

A FALSE SENSE OF COLLECTIVE SECURITY: HOW GERMAN
INTERVENTION IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR THWARTED
BRITISH MULTILATERAL EFFORTS DURING
THE PHONY PEACE

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Military History

by

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ABSTRACT

A FALSE SENSE OF COLLECTIVE SECURITY: HOW GERMAN INTERVENTION IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR THWARTED BRITISH MULTILATERAL EFFORTS DURING THE PHONY PEACE, by Alex Hannagan, 194 pages.

British policy towards Germany prior to World War II is often studied in the context of its failed appeasement policies. While many narratives discuss appeasement in the context of Neville Chamberlain and the September 1938 Munich Conference, German aggression began much earlier. Nor were German actions as provocative as popular storytelling suggests. German troops first marched during the Remilitarization of the Rhineland in March 1936, and the British responded with little more than a yawn. When Hitler annexed Austria in the *Anschluss* two years later, however, the British literally responded by taking up arms. The intervening two years, what this thesis titles the “Phony Peace,” saw no overt acts of German aggression except for its veiled intervention in the Spanish Civil War. This thesis analyzes the period of the “Phony Peace” to examine how German actions in Spain shaped British appeasement, in particular its multilateral collective security policies. It traces the beginning of each policy, the effects of German intervention, and their endpoints at the *Anschluss*. The research helps to answer two questions: how did the Germans strive to undermine British collective security efforts, and how did Neville Chamberlain come to play such an expansive role in British foreign policy?

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Though my inspiration to study the Spanish Civil War's impact on greater Europe dates back a decade, it did not come in a vacuum. In 2004, some personal challenges led me to change my major at the University of Virginia from what had been my life-long dream of a career in Computer Science. My Resident Advisor and close friend, Jimmy Sunday, steered me to pursue my next closest passion—history. Shortly before Sunday departed for his own career in Egypt, we sat down over coffee at the Barnes and Noble Starbucks in Georgetown. He argued that if I loved history as I suggested, to start thinking on the one big idea I might eventually take with me to grad school. An off-hand mention of UVa's ignoring the Spanish Civil War in its Western Europe curriculum got a raised eyebrow in reply, and my interest was sufficiently piqued to purchase a few books and explore it in several papers as an undergraduate.

In the present day, Dr. Mark Hull challenged my assumptions both on what I could accomplish through a thesis as well as the strength of my findings. Dr. Hull showed me where the literature was most mature, allowing me to identify where I might be able to contribute. While most authors cherish the thought of publication, to be pushed to think bigger and look to influence broader understanding of such a large topic is both daunting and thrilling. Finding Dr. Hull in a serious mood meant I was either very wrong or on to something, which drove me further to prove his trust in my abilities. Also, thanks to Dr. Scott Stephenson on my committee for forcing me to take pity on my poor readers.

I would also be remiss without thanking others who nudged me in the right direction either academically or mentally. Sir Antony Beevor and Dr. Robert Whaley, two of the world's foremost experts on the Spanish Civil War, helped confirm some of my key assumptions about the British Cabinet's investigations into the *Legion Condor*. My classmates in Staff Group 7B showed a genuine interest in my research, and were always there the morning after a near all-nighter to pick me up—thank you to Reed, Daniel, Muggs, Aaron, Adam (not necessarily. . .), Carey, Casey, Chris, and all the rest of you. Kudos to the rest of the Section 7 faculty—Dr. Rick Olsen, Brian Gerling, LTC Bill Weaver, and LTC Pete Boyer—for allowing me to find the right balance. Finally, due to LTC Christopher Johnson and my thesis seminar (also Tony, Luke, Dan, and Charlie), my oral arguments and peer editing led to my “lightbulb” moment, without which my eventual conclusions on the indirect impact of the Spanish Civil War on Chamberlain's influence within the Cabinet would not have been possible.

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ACRONYMS

CAB	Cabinet Conclusions
NIA	Non-Intervention Agreement
NIC	Non-Intervention Committee

PREFACE

At the time I finished my first draft of “A False Sense of Collective Security,” I had yet to erase the whiteboard I prepared from August 2016 which outlined the steps I would need to start a thesis. Back then, I felt trapped by an earlier idea to research acquisition management, and my wife agreed that it made no sense to go into such an endeavor if I’d be thoroughly unhappy throughout the entire process. When she asked what else I could study, I laughed and in an offhand manner mentioned an old history topic which had no bearing on my day job. For that reason it made little sense, but at the same time it was something which had been in the back of my mind since 2004. Even over my complaints about how much heavy lifting she’d have to do with our children (then needing constant supervision), she was right in saying I may never have this sort of opportunity again. Out came my project planning whiteboard, complete with snarky magnets, and I loaded it with bullets and assumptions. They were all wrong, and it sits there as a reminder to let the evidence guide your instincts, not the other way around.

My introduction to the Spanish Civil War came via a course on American diplomatic history. The professor, a Cold War scholar named Dr. Melvyn Leffler, remarked along the lines that just as it had presaged World War II, that conflict had drawn the dividing lines for the Cold War as most of the democracies had implicitly supported the result of the Fascist intervention even if they despised the methods. Though his conclusions were meant as an aside on the power of anti-Communist sentiment in interwar Europe, as I was just beginning my history degree I was floored with the power of such a casual observation. To my shock, though, I spent the next several years concentrating on Western European history and foreign affairs without ever coming into

serious contact with the Spanish Civil War. Though considered an influencing factor, most courses were obsessed with “systemic” events such as Great Power conflict. References to the civil war lacked more than cursory observations and anecdotes, with little substance. From the outset, I wanted to know more about the origins of this line of thought.

After watching my Resident Advisor around that same time write a thesis in little under a month, I later asked him what drove his sleepless nights in dedication to his work. Though he cited passion, knowing it to be a cliché he explicated the need to be convinced of the utility of one’s work. You have to love the idea of your work to be in love with doing the work itself. Without that spirited sense of discovery, and excitement at (potentially) making a difference in the existing literature, he argued, you probably haven’t settled on the right topic. Listening to me talk about the confusing amount of confidence—amidst little evidence—with which our professors discussed the impact of the Spanish Civil War, he said I clearly had a passion which could drive a thesis or even dissertation. I immediately bought a few general history books on the subject but was still left wanting as to the effects of the conflict on the rest of Europe.

That the Spanish Civil War affected the build-up to and conduct of World War II appeared to be without question. I was still not convinced of the mechanism even after reading names such as Beevor, Thomas, and Preston. Furthermore, what literature I found focused on two basic topics: anti-Communism and efforts to prevent or limit foreign intervention. These perceptions and policies impacted the conduct of the civil war, to be sure, but their link to world war with so many other events and policies in the background seemed superficial. My first idea for this thesis was to try to prove this link—that perhaps

their intervention gave Germany the confidence to wage war on the rest of Europe or convinced the eventual Allied powers they weren't yet ready to stand up to Germany. The literature here focused mostly on expansionism, rearmament, and appeasement, not Spain. Furthermore, the story of intervention itself—such as the Italian Blackshirts and German *Legion Condor*—was already well-covered.

In hashing out the details with Dr. Mark Hull, my thesis chair, I came to look at the problem from the British point of view. Having previously studied the mechanisms which finally caused Neville Chamberlain to abandon appeasement and go to war on the continent, I was now curious as to whether that might be a place where the Spanish Civil War had influenced the buildup to war in 1939 (it ended just before Germany invaded Prague). Most stories of Chamberlain's role (such as in Parker, Charmley, Gilbert & Gott, Colvin, and others cited herein) in appeasement begin with his ascent to Prime Minister, but some argued that it began much earlier and reflected more than just Great Britain's negotiations with Germany. At the same time, the preponderance of the literature glossed over most of the period between the Remilitarization and the Rhineland and the *Anschluss*, which included the outbreak of the Spanish conflict and the tensions it caused among the European powers. This led to the idea for the "Phony Peace," as the period between those major crises allowed for a test of the Spanish Civil War largely in isolation of other major events. After diving through the British, German, and a few other archival records, I came to an early conclusion that while the civil war certainly influenced the conduct of World War II, its impact on the latter's outbreak was more of an indirect factor that could be traced across multiple policies under the banner of "appeasement."

My arguments for this thesis go in two directions: the impact of German intervention in Spain on British policy, and a parallel evolution (or lack thereof) in the perception of key members of the British Foreign Office and Cabinet towards Germany. In other words, the presence of the Condor Legion in Spain by itself did not substantially alter strategic British decision-making so much as it deflected from—and eroded—the dominant British policies and beliefs at the time. There is no smoking gun akin to “because Germany landed troops/lied to us/massacred civilians, we should prepare to go to war with them.” Rather, the conduct of that intervention allowed Germany on a tactical level to undermine British strategy, which both sides acknowledged even as it forced Britain to pursue alternative appeasement policies. They used the turmoil in Spain—of which they were a cause—to justify their diplomatic actions elsewhere. Additionally, the British used these failures to review and tweak appeasement. The full topic is too large for a thesis, so these pages focus on just the collective security aspect of appeasement.

