry, Andrei Vyshinsky, and the Soviet ambassadors in Washington, Andrei Gromyko, and London, Feodor Gousev. Minutes of the first plenary session of the conference drawn up by the British delegation, 17 July 1945. FO 371/50867 U6197.

[23] Proposals for Agenda. FO 371/50863 Z5554.

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proposal. It included the discussion on Germany but specified as vital questions the issues of war reparations and the division of the German navy. It broached the future of the Italian colonies in Africa and the Mediterranean, and the situation of the French mandates in Lebanon and Syria. It pointed to the establishment of diplomatic relations (by the British and Americans) with the former German satellite states in eastern Europe. And, finally, it included three specific items: the regime in Spain, (the statute of) Tangier, Poland. This was, in short, a list which included the Soviet demands regarding its sphere of influence and confronted questions which until then had been exclusively in the Western powers' orbit of interest.

After incorporating these items into the conference agenda, the first plenary session began with a general discussion on its undertakings. First, Truman was chosen as chairman of the conference. The proposal to form a Council of Foreign Ministers to prepare subsequent discussions was approved. Subsequently, during the round of general remarks by each leader, a pattern was set that would become characteristic: each thorny issue brought up by the Western powers against the Soviets would be met by an equally delicate matter brandished by the Soviets against them; every British and US mention of a question relating to the Soviet sphere of influence would be met by a Soviet allusion to matters pertaining to the Western sphere.

It was the Spanish question which was to be one of Stalin's trump cards in the face of Truman and Churchill's criticisms of the internal situation in the countries liberated by the Red Army and of the failure to implement the Yalta declaration. Stalin himself established the basis for the strategy on 17 July, when he declared that 'the present political regime in Spain had not sprung from the free will of the Spanish people but had been imposed upon them by Germany and Italy' and that 'this regime harboured great dangers for the United Nations'. For that reason a way ought to be sought for 'the Spanish people to establish the political regime which they themselves would choose'. The proposal was, without doubt, a ploy to restrict from the outset any Western criticisms of the internal situation in the eastern European countries occupied by the Red Army.

Supporting his leader, during the second meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers held on the morning of 19 July Molotov presented his Western counterparts with a detailed memorandum on the Spanish question:

> In view of the fact: 1. That the regime of Franco originated not as a result of the development of the internal forces in Spain but as a result of the intervention by the principal Axis-countries – Hitler's Germany and Fascist Italy – which imposed upon the Spanish people the fascist regime of Franco; 2. That the regime of Franco constitutes a grave danger to the freedom-loving nations in Europe and South America; 3. That in the face of brutal terror instituted by Franco, the Spanish people have repeatedly expressed themselves against the regime of Franco and in favour of the restoration of democratic government in Spain,
> The Conference deems it necessary to recommend to the United Nations: 1. To break off all relations with the Government of Franco; 2. To render support to the democratic forces in Spain and to enable the Spanish people to establish such a regime as will respond to their will.[24]

[24] Memorandum of the Russian delegation, 19 July 1945. FO 371/49612 Z8637. Minute of the second meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers, 19 July 1945. FO 371/50867 U6197.

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Both Eden and Byrnes refused to discuss the text and deemed it necessary to submit it to the plenary session of the conference due to take place that afternoon. As a result, on 19 July the three leaders met for a third time in order to discuss six crucial matters: the situation in Greece (where British troops had crushed what amounted to a communist uprising without the Soviet Union responding); the definition of authority regarding political questions in the Allied Control Council in Germany; the prospects for the German Navy; Spain; Yugoslavia; and Romania.[25]

The Soviet proposal led to the most revealing discussion of the 'Spanish question' of the entire conference. Churchill was the first to broach the subject, following the line previously agreed with the United States. He began by expressing the 'strong distaste' felt by the British government for the anti-democratic nature of the Franco regime. The latter's overtures to the United Kingdom regarding the possible formation of an anti-Soviet front had been rejected. However, Churchill did not accept 'the recommendation that the United Nations should break off all relations with the Government of Franco', as this would merely serve to strengthen its position given 'the proud and touchy nature of the Spanish people'. Moreover, Franco would be able to resist such pressure thanks to his army ('although probably not a very good one') and to the fact that Spain is a 'mountainous country' which could easily be defended. Consequently, they would be obliged either 'to take a rebuff or to use heavy forces, and that he would be opposed to'. He continued by appealing to the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of a neutral country and to the fear of unleashing another civil war as being sufficient to rule out any exertion of pressure on Franco:

> He did not think that we should interfere with the internal affairs of another country, although of course in the case of a country which had fought against us, or of a country we had liberated, we could not countenance a system of government which was repugnant to us. But here we had a country which had neither fought against us, nor been liberated by us, and he would, therefore, deprecate doing what was suggested. The Franco regime, it was to be hoped, would soon pass away and in all proper diplomatic ways we should speed the parting guest. Breaking off relations, however, was a dangerous practice in world affairs. Moreover, he would find still more difficulty in countenancing any action which would lead to a renewal of the Civil War. That had been a terrible war, of a population of 18 million, 2 million had been killed in the wild and stony peninsula of Spain. . . . He would, therefore, be reluctant to interfere, specially when things looked as if they might improve[26]

Truman backed up this lengthy statement with a brief expression of his shared lack of affection towards Franco and his parallel reluctance to provoke 'another Spanish Civil War'. In his view, although it would be agreeable 'to recognise a government other than General Franco's', such a change was an internal Spanish matter.

Stalin's reply to these non-interventionist arguments was as incisive as it was

[25] Minutes of the third plenary session, 19 July 1945. FO 371/50867 U6197.

[26] The number of victims given here is clearly exaggerated, despite being commonly used at the time. In fact, the number of victims of the Civil War, both military and civilian, just exceeded half a million. See Santos Juliá (ed.), *Víctimas de la Guerra Civil* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 1999).

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laconic: 'that meant nothing would be changed'. He accepted the British and US aversion to the Franco regime ('imposed upon the Spanish people by Hitler and Mussolini, and [we were] in process of destroying the work of these men'), but he reiterated that 'this should be proved in deeds'. He rejected any intention of 'military intervention, nor that civil war should be let loose in Spain', but insisted that Franco was consolidating himself in power and that it was essential for 'the Spanish people to know that we, representing democratic peoples, were against the Franco regime'. Otherwise, he warned, 'they might say that, since we did not denounce the Franco regime, we supported it'. He immediately continued, in a calculated concession to Western sensibilities on a matter within its exclusive sphere of influence, to accept the rejection of the breaking off of relations as 'too severe a measure'. He demanded, however, 'a more flexible democratic means to let the Spanish people know that we do not sympathise with Franco' and to show 'public opinion in Europe and in the United States' that there was no intention to let 'this cancer pass in silence'.

Again it was Churchill who replied to Stalin, reiterating that he was not prepared to resort to drastic measures 'unless he were very sure of the favourable result' and that there was no danger of damaging 'very important trade relations' between Spain and Britain. He expressed his understanding of the Soviet hostility towards the Spanish regime given the activities of the Blue Division, but recalled that Franco had not entered the war nor had he hindered the Allies' landing in North Africa. Stalin replied immediately that Great Britain 'had also suffered at the hands of Franco Spain, since bases had been provided for German submarines' and that 'all the Powers had suffered in this or other ways'. However, in another calculated conciliatory gesture, he stressed that he did not wish to deal with the subject 'from this angle' (collaboration with the Axis), but rather from the point of view of the 'grave danger' that Francoism represented to Europe. For that reason he reiterated the need 'to say that we were not in sympathy with the Franco regime and that the aspirations of the Spanish people towards democracy were just'. Consequently, he proposed that the Council of Foreign Ministers attempt to find 'a milder and more flexible method than that suggested in the Soviet Delegation paper to make this clear'.