Those British policymakers who favored a collective security approach to foreign affairs saw support for those initiatives diverted by events in Spain, both internally and through German manipulations. Topics such as anti-Communism and non-intervention do play a part in this accounting, but internal Cabinet politics also have a role. That the anti-Fascist hawks such as Anthony Eden lost so much face through the failure—real or perceived—of collective security directly enabled Chamberlain and a larger bloc within the Conservative Party to pursue a divergent approach in terms of both tactics and procedure. While the hawks saw German actions in Spain as a reinforcing mechanism in their view of German ambitions, the Chamberlain bloc saw the civil war as little more than a thorn bush impeding progress of their overall agenda. The *Anschluss* and the chain

of events it precipitated in Central and Eastern Europe therefore dominated Chamberlain's Ministry in a way which the Spanish Civil War did not. For example, though Eden's efforts at driving the Nyon Conference showed that the dictators *would* back down under a united front in which the other powers all played a role, Chamberlain complained in private letters that collective security distracted from his efforts to "get on better terms" with Germany and Italy. This context is, in my belief, crucial to filling a gap in the story of the evolution of British policy prior to World War II. It also provides a better causal mechanism with which, given the continued negative connotation of "appeasement," to understand appropriate analogies and comparisons of interwar Great Britain and modern day crises.

CHAPTER 1

EVERY ENDING HAS A BEGINNING

With the *Wehrmacht*'s unimpeded march into the Rhineland on March 7, 1936, the balance of power in Europe was shattered. Though French forces gathered at the border for a possible response, Germany's repudiation of the Locarno and Versailles treaties was not otherwise challenged that day. Emergency cabinet sessions across Europe were quickly convened to determine appropriate courses of action. Most eyes initially looked to France and, indirectly, Great Britain to address the situation. Over the ensuing fortnight, the British War Cabinet assembled on several occasions to outline military and diplomatic options. Although concluding that their "influence was greater than that of any other country," the Cabinet ultimately hesitated given a public mood which disadvantaged a confrontational stance and was "anxious to obtain a peaceful settlement."¹ A military option involving a "symbolic" force of five brigades² was shelved despite dire warnings from France and Belgium that war may be looming within the next two years. Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden "regretted to say [that] was not an improbable forecast."³ Hitler's next overt gambit would not occur for those same two

¹ "The Locarno Treaty—German Re-occupation of the Rhineland," Cabinet Conclusions no. 18 (1936) [CAB 18(36)], Cabinet Series 23, Volume 83 (January-April 1936) [23/83], March 11, 1936, 1 and 3.

² M.P.A. Hankey, "Possible Despatch of an International Force to the Rhineland," March 18, 1936, Report by the Committee of Imperial Defence, Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee: [C.P.] 81(36), 23/83, 1-2.

³ "Germany and the Locarno Treaty—The French General Case," CAB 21(36), 23/83, March 18, 1936, 11.

years, this time under the auspices of the *Anschluss* with Austria,⁴ and though war was again averted despite the predictions otherwise, the tone of Britain's response would grow increasingly desperate with each further provocation. While the annexation reverberated forcefully in London, Great Britain had already begun to amend its policies in response to German intervention over the preceding two years in the Spanish Civil War. In effect, Hitler's first foray beyond his borders hastened the British response to what they already perceived as a mortal German threat.

Up until the march into Vienna on March 12, 1938, Hitler had aimed to screen his intentions from continental competitors until such time as Germany had sufficiently rearmed and readied itself for war. The Spanish Civil War, though not initially intended to provide that smoke screen, became Hitler's strategic theater of preparation shortly after the disaffected Spanish generals launched their ill-fated *pronunciamiento*⁵ on July 17,

⁴ Following the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the close of World War I, it split into varying countries largely along ethnic lines. One of those new countries, the Republic of German-Austria, had previously been part of the German Confederation and its citizens (along with Germany) openly campaigned for a union with the new German Republic. However, through the Treaty of Saint-Germain as well as Versailles, the victorious nations not only forbid this union but also the name "German-Austria." The term *Anschluss*, loosely meaning "joining," was adopted by the Nazis as a political platform given favorable Austrian plebiscites as well as the principle of self-determination. Also translated as *Anschluss Österreich*, or "joining of Austria," the Nazis under Hitler aggressively pursued this policy through subterfuge and political violence until it was successfully carried out in March 1938. For a discussion of British considerations during this time, an excellent contemporary opinion is that of prominent Labour politician Lord Lothian in a speech given at Chatham House on June 29, 1937 and printed as "Germany and the Peace of Europe," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1931-1939)* 16, no. 6 (November 1937): 870-886.

⁵ Literally "pronouncement," a *pronunciamiento* typically signaled a pending military coup in Hispanic countries in the 1800s and early 1900s. A previous attempt by the Spanish generals in 1932, also under José Sanjurjo, had failed. While Sanjurjo helped to plan the 1936 effort and was expected in some circles to become the head of state, his

1936. Despite inclinations believing otherwise, the generals lacked popular support and the *coup d'etat* against the democratically elected Republican government failed. Hitler, for his part, clandestinely sent General Francisco Franco, the future dictator of Spain, a note professing his sympathy to the rebels' cause when Franco landed at Tetuán, Morocco to rally the Spanish Foreign Legion on July 19.⁶ With only scattered enclaves having been captured by rebel forces, a few days later intermediaries landed in Berlin with dispatches from Franco seeking German aid. That evening, Hitler agreed to send assistance to the Spanish rebels just as his future British and French enemies charted a different course.

While Hitler spent July 24, 1936, drawing up interventionist designs in Spain, Great Britain was again dissuading French action. Having previously requested a meeting, French Premier León Blum met with Eden and English Prime Minister (PM) Stanley Baldwin in London that day to address British concerns over the course of French policy. Eden, in particular, attempted to discourage French intervention in Spain as a “great danger to the peace of Europe.”⁷ A day after returning to France, Blum sided with those in his government who favored neutrality; a week later, on August 1, 1936, France proposed a non-intervention pact to the other great powers in Europe. The two separate courses plotted in Berlin and London shaped the opening days of a conflict that

death on July 20, 1936, just days into the attempt, caused Generals Franco and Emilio Mola to take on a more prominent role.

⁶ Dante Puzzo, *Spain and the Great Powers, 1936-1941* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 59-60.

⁷ Ibid., 87.

eventually resulted in more than 300,000 deaths and the near ruin of Spanish cities, agriculture, and industry. More duplicitously, Hitler used the ongoing European diplomatic tensions surrounding the Spanish Civil War to cloak his expansionist goals.

Owing to its prominent position in European affairs, Great Britain's posture towards military intervention served as a lead for its numerous allies—and adversaries. Preaching pacifism and appeasement to a war-weary public, British leaders agreed on neither the nature nor danger of this policy. The perceptions of senior British decision-makers, particularly *vis-a-vis* Germany, informed their ability to collectively analyze and respond to events in Europe. Between the Remilitarization of the Rhineland and the *Anschluss*, a period which can best be summarized by the term “Phony Peace,” British perception of German capabilities and intent were primarily shaped by the events in Spain, which became the most obvious manifestation of German capabilities and intentions. This evolution affected British policy pertaining not just to appeasement, but to its core tenets of rearmament, bilateral negotiations, and collective security. Dissension among senior British leaders eventually resulted in Neville Chamberlain, who succeeded Baldwin as PM in 1937, remaining as the steadfast champion of appeasement even as the Sudetenland Crisis emerged in 1938 following Hitler's seizure of Austria. While Hitler's intervention in the Spanish Civil War altered British perceptions toward Germany, Chamberlain's internal cabinet machinations thwarted any ability the British may have had to prevent the crises of 1938 beginning with Austria. That event shattered the fragile illusion which held the majority of the appeasement regime intact despite clear evidence of German duplicity in Spain. Despite Chamberlain's attempts, some British leaders such as Eden and War Secretary Leslie Hore-Beelish responded to events in Spain in a manner

which allowed Great Britain to accelerate its defense policies. In effect, Spain started it all.

Hitler Prepares Germany for War

Though not initially envisioned with the strategic importance it later came to bear, Spain proved invaluable to Hitler's ambitions in Europe. While a multitude of contemporary observers proclaimed the Spanish Civil War as a “war laboratory,”⁸ Germany itself did not plan for that outcome. Hitler and other major Nazi leaders, including Admiral Wilhelm Canaris and Hermann Göring,⁹ increasingly seized upon the opportunity that Spain presented both in preparation for, and a practice in, *Weltpolitik*.¹⁰ What began as a limited intervention peaked in November 1936 with the deployment of the Condor Legion (or *Legion Condor* in its original German form), after which point Germany's development program in Spain was also initiated. With a period of otherwise

⁸ K.W. Watkins, *Britain Divided* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1963), 7.

⁹ In 1936, Canaris served as Chief of the *Abwehr*, German Military Intelligence, while Göring in his role as Reich Aviation Minister headed the *Luftwaffe*. Göring, in particular, would play an increasingly important role under Hitler culminating as *Reichsmarschall*, the highest rank in the *Wehrmacht*, in 1940. Also of note, Field Marshal Werner von Blomberg, the Minister of War as well as the Commander-in-Chief of the *Wehrmacht*, was present at the meeting where Hitler was convinced to aid Franco but played a smaller, more hesitant role.

¹⁰ *Weltpolitik*, or “world policy,” characterized Hitler's foreign policy aims of achieving Germany's “place in the sun” through aggressive expansion and the acquisition of colonies. Though Canaris is not generally regarded as a proponent of *Weltpolitik*, he did, in fact, argue alongside Göring to Hitler on July 24, 1936 that influence in Spain would be critical. His knowledge of early French support to the Spanish Republicans starting July 20 was apparently one of the deciding factors that swayed Hitler. For an examination of Hitler's decision and his advisers' influence, see Peter Elstob, *Condor Legion*, 52-53.

relative peace for Hitler's European ambitions, German intervention in Spain thus presented a critical test for British foreign policy. For Great Britain to accurately react to direct German aggression, it would have to respond to Germany's proxy designs as well. German diplomacy and tactics with respect to Spain would provide British leaders a wealth of opportunity to update their respective perceptions between July 1936 and the *Anschluss*.

The lack of clarity and consistency with Germany's early intervention was later misconstrued. In retrospect, British politicians seized upon Göring's testimony at Nuremburg that “with the permission of the Führer, I sent a large part of my transport fleet and a number of experimental fighter units, bombers, and antiaircraft guns; and in that way I had the opportunity to ascertain under combat conditions, whether the material was equal to the task.”¹¹ In reality, that logic was not evident during the early phases of intervention; during the discussions to secure Hitler's aid on July 24, 1936, for instance, Göring had (alongside Canaris) to persuade Hitler of the necessity of supporting the Spanish generals.¹² Additionally, none of the German planners initially envisioned an enduring civil war in Spain.¹³ The majority of early German support (to include Condor Legion's deployment in November 1936) came via existing Ju-52 transport planes and

¹¹ Hermann Göring, interview by Dr. Otto Stahmer, Nuremberg, Germany, March 14, 1946, *Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg, 14 November 1945—1 October 1946*, IX (Nuremberg: International Military Tribunal, 1947), 281.

¹² *Ibid.*, 280-281.

¹³ Robert H. Whealey, *Hitler and Spain, The Nazi Role in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 9.

He-51 fighter planes, and only after the appearance of Russian planes at the Battle of Madrid in November 1936 bloodied the *Luftwaffe's* nose did Germany commit those “experimental” planes to the Condor Legion.¹⁴ Troop rotation for training purposes was also not codified until 1937 due to initial security concerns.¹⁵ While Germany may have used Spain to design and test plane and tank tactics, these came largely as a reaction to battlefield necessity and not as part of predetermined scheme to exploit the situation in Spain.

Though not his original intent, Hitler eventually viewed the conflict as a means to cloak his expansionist plans for Europe. Just as he had needed initial convincing to assist Franco's transport of the Spanish Foreign Legion, German Foreign Minister Konstantin von Neurath was among the first to persuade Hitler that the conflict could be used for subterfuge. He successfully petitioned Hitler to coincide the announcement of Germany's support to the Non-Intervention Agreement (NIA) on August 24, 1936, with Hitler's proclamation extending the length of German conscription. Though Hitler had been concerned about appearances given the broad support of the NIA,¹⁶ the gamble worked. A few months later, after the Condor Legion's deployment was completed, Hitler formally defined his Spanish policy. He informed his advisers on December 1, 1936, that “German policy would be advanced if the Spanish question continued for a time to

¹⁴ Peter Elstob, *Condor Legion* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973), 113-114.

¹⁵ Whealey, *Hitler and Spain*, 56.

¹⁶ Puzzo, *Spain and the Great Powers*, 115.

occupy Europe's attention and therefore diverted it from Germany.”¹⁷ This was followed by Hitler commenting as part of his Four-Year Plan that “we are already in a state of war, although the guns have not gone off.”¹⁸ This did not translate into an open acknowledgement of Germany's full role in Spain, and heavy secrecy was enforced as a result. Contrary to the flamboyant Italian proclamations, no German recognition of Condor Legion's successes was given until 1939; Hitler even employed both the *Gestapo* and *Abwehr* for information security and counterintelligence purposes.¹⁹ These tactics hindered, but did not ultimately thwart, British analysis of German actions in Spain.

After the Condor Legion's arrival in Cádiz November 6-7, 1936, Germany's level of intervention remained fairly stable through the end of the Civil War, and presented Great Britain with numerous minor crises and lessons. Strikingly, although foreign journalists and sympathetic German Communists routinely described the nature of German intervention both in the press and through diplomatic channels, British leaders were, at least publicly, essentially nonplussed. Diplomatic reporting that after Condor Legion's arrival the Nationalist headquarters at Salamanca resembled “a German military camp,”²⁰ for instance, failed to affect a response from the British-led Non-Intervention Committee. Public rancor and British indignation over events such as Guernica often did

¹⁷ This passage was paraphrased by Walter Warlimont under interrogation in 1945, quoted in Whealey, *Hitler and Spain*, 54-55.

¹⁸ Adolf Hitler, Speech to Aero Club, December 17, 1936, reported by British Ambassador Sir Eric Phipps and quoted in Whealey, *Hitler and Spain*, 77.

¹⁹ Whealey, *Hitler and Spain*, 56.

²⁰ Attributed to Claude Bowers, American Ambassador to Spain and quoted in Puzzo, *Spain and the Great Powers*, 125-126.

not produce action even as exasperated British and French leaders toiled away behind the scenes for an appropriate response. Italian piracy off the Southern coast of Spain eventually did elicit a British reaction in the form of the Nyon Agreement on September 21, 1937, establishing British and French patrol zones, but even this action only forced aid to Franco's forces to take an alternative route.²¹ The tenuous British approach did little to impede German and Italian aggression while simultaneously furthering their aims both in Spain and elsewhere in Europe.

Great Britain's—and to a lesser extent, France's—irresolution concerning intervention in Spain emboldened Hitler to pursue his international policies and, perhaps, further his domestic agenda in the absence of any meaningful intervention from his enemies. In his infamous (and secret) conference on November 5, 1937, which resulted in the Hossbach Memorandum, Hitler laid out his vision for *Lebensraum*, among other policies.²² He was quoted as concluding that “our interest lay more in the prolongation of the war in Spain” to both reinforce the Italian position and divert British/French forces, allowing Germany to “[make] use of this war to settle the Czech and Austrian

²¹ Puzzo, *Spain and the Great Powers*, 197-198.

²² Colonel Friedrich Hossbach, Hitler's military adjutant, attended this meeting between Hitler, his military chiefs, War Minister v. Blomberg, and Foreign Minister v. Neurath. The Hossbach Memorandum was, more accurately, the minutes of the meeting. Since Hitler's statements carried the effects of edicts, however, the document became more broadly known as a memorandum of intent. Apart from *Lebensraum*, Hitler also couched a new series of policies towards Great Britain; having previously courted it as a potential ally, Hitler had increasingly come to view the British as at best, ambivalent towards his ambitions and, more likely, a future enemy. German historian Klaus Hildebrand provides good commentary and context on this conference and its aftermath in *The Foreign Policy of the Third Reich*, 51-60.

questions.”²³ Though Hitler had written of his desires for the *Anschluss* as early as *Mein Kampf*, and used subterfuge via Austrian Nazis throughout the crisis period in Vienna, he did not decisively act until February 1938. This outcome was hardly mitigated by British policies and actions that later came to define appeasement. In other words, Hitler's perceptive reading of potential responses—in particular, those of France and Great Britain—informed the events surrounding the annexation of Austria. The British, for their part, had formulated those same options based on their perceptions of Germany and its actions in Spain.

Great Britain Prevents a European Challenge to the Dictators

British leaders led or influenced numerous diplomatic and military initiatives during the period March 1936-1938. Some of these outcomes were the result of domestic realities and the interplay of perception and calculation, which did not always ensure that British decision-making had the greatest impact on continental scenarios. While British policy was generally shaped by a desire to avoid war, policies prior to the *Anschluss* resulted in some combination of collective security (to include the non-intervention policy), bilateral bargaining with Germany, and rearmament. This precise combination later earned the moniker of “appeasement.”²⁴ Any attempts to assess British actions

²³ “Minutes of the Conference in the Reich Chancellery, Berlin, November 5, 1937,” Document no. 19, November 10, 1937, *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Series D (1937-1945), Vol. I: *From Neurath to Ribbentrop (September 1937—September 1938)*, ed. Raymond James Sontag et al. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1949), 36-37.

²⁴ Charles Loch Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars, 1918-1940* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955), 536.

leading up to World War II, and in particular the period in which the British were responding to German intervention in Spain, must be viewed through the lens of appeasement and those diplomatic maneuvers.