Stalin's new proposal provoked differing reactions among the Western leaders. Truman was prepared to accept that the ministers should discuss the matter, while Churchill stuck fast to his refusal to consider the question on the basis of the 'principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of another country'. To Stalin's reply that 'it was not a domestic affair, but an international danger', Churchill retorted, 'That could be said of about almost any country'. He also restated his refusal to interfere in Spanish affairs on the basis that it might provoke a pro-Franco backlash, despite acknowledging that 'he would be very glad, speaking personally, if a change took place in Spain resulting in a constitutional monarchy on democratic lines, and an amnesty for political prisoners'.

Churchill's stance was not supported by Truman, who repeated that he was prepared to allow the matter to be studied in the Council of Foreign Ministers in

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order to arrive at an agreement. In support of this, Stalin made a further proposal: that the Council prepare 'an appraisal of the Regime of Franco, making it clear to public opinion that we did not support him' and that this be included 'in a Declaration at the end of the Conference'. In support of his proposal he made reference to pressure previously exerted by his fellow allies with regard to examining the internal situations in other countries of central Europe and the Balkans. His words reveal that the 'Spanish question' had become a key factor in cementing adherence to the idea of spheres of influence and in counterbalancing criticisms of the absence of democratic liberties in the countries occupied by the Red Army: 'The suggestion was the most mild form of action that could be taken, and indeed milder than that applied to Greece, Yugoslavia or Poland. He therefore suggested that Foreign Secretaries should think the matter over on these lines.'

Churchill's reaction to this Soviet tactic was energetic. He doubted that there was any need of 'any Declaration about Spain being made' and reiterated his refusal to intervene in the case of 'a country which had not been involved in war against us, and which we had not liberated'. On these grounds, he rejected any analogy 'between the question of Spain and for instance that of Yugoslavia, Bulgaria or Roumania, where frankly there were things which he did not like'. As a result, he declared himself against having the matter discussed by the Council of Foreign Ministers 'who were already very busy'.

The intransigent attitude adopted by Churchill on this point stymied the discussion. With Stalin's consent, after ascertaining that 'there was no chance for agreement at the present time', Truman decided to abandon this question and to consider the next item on the agenda: Yugoslavia. It was at this point that the Western leaders were led for the first time to an appreciation of the substantial tactical worth to the Soviet Union of 'the Spanish question'. When Churchill protested at the proto-Soviet nature of the government formed by Tito and demanded that the three powers 'should issue a statement' calling for adherence to the Yalta Declaration, Stalin replied that this would be an interference in the internal affairs of Yugoslavia and refused to discuss the matter 'without the presence of the representatives of the Yugoslav Government'. With ill-concealed impatience, Truman again brought discussion of the subject to a close.

After the plenary session, with the prospect of further stalemates in later discussions, the British delegation was obliged to reassess its attitude regarding the Spanish question. The very afternoon of 19 July, Frederick Hoyer-Millar, chief of the Western Europe Department in the Foreign Office, put forward a measure 'to satisfy the Russian Delegation and effectively to indicate our dislike of the Franco regime without at the same time appearing directly to intervene in Spanish internal affairs'. In his opinion, although the original Soviet proposal was not acceptable 'in any circumstances', Stalin's conciliatory stance allowed the possibility of 'trying to find some fairly anodyne form of anti-Franco resolution'. He realised that outright resistance would only 'make the Russians more obstinate on points to which we attach importance' and would create the impression that 'we are pro-Franco and reactionary'. As a result, on the basis of the motion approved in San Francisco

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blackballing Spanish membership of the UN, he suggested a 'fairly anodyne' resolution along the following lines:

> The Three Governments, while recognising that it rests with the Spanish people themselves to choose the type of Government under which they wish to live, feel bound to make it clear that insofar as they themselves are concerned, they will find it difficult to place their own relations with Spain on a better footing so long as General Franco and the Falange regime remains in power. In particular as long as the present regime in Spain remains unaltered, the Three Governments will feel unable to support any application from the Spanish Government for membership of the World Organisation.[27]