The challenge Great Britain faced in balancing the three legs of the appeasement policy owed as much to their own indecision as to Germany's ability to steer events in Europe. Nominally, the task itself was difficult insomuch as the opposite, deterrence, “requires the state to combine firmness, threats, and an apparent willingness to fight with reassurances, promises, and a credible willingness to consider the other side's interests.”²⁵ Particularly with Chamberlain's Ministry, Eden constantly argued the former half of the deterrent quotient from his position as the Foreign Secretary as much as Chamberlain intransigently denied most attempts from outsiders to influence his chosen course. The result certainly combined reassurance, promises, and a consideration of Germany's interests at the expense of other tactics. Chamberlain was not alone in pursuing those tenets of appeasement, however, as his predecessors to include both Baldwin and Ramsay MacDonald defined the earliest implementation of the policy.

In the months leading up to the outbreak of hostilities in Spain, British opinion and policy seemed initially to waiver. The Hoare-Laval Pact had stirred the public to considerable heights,²⁶ but having been “unmoved” by German aggression in the

²⁵ Robert Jervis, “War and Misperception,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4 (Spring 1988): 686.

²⁶ The Hoare-Laval Pact had created considerable controversy in Britain in December 1935, as the public learned that Samuel Hoare, the Foreign Secretary, had negotiated in secret with France to concede large swaths of Ethiopia to Italy. The resulting backlash not only scuttled the pact but forced Baldwin to demand (and accept) Hoare's resignation. Eden would replace Hoare as Foreign Secretary.

Rhineland, British opinion subsequently lost “all sense of direction and [was] guided only by the squalls of momentary passion” as Mussolini conquered Abyssinia in terms far more dire than the Pact may have secured for the Ethiopians.²⁷ Into the Foreign Secretary vacuum stepped Eden, who had previously been instrumental in designing the sanctions which the League of Nations had approved (but sporadically enforced) against Italy for its invasion of Abyssinia. Though Eden would be a champion of a firmer stance towards the dictators in Europe, his peers (and superiors) redefined appeasement during this period. With Baldwin nearing retirement in early 1937, Chamberlain began taking a larger role in the government around that same time. This meant that while Eden “regretted” the possibility of war in the near-term with the Rhineland crisis, and sought policies such as collective security to prepare Great Britain for that outcome, his bosses demurred. In March 1936, for instance, Baldwin would remark to French Foreign Minister Pierre-Étienne Flandin that British public opinion would support neither sanctions nor mobilization if there were “even one chance in a hundred that war would follow.”²⁸ This kow-towing to the public would continue with regard to British handling of overtures for more assertive stances towards continental aggression.

Just as Baldwin thwarted French attempts at a retaliatory response to Germany in the Rhineland, so too did his, Chamberlain's, and to a lesser extent Eden's maneuvers with regard to Spain prevent a sharp response to Axis intervention. He and Eden had

²⁷ Harold Nicolson, “Has Britain a Policy?” *Foreign Affairs* 14, no. 4 (July 1936): 560.

²⁸ Paraphrasing attributed to Chamberlain, quote to Baldwin, March 11, 1936. Reported by Winston Churchill in *The Gathering Storm*, 175-178, quoted in Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, 566.

already convinced Blum in July 1936 to pursue non-intervention rather than risk war; at the lead of the British Foreign Office on December 5, 1936, the Anglo-French delegation to the Non-Intervention Committee proposed peace talks to Germany and Italy that they knew were doomed to failure. The British, apparently, having estimated that the Spanish Civil War would last “for an extended period,” made the proposal in order to prevent the Spanish from launching allegations at the two countries at the upcoming Council of the League of Nations meeting on December 10.²⁹ The Non-Intervention Committee, by this point, had become a delaying tactic for the British rather than a true collective security measure. The German Ambassador to Great Britain at this time, Ernst Woermann, reported to Germany that the Cabinet intended to keep the country out of war to the greatest extent possible, and “the existence of the committee offers the Government a comfortable shield.”³⁰ Whether or not such continued actions reflected aggregate British public opinion at the time is debatable,³¹ however Eden spent much of the rest of his tenure defending the NIC's role and effectiveness against heightened pressure from the Labour Party. This pattern of appeasement as a self-fulfilling policy would continue under Chamberlain through to Munich in September 1938.

²⁹ Puzzo, *Spain and the Great Powers*, 188-189.

³⁰ Document no. 131, *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Series D, III (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1951): quoted in Watkins, *Britain Divided*, 93.

³¹ See discussion in these sources for the evolution in British public opinion and the Baldwin Ministry's response in April-August 1936. Nicolson, “Has Britain a Policy?” 560-562 and Watkins, *Britain Divided*, 91-92.

German intervention in the Spanish Civil War affected a parallel evolution of British policy surrounding collective security, rearmament, and bilateral negotiations in the period between the Remilitarization of the Rhine and the *Anschluss*. While the latter was a wake-up call which accelerated British war planning, British perception of German policy, intentions, and capabilities resulting from its actions in Spain affected its implementation of an appeasement policy that had previously been founded on public opinion and a miscalculation of its relative military standing. At its worst, German intervention effectively ended British collective security efforts where aggression from its Italian or Japanese partners elsewhere only weakened them. Much of this effect, on which this thesis primarily focuses, owes to how the British utilized preconceived images and biases surrounding Germany to reinforce these multilateral policies up through 1936. Not only did they misread Hitler, but he effectively used those same British perceptions against them during the Spanish Civil War to drive a wedge in British Cabinet decision-making and preclude a more effective policy response. While increasing warning signs should have been visible to the British as Germany's actions in Spain came to light, Chamberlain later overrode dissenting opinions in favor of his own views. He effectively eschewed a multilateral collective security approach due to his preference for bilateralism regardless of evidence that those existing initiatives might still be effective. The resulting British paralysis owing to German actions in Spain ultimately left them ill-prepared for the inevitable *Anschluss* and Hitler's follow-on aggressions presaging World War I.

CHAPTER 2
THE ROLES OF PERCEPTION AND APPEASEMENT
IN INTERWAR BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY

While the British appeasement policy was founded in a balancing of collective security, bilateral negotiations, and rearmament to counter increasing European instability, the conduct of that program relied in no small part on the perceptive abilities of the British Cabinet. Not to be confused with terms such as calculation, perception is instead a reliance on the mind's cognitive processes to quickly sort and process information. The breakdown of those processes, called cognitive dissonance, inhibits a leader's ability to effectively function when presented with new information—particularly when such information directly confronts their view of the world, as in a crisis. Dissonance either then results in paralysis or exacerbates the effects of misperception when coupled with preexisting images, or biases. Understanding existing British beliefs and biases is then critical to understanding the impact of the Spanish Civil War, as any British inability to accurately perceive German aims, intentions, and capabilities in such a context would undermine its leaders' policies and planning. Inversely, any ability on Germany's part to influence British perceptions would create a favorable international environment for their own ambitions. That Hitler was able to manipulate British perceptions with such seeming ease was due as much, if not more, to their preformed opinions as any enduring realities—domestic or otherwise. Hitler's use of the Spanish Civil War against the British between more overt acts of Nazi aggression is then crucial to understanding the decisions which the policymakers later formulated.

Perception and Politics

In addition to any analysis done in real-time, British perception of Germany would also have been affected by any preconceived images they may have formed. Cognitive processes, particularly in times of crises, rely on shortcuts to both prevent information overload and conflate or sort new information against that already stored in the mind. In this way, the ability to accurately perceive threats or intentions in real-time can be heavily dependent on images which have been organized into “schemata” based upon their own experiences *or* desires; the schemata possessed by policymakers, in turn, utilized during crises form the shortcuts they use to inform their decisions.³² For example, the British appeasement policy may have been based, in part, on their ongoing collective embarrassment over the harshness of the Versailles Treaty as well, later on, as how German strategic considerations during World War I had been driven by a fear of encirclement.³³ In crises where brinkmanship may play a part, such as the incursion into the Rhineland or the *Anschluss*, those beliefs would shape the British response. Additionally, a preconceived image of steadfast German reasonableness would also further affect British statesmen's ability to appropriately analyze German actions during the prolonged diplomatic arc of the Spanish Civil War. The British position in European diplomacy at the time compounded these effects.

Consequently, any attempts by Germany to steer British perceptions in a particular direction would have profound repercussions on not only British policy, but

³² Janice Gross Stein, “Building Politics into Psychology: The Misperception of Threat,” *Political Psychology* 9, no. 2. (June 1988): 248-249, 251-252.

³³ Jervis, “War and Misperception,” 689.

owing to its role in European affairs, the policies of the majority of Germany's potential adversaries. Though initially wary of becoming involved, Hitler quickly viewed the Spanish Civil War as a means through which he could shape British—and by proxy, other European powers'—reading of his ambitions and intentions in Europe. If Hitler is aware that the French response will be based, in no small measure, on the British lead, he need not worry about French reactions so much as British ones. And he likely did, given German Ambassador Joachim von Ribbentrop's report from London that “I believe France would do nothing without England . . . [they] will not undertake any serious measures without the approval of England.”³⁴ Accordingly, during the Phony Peace, Hitler's design to steer the conversation would have to target British policymakers above all others.

Another application of perception and its role in politics concerns commitment. In this sense, leaders and senior advisers generally commit themselves to a chosen policy or course of action. Though not the same as an image of others, the effects can be the same as decision-makers are “likely to believe that the policy can succeed, even if such a conclusion requires the distortion of information about what others will do.”³⁵ Through this distortion, misperception occurs—Chamberlain may thus believe that Hitler can be appeased, even as he continues to arm Germany and pursues the Nazification of its military. Another example in this study's scenario is rearmament in the sense that “civilian and military officials responsible for defense often unwittingly exaggerate threat

³⁴ Document no. 239, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, 1918-1945, Series D, III, quoted in Watkins, *Britain Divided*, 81.

³⁵ Jervis, “War and Misperception,” 693.

to increase the size of budgetary allocations.”³⁶ As Prime Minister, first Ramsay MacDonald and later Neville Chamberlain fought this precise battle against both the British Chiefs of Staff and hardliners in the Conservative Party. This outcome concerns the Spanish Civil War in that by its outbreak in July 1936, the appeasement policy had already come well into effect. The commitment evidenced by Stanley Baldwin, Chamberlain, Anthony Eden, and others in doggedly pursuing that policy, despite German involvement in that conflict, points to its potential fallacies and indicates a perceptive baseline that borders on dissonance.

While images and commitment can warp new information, cognitive dissonance is its complete rejection owing to possessing contradictory beliefs. For a leader to calculate—much less perceive—threat, they must possess a basic ability to process inputs into their schemata; dissonance prevents such easy categorization. In other words, does Hitler propping up Franco show expansionist aims for Fascist ideologies, or prevention of the spread of Communism as he so frequently stated in his speeches? Once a decision-maker chooses their course (if they are even able to, that is), they will then attempt to rationalize their actions by skewing the data to meet their preformulated ideas.³⁷ This is the basic tale of appeasement, a policy which fit the world view of multiple British Cabinets. Later, as competing information was received, persisted despite mounting evidence that a new approach was needed. Before one gets to the Phony Peace era, however, the policy needs a bit more explanation.

³⁶ Gross Stein, “Building Politics into Psychology,” 261.

³⁷ Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 106.

The Origins of Appeasement

Well before Hitler had forsaken Versailles or revealed to the world the poorly kept secret of German rearmament, much less deployed the Rhine troops which became Germany's version of crossing the Rubicon, British foreign policy faced an existential crisis. The Ten Year Rule, which stipulated that the British Cabinet did not envision war within the succeeding decade, was abandoned on March 23, 1932. Owing mostly to the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the British sought to not only respond to strategic threats but also domestic politics which had taken on an increasingly pacifistic tone. Even with the newly formed National Government under Ramsay MacDonald shoring up the Conservative Party's grasp on Parliament the same year that Japan established its Manchukuo protectorate, an example of the changing mood by 1933 is East Fulham. In that district's by-election, a previous 58 percent majority for Conservatives fell to only a 26 percent minority after its candidate campaigned on rearmament; his Labour competitor labeled the policy as “preparing for war.”³⁸ British disarmament policies peaked that same fiscal year: just as MacDonald had warned that abolishing the Ten Year Rule was not an argument for defense spending, that budget fell to £106.7M—only 88 percent of 1927 spending—and remained near that level for several years.³⁹ MacDonald's goal by 1934 was to engage the British public with a policy which did not rebuff the national anti-war will.

³⁸ Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, 422.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 475, 628.

The nascent crisis surrounding the failing Disarmament Conference in Geneva in 1933 provides an illustrative example of the new effect of public opinion on British policy that would define the rest of the appeasement era. By the time Hitler assumes the Chancellorship in Germany, a collective national guilt bordering on embarrassment had taken hold in England for the effects of the Versailles Treaty (as well as subsequent concessions) on Germany. With the Conference nearing a stalemate by September 1932, *The Spectator* urged the Foreign Secretary, Sir John Simon, to say “what the country, if it had been consulted, would have required him to say: that Great Britain admits in principle . . . the justice of the German claim to equality status.”⁴⁰ Though Hitler often stressed over what he presupposed was an overly negative British press, in fact by the Spring of 1933, many “Germans frequently learned that Englishmen did not really oppose their aims, even if their methods were causing concern.”⁴¹ Indeed, subsequent German intransigence in Geneva leading up to their withdrawal in October 1933 was blamed more on Versailles and the idea that Germany was being asked to “neuter” its army more than it already had.⁴² Vernon Bartlett, a British journalist who corresponded for *The Times* and *BBC*, among others, met with Hitler during this period and later asked his readers, “how could Germany be expected not to worry about *her* security when her

⁴⁰ From an article on September 24, 1932 quoted in Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, 423.

⁴¹ Martin Gilbert and Richard Gott, *The Appeasers* (Boston: The Houghton Mifflin Company, 1963), 12.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 14-15.

neighbours, so much better armed and equipped, talk all the time about *theirs*.”⁴³ In a conversation with the German Ambassador, Leopold von Hoesch, MacDonald confirmed this to be his view as well.⁴⁴ Though not a necessary cause to explain the British Cabinet's early appeasement policy, this example combined with the East Fulham elections shows public opinion is still sufficient in showing how *successful* politicians both recognized and governed by that same pulse.

The British Cabinet's challenges by July 1934 were increased by the collapse of the Disarmament Conference and the murder of the Austrian Chancellor, Englebert Dollfuss. Against this backdrop MacDonald seemingly pledged actions which were contradictory to the prevailing pacifistic mood: a defense of the Rhineland Demilitarized Zone, Anglo-French general staff conversations, and an increase in aircraft production. In reality, the MacDonald Ministry had little clue the direction it wanted to go until the Foreign Office, led by Permanent Under-Secretary Robert Vansittart, offered to couch the policy revisions, at least publicly, as “collective security.”⁴⁵ This decision proved fortuitous in the coming year's elections for several reasons, first and foremost that Vansittart had successfully identified the public's main desire: a lack of sustained British commitment to continental affairs. As a signal for that desire, just as the country was truly beginning to lag behind German and Italian rearmament, the year-long Peace Ballot

⁴³ Vernon Bartlett, *Nazi Germany Explained*, 1933, quoted in Gilbert and Gott, *The Appeasers*, 22.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁵ Arthur H. Furnia, *The Diplomacy of Appeasement: Anglo-French Relations and the Prelude to World War II, 1931-1938* (Washington, DC: The University Press of Washington, DC, 1960), 138.

initiative released its results in June 1935: 60 percent of Britons would not feel compelled to intervene against aggression in Europe, and 90 percent favored the use of collective security.⁴⁶ The public repudiation of then-Foreign Secretary Samuel Hoare in December 1935 for bilateral negotiations with France outside the League of Nations—the Hoare-Laval Pact—even featured a massive letter-writing campaign to Members of Parliament (MPs) which led to his resignation. While the Hoare-Laval Pact, which would have granted considerable concessions to Italy in Abyssinia, was the epitome of the future appeasement policies, the backlash seemed to signal to British MPs and Cabinet Ministers the role of the public's wish for a certain kind of hands-off policy that dealt with old grievances, not new ones.

Though Vansittart played a political role in naming a series of unrelated policies as “collective security,” the term held true meaning for both the British Cabinet and the Foreign Office. With the public asking for a form of limited liability with respect to continental defense, the two primary means by which the National Government pursued collective security were the League of Nations and the Treaty of Locarno. The spirit of both stemmed from the desire that no nation should need to arm itself in fear of its neighbors as the collective might of the alliance should prove sufficient to keeping any possible belligerents in line. Though not disarmament in name or goal, the Cabinet still hoped to achieve similar ends through those fora. They expected other countries to prove both willing and able to lend military and economic power as means to achieving the overall security of each nation pledged to the agreement. Though the Foreign Office

⁴⁶ Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, 541-542.

hoped for a “general” security through the participation of all states, realists who would later align to the Chamberlain camp (such as Sir Samuel Hoare or Edward Wood/Lord Halifax) also believed the same ends were possible through regional pacts. The extreme version of this view also saw a push for bilateral agreements, ostensibly what the Germans themselves were thought to have preferred. That the Foreign Office also perceived the need for a strong military to back up British commitments to these treaties allowed Vansittart to carefully couch MacDonald’s initiatives in the same terms as collective security.

The collective security that Vansittart proposed in 1934 could then help MacDonald's Cabinet sell his defense policies to the British public. As Sir Samuel Hoare would later note, Britain's defensive commitments under such policy were not hers alone and could only be honored through the cooperation of other partners such as France.⁴⁷ At the Stresa Conference which followed in April 1935,⁴⁸ MacDonald and Simon noted to observers that Britain “must maintain its armaments policy at a level which obtains German respect but does not necessarily permit England to throw away her French shield.”⁴⁹ Following Italy's scuttling of Stresa with its invasion of Abyssinia, soon-to-be

⁴⁷ Furnia, *The Diplomacy of Appeasement*, Page 160.

⁴⁸ Among other initiatives, the so-called “Stresa Front” between MacDonald, Mussolini, and French Prime Minister Pierre Laval was a reaction to Germany's rearmament and conscription declaration in March 1935. The Conference aimed to disable Germany's ability to further change the terms of Versailles, but disagreement among the powers vis-a-vis Italy's intentions in Ethiopia led to its dissolution by October 1935.