Having acknowledged the need for this tactical shift, the British delegation was able to show its flexibility during the third meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers, held on 20 July and devoted to debating four issues: Italy, Spain, the Yalta Declaration and Romania. As soon as the session had begun, Byrnes put forward a proposal intended to overcome the Anglo-Soviet differences on the Spanish question. On the basis of an earlier request by Truman that the conference issue a communiqué supporting Italy's entry into the United Nations, he suggested that 'in this announcement it might be indicated that the three Great Powers would not favour the admission of Spain to association with the United Nations, so long as she remained under the control of the present regime'. Eden accepted the proposal and added that, to highlight 'the contrast with Spain', a reference might be included in the communiqué to 'other neutral countries in the same position as Italy' (Sweden, Switzerland and Portugal). Molotov also agreed, but not before adding a significant gloss: that the declaration should refer to 'the admission of ex-enemy States who had become co-belligerents' (as was the case of Bulgaria and other Soviet-occupied countries). As a result, the creation of a sub-committee to draw up the draft declaration for subsequent discussion in the plenary session was approved.[28]

The designated committee began its work on the afternoon of 21 July. The British representatives had agreed with the Americans that the reference to Spain would be restricted to vetoing its entry into the United Nations. The Soviet delegates tried to include 'the same sort of sentiments as appeared in the original Soviet paper' and 'all sorts of phrases including suggesting that Spain was a menace to world peace, and Franco was a war criminal, etc. etc.' (in Hoyer-Millar's words). However, they finally accepted the Anglo-US proposal in return for 'certain additions at the end indicating why we did not care for the Franco regime'. As a result, the committee agreed on a reference to Spain which would be fully incorporated in the final communiqué of the conference and which, in the opinion of the British representative, 'is a great deal milder than the original Soviet proposal, which, if pressed, might cause us a good deal of embarrassment'.[29]

However, the Soviets' conciliatory attitude over the Spanish question did not

[27] Minute, 19 July 1945. FO 371/49613 Z9237.

[28] The committee consisted of H. F. Matthews and C. W. Cannon (United States), F. Hoyer-Millar and P. Dean (Britain) and Ivan Maisky and F. Gousev (USSR). FO 371/49612 Z8823.

[29] Letter from Hoyer-Millar to Oliver Harvey, 21 July 1945. FO 371/49612 Z8823. Minute by Hoyer-Millar, 16 August 1945. FO 371/49613 Z9726.

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extend to the other matters mentioned in the declaration. In accordance with their strategy of establishing adherence to the respective spheres of influence, the Soviet delegates refused to accept the inclusion of a paragraph in support of Italy's entry into the United Nations unless another similar paragraph was included with regard to the eastern European states, along with a recommendation that the Western powers establish diplomatic relations with them. The British and US representatives rejected the proposal equating Italy with these states, since this would have compromised their policy of firmness and insistence regarding the Yalta Declaration. The disagreement was so profound that no solution could be found in the course of the meetings of the Council of Foreign Ministers of 23 and 24 July.[30] As a result, the question was deferred to the eighth plenary session of the Conference, which took place on that same afternoon.

The debate headed 'Neutral and ex-enemy States. Admission to United Nations', held after another discussion of the Polish question, gave rise to what was probably one of the tensest moments of the whole conference. Stalin categorically yoked his support for Italy's entry into the United Nations to British and US recognition of the governments of Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria and Finland and their subsequent entry into the United Nations. He dismissed any 'artificial distinction' between the former enemy states ('What were the deserts of Italy in comparison with the other (German) satellites?') and considered any preferential treatment to reflect an 'intention to discredit the Soviet Union and the Red Army'. Churchill and Truman justified this difference in similarly direct language, stressing that in Italy 'everyone was free to come and go', whereas in eastern Europe 'we had been seriously hampered in our efforts to get free access to these countries and information from and about them'. In his cut and thrust with Stalin, Churchill went as far as to state that 'an iron curtain had been rung down'. His opponent replied dismissively that 'these were fairy tales'. The sharp exchange revealed the latent antagonism between the Soviet policy of adherence to the spheres of influence and the Western will to restrain that process and maintain their presence in eastern Europe. The discussion ended with the issue being returned to the Foreign Ministers for them to find a compromise solution.[31]

After the debate of 24 July, the Conference was opportunely interrupted for several days due to Stalin's having slight illness and to Churchill's return to London to await the results of the general election in Great Britain. Efforts were not resumed until 28 July, after the news of the landslide Labour victory and the subsequent restructuring of the British delegation under the new Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, and the new Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin.