⁴⁹ Observation by Ray Atherton, US Foreign Service Officer, quoted in Furnia, *The Diplomacy of Appeasement*, 148.

Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden won public acclaim for his actions pushing for sanctions against Italy for its aggression. Seeing an environment in which “the League [of Nations] and collective security were worshipped,” the new Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, called for national elections.⁵⁰ Under Baldwin, as well as Eden following Hoare's resignation as Foreign Secretary, the appeasement policy would be expanded to include a larger emphasis on rearmament.

Stanley Baldwin's stamp on appeasement begins, first and foremost, with his stance towards Germany followed by a waffling commitment to rearmament. Speaking to German Ambassador v. Hoesch, he remarked that Great Britain must be “entirely willing to continue to work closely even with a Germany under the new order.”⁵¹ As the Rhineland crisis took shape, he further noted that “it seemed very unfriendly” of France to stoke tensions towards Germany while pursuing greater British commitment.⁵² This same Baldwin had remarked to Winston Churchill in March 1934 that “this Government will see to it that in air strength and air power this country shall no longer be in a position inferior to any country within striking distance of its shores.”⁵³ Furthermore, in August of that year, he argued alongside others in the Cabinet for “a connection between support for

⁵⁰ Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, 545-546.

⁵¹ Gilbert and Gott, *The Appeasers*, 20.

⁵² Quoted in Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 64.

⁵³ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, 102, quoted in Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, 476.

collective security and armed strength,” or rearmament.⁵⁴ However, once the elections came a year later he borrowed a page from Vansittart's playbook, denying Neville Chamberlain's request to make rearmament a part of the Conservative Party platform in August 1935⁵⁵ and stating in the campaign that “collective peace . . . is yet the only alternative between a race in armaments and the risk of uncontrolled war.”⁵⁶ Where Baldwin saw a need to potentially placate Germany behind a renewed wall of firepower, Eden turned out to be far more direct in his efforts.

Riding the waves of overwhelming popular support for his sanctions effort against Italy in the League of Nations, Anthony Eden would see an early test of his skills with the Rhineland crisis. From the outset, Eden voiced a steadfast policy of rearmament and tough negotiations (preferably in the collective sphere). He was not always a proponent of the League of Nations, though, and his peers in the Foreign Office had largely forgotten that he remarked in 1927 that “if settlements can be achieved by direct negotiations . . . [they] are much better than settlements arrived at through the intervention of the League.”⁵⁷ Following admission of the Soviet Union to the League of Nations and the body's successful oversight of the Saar Plebiscite,⁵⁸ he became a convert

⁵⁴ R.A.C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 47.

⁵⁵ John Charmley, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1989), 23.

⁵⁶ Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 47.

⁵⁷ Anthony Eden, Speech to the House of Commons, November 24, 1937, quoted in David Carolton, *Anthony Eden* (London: Penguin Books, 1981), 30.

⁵⁸ Under the Versailles Treaty, the Saar region in Germany was to hold a plebiscite in January 1935 to determine whether it would return to Germany or remain an

to the League's ability to govern Europe. Eden was also credited at the time with helping the League of Nations secure British troops to help police the Saar during the referendum, which could not have hurt his feelings towards that forum.⁵⁹ His version of collective security was one which saw British firmness backed by an ability to enforce such stances.

Eden made a similar case as Baldwin for rearmament in 1934, going further in noting that "an unarmed Britain in an armed world would not only place Britain in a highly dangerous position, but would deprive British representatives of much of their negotiating power and authority."⁶⁰ Remarking following the Saar Plebiscite in early 1935 of the diplomatic victory scored by the League of Nations, he still cautioned that "nations will have to contribute more to the common stock than professions of goodwill, however sincerely delivered."⁶¹ Writing later of broader lessons learned by that event, he noted that the Saar Plebiscite taught him that "international authority cannot discharge its function unless it had a force of its own."⁶² Eden's firmness on the matter won acclaim in a speech at Fulham where he concluded that England "shall always be found arrayed on

independent state. Though France, among others, held grave concerns about returning the industry-rich Saar to Germany following the overwhelming "return" vote, Germany resumed sovereignty on March 1, 1935.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 56.

⁶⁰ Eden, "Ideals, Realities, and Arms," Speech to the Stratford-on-Avon Brotherhood, November 11, 1934.

⁶¹ Eden, "A New Era of Opportunity," Radio broadcast from Geneva at the League of Nations, January 18, 1935.

⁶² Sir Anthony Eden (as the Rt. Hon. The Earl of Avon, K.G., P.C., M.C.), *The Eden Memoirs: Facing the Dictators* (London: Cassell and Company, 1962), 106-107.

the side of the collective system against any government or people who seek by a return to the power politics to break up the peace.”⁶³ While others in the Cabinet resented his meteoric rise, Eden was also recognized as a skilled, unwavering negotiator. He would take the lead in petitioning Germany for concessions in the Rhineland (to include a new version of the Locarno Treaty), nudging France towards the Non-Intervention policy, and fostering multinational support during the 1937 Nyon Conference.⁶⁴

Perhaps the only voice louder than Eden in early 1936 was that of Neville Chamberlain, and the two would (mostly) work in tandem over the succeeding two years until a rift over appeasement forced Eden to resign in February 1938.⁶⁵ The Chancellor of the Exchequer since the formation of the National Government in 1931, Chamberlain often professed in private his love of foreign policy even if in public he was chastised by

⁶³ Eden, “Problems of Collective Peace,” Speech to the East and West Fulham Conservative and Unionist Association, May 16, 1935.

⁶⁴ Following overt acts of Italian naval aggression in July-August 1937, Eden pushed for a conference—against Chamberlain’s objections—to discuss a protective force in the Mediterranean. Taking place at Nyon, Switzerland, the conference brought Italian “piracy” against foreign merchant ships nearly to a halt even before it had even started; the naval patrols are one of the seminal achievements, so to speak, for the Non-Intervention policy.

⁶⁵ Most of Eden’s concerns centered around Chamberlain’s treatment of Italy in early 1938, particularly with respect to the latter’s overt and extensive intervention in the Spanish Civil War. Over the prior six months, Italian submarines, or “pirates,” had sunk British shipping and fired on its war vessels while Italian troops continuously landed in support of General Franco’s offensives—all as Italy obstructed the proceedings of the Non-Intervention Committee to successfully deal with the “pirates” or the issue of foreign volunteers. When Chamberlain pushed forward with his version of an Anglo-Italian Agreement—to the point of attempting to exclude Eden from conversations with the Italian Ambassador—Eden threatened to resign, and Chamberlain called his bluff.

his peers for his ignorance (which was not always a warranted claim).⁶⁶ Though forgiveness may be lacking for his dogged pursuit of German appeasement, in many cases Chamberlain provided astute observations of the European climate before assuming the mantle of Prime Minister. In an August 1936 letter to Eden, for instance, he remarked of Hitler's economic program that "if the German Government chose, they could find ample scope for encouraging capital expenditure otherwise than on armaments."⁶⁷ Though a staunch proponent of rearmament, he consistently pushed the brakes on any acceleration proposed by Baldwin, Eden or others, recognizing through his role at the Treasury that it could not be easily funded. Later on he would lament of a "mad armaments race, which if allowed to continue must involve us all in ruin."⁶⁸ Beginning with the Remilitarization of the Rhineland, Chamberlain took a more direct approach to influencing policy beyond his given duties. Arrogant and frequently unpleasant to work with in the Cabinet,⁶⁹ he would even write to his sisters of a belief that only through his

⁶⁶ From the outset, Chamberlain blamed the Foreign Office for many of his issues in pushing through his preferred policies. On rearmament in particular, he noted in a letter to his sisters in July 1934 (more than a year before approaching Baldwin on the matter) that "what does not satisfy me is that we do not shape our foreign policy accordingly . . . if we are to take the necessary measures of defence against [Germany] we can't afford at the same time to build our battle-fleet." Quoted in Charmley, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace*, 23.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 71.

⁶⁸ Neville Chamberlain, Letter to Ida Chamberlain, October 30, 1937, *The Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters, Volume 4: The Downing Street Years, 1934-1940*, ed. Robert Self (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 280.

⁶⁹ Unpleasant being an understatement, dictatorial being more apt.

own personal, bilateral negotiating skills could war be avoided.⁷⁰ Those firm beliefs would eventually border on pathology as he used Eden's resignation to signal an end to British collective security efforts. Following the Munich Settlement in September 1938, Duff Cooper, the First Lord of the Admiralty, would drily come to observe, "the Prime Minister believes that he can rely on the good faith of Hitler . . . how are we to justify the extra burden [of rearmament] if we are told there is no fear of war with Germany?"⁷¹

How Germany Weaponized Stubborn British Perceptions

While MacDonald first laid claim to the policy of appeasement, it evolved under Baldwin, Eden, and finally Chamberlain leading up to and during the period of the Phony Peace. Whereas Eden saw collective security as an end to itself, Baldwin justified it as a means to achieving rearmament. All three shared in the assessment that rearmament was needed even if they (frequently) argued as to its pace. Chamberlain, and to a lesser extent Eden, later began to see appeasement as less of a collective pursuit than a bilateral one in its implementation. None of these beliefs were insurmountable in the Cabinet; the perception of the risk that Germany presented, however, eventually drove the two most popular English politicians apart. By the time Eden departed the Cabinet his own preferences towards collective security likely would not have mattered, as Hitler used Spain to undermine those efforts and was not to be dissuaded from the *Anschluss*.

With his resignation from the post of Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden would later remark that "some of my seniors in the Cabinet . . . could not believe that Mussolini

⁷⁰ Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, 591.

⁷¹ Quoted in Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 184.

and Hitler were as untrustworthy as I painted them.”⁷² Hitler's strategy in achieving this outcome came as early as October 1936, and as a direct result of the Spanish Civil War. In a conversation with Count Galeazzo Ciano, the Italian Foreign Minister, he remarked that “the tactical field on which we must execute the maneuver [of influencing opinion] is that of Anti-Bolshevism. In fact many countries which are suspicious of Italo-German friendship . . . will be brought to group themselves with us if they see in Italo-German unity the barrier against the Bolshevik menace.”⁷³ This caught on with Mussolini, who a few months later remarked back to Hermann Göring that “the English Conservatives have a great fear of Bolshevism and this fear could easily be exploited politically. This task would fall principally on Germany.”⁷⁴ Hitler utilized this tactic at least eight times in 1936, and then convinced Lord Halifax (who would later replace Eden as Foreign Secretary) in 1937 that his aims were to block communism's “passage west.”⁷⁵ Hitler was on the mark: it just so happened that in July 1936 Baldwin hinted to Tom Jones, his one-time Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet, that he had instructed Eden “on no account, French

⁷² Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 560.

⁷³ Conte Galeazzo Ciano, *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers: being a record of nearly 200 conversations held during the years 1936-42 with Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, Goering, Ribbentrop, Chamberlain, Eden, Sumner Welles, Schuschnigg, Lord Perth, François-Poncet, and many other world diplomatic and political figures, together with important memoranda, letters, telegrams, etc.*, ed. Malcolm Muggeridge, trans. Stuart Hood (London: Odhams Press, 1948), 57.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁷⁵ Whealey, *Hitler and Spain*, 29.

or other, must he bring us into the [Spanish] fight on the side of the Russians.”⁷⁶ Hitler's use of Spain to alter British perception provided not only a freer hand in Axis interventions in that country, but also benefited his other and wider European aims.

Hitler targeted of British perception in one other way: rearmament. Though any defense of Chamberlain's appeasement policies likely cites the time it bought Great Britain to accelerate its industrial programs (particularly for the Royal Air Force), the opposite is more so true for Germany. While Great Britain began to rearm after the Remilitarization of the Rhine, and accelerated those investments in both 1937 and 1938, it faced a 4.5:1 disadvantage relative to German defense spending by the time of the Munich Conference.⁷⁷ The counterfactual argument is that Great Britain might have joined France in either deterring or combating German aggression earlier than 1939-1940 had they perceived Hitler's intentions correctly *and* accurately calculated their earlier military superiority.⁷⁸ Instead, Chamberlain's policies informed the publication of intelligence estimates which led his Cabinet and advisers to perceive a larger military gap than at the time existed, making war seem untenable.⁷⁹ In that manner, Hitler's use of Spain to divert British decision-making meant that rather than face war in 1938 (or earlier) with a plane ratio closer to 1:1 between Germany and Great Britain, in 1939 the

⁷⁶ T. Jones, *A Diary with Letters*, Transcription written on July 27, 1936, quoted in Watkins, *Britain Divided*, 73.

⁷⁷ Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, 628.

⁷⁸ Jervis, “War and Misperception,” 683.

⁷⁹ Gross Stein, “Building Politics into Psychology,” 258-259.

Luftwaffe enjoyed a near 2:1 advantage.⁸⁰ Hitler's ability to play upon British biases effectively weaponized perception and put Germany into an advantageous position for his European ambitions.

Beginning with the Rhineland crisis in March 1936, British policymakers' ability to properly codify German intentions would dictate their decisions throughout the Phony Peace. As its transgressions grew throughout Germany's intervention in the Spanish Civil War, Eden's views hardened. For differing reasons, the other Conservatives, first under Baldwin and then Chamberlain, refused to see the same threat whether as a result of Hitler's ploys, their own ideologies, or a reliance on public opinion to drive policy. Hardliners such as Eden (and to a lesser extent, Churchill, who in something of a scandal was held at a distance from Chamberlain's Ministry) were able to incrementally influence policy until such time as the Cabinet came to its senses in the wake of the *Anschluss*. While a few broad strokes were laid in this chapter, the next portion of this study will focus on identifying the policy stances, beliefs, and perceptions of key Cabinet players at the start of the Phony Peace in order to determine the true effects of Germany's involvement in Spain.

⁸⁰ Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, 631.

CHAPTER 3

BASELINE BRITISH PERCEPTIONS AT THE START OF THE PHONY PEACE

An understanding of Britain's initial images and biases is necessary in order to determine any effects of Germany's intervention in Spain on British perception and policy. That the British reacted differently to German actions in Austria in 1938 than they did to the Rhineland in 1936 is a given. Generally, over the two years in question, British perception swung from a *laissez faire* attitude towards Hitler's seemingly minor machinations to one of growing alarm both to Germany's relative aggression and strength. The question pertinent to this research is whether or not their view of Germany in March 1938 was: a) swayed solely by the *Anschluss*, b) represented a clear evolution in perception owing to Germany's involvement in the Spanish Civil War, or c) if German intervention had culminated in a clear British image unchanged by Austria. Collective security was foremost in British foreign policy during this time, and will be used to test any changes in perceptions.

This policy banner was useful as the British Cabinet had to respond to a number of other influences during the Phony Peace, ranging from a public opinion that at times bordered on ignorance to internal party bickering and constant warnings from its partners and allies.⁸¹ The 1936 episode in particular hinged on those points, but a clearer policy

⁸¹ Among other events of note, in 1936 Great Britain was dealing with the fallout of Italy's invasion of Abyssinia and the sanctions regime it had attempted (with minimal success) to enact against Italy at the League of Nations. Japanese aggression against China would become another flashpoint in 1937. Arguably; however, the Spanish Civil War represented the single biggest ongoing crisis in British policy—its prominence as the first item of interest in Cabinet discussions over a multi-year period lends credence to such a suggestion.

had by this point formed out of the roughshod “collective security” planning undertaken first by MacDonald and then by Baldwin two years earlier. That Chamberlain had rejected collective security as a viable policy following Eden’s resignation is also clear in the history, but the secondary question this research will answer is how German intervention in Spain may have set the stage to enable him to do so. Much of this solidification was owed to Chamberlain's unwavering belief in his own ideas, yet the resulting Cabinet decisions did occasionally break from outside pressure owing to intelligence or observations gathered from abroad (particularly in Spain and the League of Nations seat in Geneva). In 1936, however, Chamberlain was not yet the primary policy driver.

The Land of the Blind

Apart from the events in Spain, the British Cabinet was primarily influenced by public opinion leading up to and during the Phony Peace. While that opinion was initially shaped by war weariness and guilt caused by World War I and the Versailles Treaty, the Spanish Civil War turned into a major source of domestic tension starting in July 1936. Though many in the public sphere were guilty of the same perceptive fallacies as their politicians, the events in Spain (particularly atrocities) did play a role in prepping the British public for the more forward-leaning policies that began to appear in 1938 around the *Anschluss*. Though addressed in part previously, a further discussion of public opinion is warranted given how those positions were directly cited not only by British policymakers but also German intelligence in shaping its own foreign policies at the start of the Phony Peace.

The British Cabinet acted both as shrewd politicians and consummate republicans in their handling of public opinion throughout the 1930s. From relying on press clippings and polls to sending Members of Parliament out to canvass their districts ahead of major policy decisions, the British public's voice truly mattered. At the same time, this caused the Cabinet to forsake British interests in favor of public opinion in certain instances. Apart from the earlier example *vis-a-vis* Baldwin's rejection of campaigning on accelerating rearmament in the 1935 elections, consider Britain's strategic interests in Spain. Captain B.H. Liddell Hart, one the preeminent interwar military thinkers in Great Britain, wrote to the British Minister of War, Leslie Hore-Belisha, in March 1938 that "a friendly Spain is desirable, a neutral Spain is vital" to preserving British access to the Straits of Gibraltar and Suez Canal.⁸² Since, however, "a sincere desire for peace together with a passionate anti-Communism were the points that united" the Conservative Party, combined with the perception that "the British Right [saw] only the excesses of the Spanish Left," the Cabinet was disinclined to act against the public's wishes to support a Spanish Republican government they did not wish to win.⁸³ Germany, for its part, sought to manipulate this tendency.