The inclusion of the Labour members of government did not represent a substantial alteration to the firm British stance in the face of Soviet demands. During the tenth plenary session of 28 July, Attlee and Bevin revealed themselves to be as opposed as Churchill and Eden to the recognition of the eastern European

[30] Minutes of the Council of Foreign Ministers. FO 371/50865 U5729 and U5730.
[31] Session minutes. FO 371/50867 U6197.

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governments and as insistent in their demand that the Yalta Declaration be respected. Similarly, they did not require any alteration to the section of the text dealing with Spain. Unable to break the stalemate and under pressure of time, Truman and Byrnes proposed the abandonment of the idea of 'any declaration about the admission of neutral and ex-enemy States to the United Nations'. Both Stalin and Attlee agreed to this.[32]

However, the US delegation continued to seek a compromise which would avoid any public display of discord between the Great Powers on such a crucial issue. On 31 July, the day before the end of the conference, during the twelfth plenary session, Byrnes proposed a new text for the declaration, one that attempted to satisfy British and Soviet demands. This saw the powers state their wish to see the end of 'the present anomalous position of Italy, Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary and Roumania' by means of 'the conclusion of Peace Treaties', and entrusted the drafting of the text to the Council of Foreign Ministers. The text continued, in separate sections for Italy and the other countries, by stating that this conclusion of peace treaties 'with recognised Democratic Governments' would enable their entry into the United Nations. It also stated the wish of the powers 'to examine each separately' with regard to the possibility of establishing diplomatic relations with the eastern European governments 'prior to the conclusion of Peace Treaties' and 'in the light of the conditions then prevailing'. The balanced text satisfied both Stalin and Attlee. As a result, they approved the final text of the declaration, whose section on Spain remained unaltered and aroused no further debate.[33] Thus it was that the final communiqué of the Potsdam Conference, on 2 August 1945, included the reference to Spain which had previously been agreed on 24 July as part of Point X referring to the 'conclusion of Peace Treaties and admission to the United Nations Organization'.

A maximum concession, not a first shot

On the face of it, the reference to the 'Spanish question' meant the international ostracising of the Francoist regime by the three Great Powers. But it was also, above all, the laboured expression of a lowest common denominator between Soviet aspirations and Anglo-American concessions. In his new role as leader of the opposition, on 16 August Churchill could make self-satisfied reference in the House of Commons to 'the terms of that most wounding, and deliberately calculated wounding, declaration against that regime'. Nevertheless, he acknowledged its limitations when he declared that 'it would, however, be wrong to intervene in Spain in a forcible manner or to attempt to relight the civil war in that country'.[34] Ernest Bevin, too, acknowledged this in his first public statement on the 'Spanish question' in Parliament on 20 August. He stressed that, according to the Potsdam

[32] FO 371/50867 U6197.
[33] FO 371/50867 U6197.
[34] Parliamentary Debates. House of Commons, 16 August 1945, columns 89–90.

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Declaration, 'we cannot admit Spain into the club'. But he reaffirmed the principle of non-intervention in its internal affairs and the fact that 'His Majesty's Government are not prepared to take any steps which would promote or encourage civil war in that country'.[35] In other words, the Potsdam Declaration was seen as constituting the sum total of the condemnation and pressure to be directed at Franco and was by no means the first shot across the bow before any more effective engagement with the Spanish regime.

The Francoist authorities did not take long to appreciate the real significance of the Potsdam Declaration. This was the perception of Admiral Carrero Blanco, by this stage Franco's principal political adviser, at the end of that same August. In his opinion, the reference to Spain amounted to a 'gross impertinence' but was, above all 'a Platonic formula' which 'pleased me because I expected something worse'. It showed that 'the Anglo-Saxons would accept anything from Spain as long as we do not allow ourselves to flinch, because they most certainly do not want any unrest which might result in a pro-Communist situation in the Iberian Peninsula'.[36] The same impression was expressed with relief by Martín Artajo, Franco's Foreign Minister from July 1945: '(the declaration) was less strong than we expected in Spain and less radical than it was expected outside'.[37]

The rapid deterioration in relations between the Western powers and the USSR which followed the Potsdam Conference had a proportional effect on the Anglo-US policy of non-intervention in Spain and the tacitly resigned acceptance of Franco's continuing in power. The failure of the Council of Foreign Ministers held in London (from 11 September to 2 October 1945), following victory over Japan, marked a point of no return in the disintegration of the Grand Alliance and the descent into cold war. It is significant that the Spanish trump card should again be used by Molotov during this conference. In the face of the stern Western refusal to recognise the governments of eastern Europe, given their anti-democratic character, Molotov replied that 'the present Governments in Spain and Argentina were certainly more Fascist than democratic, yet the United States Government maintained diplomatic relations with them'.[38] But the Soviet strategy of enforcing respect for the spheres of influence was fruitless on this occasion. In the atmosphere of mistrust and antagonism, the Western powers were prepared to abandon the policy of co-operation in favour of containment of the Soviet expansionist threat.

In this new context, the always scant possibilities of increasing Western pressure on Franco to abandon the reins of power voluntarily were drastically reduced. By contrast, the inherent contradictions in the Anglo-US policy on Spain were starkly

[35] Parliamentary Debates. House of Commons, 20 August 1945, column 296.

[36] Note for Franco, dated 29 August 1945. Quoted in Javier Tusell, *Carrero. La eminencia gris del régimen de Franco* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 1993) p. 129; and Laureano López Rodó, *La larga marcha hacia la monarquía* (Barcelona: Noguer, 1977) p. 58.

[37] Words by Artajo during his interview with Franco, 4 August 1945. Quoted in Javier Tusell, *Franco y los católicos. La política interior española entre 1945 y 1957* (Madrid: Alianza, 1984), 96–7.

[38] Declaration made during the meeting of 21 September, quoted in de Senarclens, *From Yalta to the Iron Curtain*, p. 96.

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revealed. At the beginning of March 1946, only a day before Churchill gave his speech in Fulton condemning the 'Iron Curtain' in eastern Europe, Hoyer-Millar drafted the following note regarding his conversation with Mr George, diplomatic adviser in the US embassy in London:

> He entirely agreed with me in thinking that further pin-pricks against Spain were really useless and did nothing to accelerate Franco's departure. He thought that our present policy and that of the United states Government was really not only illogical but to some extent dishonest. If we were really as convinced as we maintained in public, that Franco ought to be got rid of at once, then we ought to be prepared to take drastic steps to remove him, such as direct intervention in Spanish affairs. In practice – presuming always that armed intervention to get rid of Franco was out of the question – this should mean that we and the Americans should take active steps to encourage the formation of some suitable alternative Government. . . . On the other hand if we are not prepared to intervene in this way and actively encourage the opposition elements in Spain, then we ought not to take further drastic steps to get rid of Franco before the Spaniards themselves had had time to make up their own minds as to the best form of alternative government.[39]

In fact, as this analysis implicitly acknowledged, between 1946 and 1947 British and US diplomacy progressively abandoned the policy of rhetorical 'pin-pricks' as far as Western public opinion allowed and as the Cold War took hold. The Western powers did not implement in the future any new measures as regards 'the Spanish Problem' beyond the limits arranged in Potsdam. As such, the Tripartite Note of 4 March 1946 signed by France, Britain and the United States merely reaffirmed the content of the previous declaration (with the significant absence of the USSR and with a view towards appeasing the French domestic situation). In this way, the withdrawal of ambassadors following a UN recommendation in December 1946 was a temporary step forced by public opinion but without real impact. Consequently, scarcely two years after its publication, the reference to Spain in the Potsdam Declaration had become a mere relic. Its final epitaph would be written ten years later, in December 1955, when Spain, still ruled by General Franco, formally entered the United Nations.

[39] Minute dated 4 March 1946. FO 371/60352 Z2193.

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