A superb example of Germany's ability to gauge both the British public and its impact on the Cabinet is the German Embassy's intelligence gathering throughout March 1936. Ambassador Leopold v. Hoesch relayed his staff's conclusions every few days at the start of the Rhineland crisis, and his caution to the Foreign Ministry at the end of each

⁸² Quoted in Watkins, *Britain Divided*, 4-5.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 86-87.

dispatch is enlightening. On March 10, for example, he compared the situation in London to that of July 1914 when “then, too, public opinion was at first much inclined to be favourably disposed towards the Central Powers . . . [but] the picture quickly changed . . . I have recalled this experience solely as an example of the fact that a sympathetic attitude on the part of public opinion is no absolutely reliable assurance.”⁸⁴ The fickle public would be v. Hoesch's broken record over the next month. As the British public's response to Germany remained solid throughout the Phony Peace, however, Hitler gained additional leverage over the British Cabinet given their reliance on that metric. Joachim von Ribbentrop, who succeeded v. Hoesch as German ambassador, noted decisively a year after the Remilitarization of the Rhineland that “British public opinion is well disposed to Germany on the whole, and it is therefore a question of winning over the governing stratum.”⁸⁵ He would later report that “England desires peace . . . [I]n spite of the sharp line followed at present . . . we can continue to count on this as an absolutely certain factor and can make our future decisions without being influenced or disturbed.”⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Leopold v. Hoesch, “The mood and situation in England,” March 10, 1936, Document no. 66: 769/270865, *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Series C (1933-1937), *The Third Reich: First Phase*, Vol. V, March-October 1936, ed. Margaret Lambert et al. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1966), 94.

⁸⁵ Joachim v. Ribbentrop, “Report on the Coronation and the present situation,” May 21, 1937, Document no. 380: 1465/367370-80, *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Series C (1933-1937), *The Third Reich: First Phase*, Vol. VI: November 1, 1936—November 14, 1937, ed. Margaret Lambert et al. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1966), 782.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Watkins, *Britain Divided*, 82. Note: Watkins cites a memorandum from v. Ribbentrop to the Foreign Ministry, Document no. 376, dated July 4, 1937, which does not appear in the American version of *Documents on German Foreign Policy*. This

In this scenario, German perception of British opinion matched that of the Cabinet, and this alignment would turn out to be crucial on certain topics during the Phony Peace. German estimations of public opinion—and the British Cabinet's use of it—would occur frequently during the Phony Peace and on occasion give Hitler a chance to manipulate proceedings. At the start of this period, however, the Cabinet seemed well in control of its readings both of the British public and of Hitler.

The Winds of War: March 7, 1936

While on the surface the British response to the Remilitarization of the Rhineland appears simple, the Cabinet deliberations and their personal musings evince a group divided in perception if eventually unified in action. What were at times deep misgivings between the Royal Armed Forces, Foreign Office, and the Cabinet were ultimately bridged first by a glimpse at public opinion and, eventually, resignation as to their available options. If Great Britain signaled general apathy to Hitler's first truly aggressive move, behind the scenes Anthony Eden and others refused to cede the initiative to Germany for several months thereafter. In terms of appeasement, the Rhineland crisis shook the Cabinet's faith in collective security. Ironically, they had previously asserted that it would be their allies who would be the first to budge when called to action. The British Cabinet that emerged after the crisis had begun to subside in April 1936 would place greater emphasis on both rearmament and bilateral negotiations—with the exception of Eden and his preference for collective security. This distinction matters

memorandum can be found in the earlier British version, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series D, III (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1951).

because at the outset of the Spanish Civil War Eden would have immense control over foreign policy. This occurred because from mid-1936 until his retirement Baldwin was otherwise absent or diverted from the majority of Cabinet decisions. They both, however, in attempting to calculate Germany's motives were clouded by their earlier perceptions and experiences with Hitler.

Though Hitler attempted to surprise the rest of the world with a move literally calculated to catch his enemies napping on a Saturday morning, the British and their allies saw the remilitarization attempt coming. His orders to the German Chiefs of Staff were issued in early February 1936, and while French intelligence was “generally aware” of the intent of German mobilization and troop movement in the following days, the French were unable to agree on any deterrent measures.⁸⁷ The only French action came via a warning from its Foreign Minister, Pierre-Étienne Flandin, to Eden at Geneva that France would invoke the Locarno Treaty if Germany did make its move.⁸⁸ In Great Britain, Baldwin called a special Cabinet meeting for two days later (March 5) to allow Eden to discuss both the Locarno Treaty and possible German actions in the “Demilitarized Zone” (DMZ). The Cabinet's conclusions are almost stunning. The meeting's minutes say it best:

In the course of the discussion it was suggested in present circumstances that Germany was unlikely to commit a “flagrant” breach of Articles 42 or 43 of the Treaty of Versailles which under Article 2.1 of the Treaty contemplated “an unprovoked act of aggression” and the “assembly of armed forces in the demilitarized zone”—that is to say a threat of an actual invasion of France.

⁸⁷ Klaus Hildebrand, *The Foreign Policy of the Third Reich*, trans. Anthony Fothergill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973; reprint, *Deutsche Aussenpolitik 1933-1945*, Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1970), 42.

⁸⁸ Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 60.

Germany was already understood to have violated the demilitarized zone to the extent that she had more aerodromes than she was entitled to and more police. Any violation she made was likely to take the form of equipping barracks and eventually placing garrisons in them *which was hardly a flagrant aggression*.⁸⁹

The emphasis on the last clause is hardly needed to underscore the hypothesis that, at least ahead of time, the British Cabinet did not view the Remilitarization of the Rhine as a particularly noteworthy event. Given that Sir Eric Phipps, the British Ambassador to Germany, had reported following a meeting with Hitler in December 1935 that the “Zone will be re-occupied whenever a favorable excuse presents itself,”⁹⁰ this outcome is less surprising since the British had deliberated over such an outcome up until it actually occurred. The Cabinet on March 5 thus calculated Germany's “favorable excuse” in denouncing the Locarno Treaty: that the recently ratified Franco-Soviet Pact of February 27 had violated it.⁹¹ They also predicted that France would acknowledge their “present military situation,” but as the crisis unfolded before Eden could transmit a response to Flandin, the British were forced to reexamine their assumptions throughout the Spring of 1936.

⁸⁹ “The Locarno Treaty,” CAB 15(36), 23/83, March 5, 1936, 5. Emphasis added.

⁹⁰ Quoted in Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 58.

⁹¹ Eden was particularly prescient on this matter. When Ambassador v. Hoesch hand delivered Germany's memorandum stating its intentions in the Rhineland to him on the morning of March 7, he declared in his report back to the German Foreign Ministry that after Eden accused Hitler of repudiating Locarno, V. Hoesch had “then explained that we had not repudiated Locarno, but that on the contrary France, by concluding her alliance with Russia, had destroyed the legal and spiritual foundations of Locarno.” The full text of v. Hoesch's Airgram no. 35 appears as Document no. 21, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, V, 41-43.

Following Germany's Saturday incursion into the DMZ as well as Eden's terse conversation with Ambassador v. Hoesch upon receiving Germany's official notice of its move, the Cabinet met again on Monday, March 9. With a meeting to take place with Flandin the following day in Paris, Eden had already set the table over the weekend in a conversation with the French Foreign Ministry in which he reminded them that "we must not close our eyes to the fact that counter-proposals were offered and these would have a very considerable effect on public opinion."⁹² Given the prior conversation, Eden's argument was that the DMZ violation was not in effect a collective security breach. Rather, the issue came down to Germany's continued argument for equality of status both diplomatically and militarily. Still, collective security provided a needed buffer to allow the Cabinet time to both quell French fervor and fully analyze Hitler's proposals. To that end, the Cabinet approved the speech Eden gave to the House of Commons that night before leaving Paris. Ostensibly addressing the public, he remarked that Germany's actions had "profoundly shaken confidence in" its reliability, which itself undermined "the sanctity of treaties which underlies the whole structure of international relations."⁹³ For the next few months, the British Foreign Secretary, with the Cabinet's backing, would play an outsize role in determining—and championing—British policy towards Germany. Eden's main focus at the start of the Phony Peace was then on those same collective

⁹² Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 341.

⁹³ Eden, "Germany Reoccupies the Rhineland," Speech in the House of Commons, March 9, 1936, *Foreign Affairs* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939), 91.

security treaties. His actions (and reactions) can best be explained by examining his perception both of the crisis and German intentions.

Eden's view of the German breach of the DMZ is calculated and calm. He accurately judged the public, writing that "most members of the British public would certainly see little harm in Hitler's action. It would merely appear that he was taking full possession of territory which was his by right."⁹⁴ Personally, he judged Hitler's actions similarly, seeing that his

timing was perfect, including the usual choice of a weekend . . . Hitler aroused resentment by his deed and created watchful foes. What is surprising is that this man could repeat the exercise so often in later years and still find many to excuse him . . . I could not forget how Hitler had spoken to me of Locarno;⁹⁵ if he was not to be believed in this, he could not be believed in anything.⁹⁶

Eden would carry this distrust forward regarding Hitler's breach of the "spirit of Locarno." This spirit stemmed from the fact that in his first meeting with Hitler, the Chancellor had apparently remarked to Eden that the Locarno Treaty of 1925 was more valid than Versailles. Hitler related that his differing stance derived from how the Weimar Republic had "freely" entered into it opposed to the forced conditions of 1918-1919. Since the terms of Locarno were acceptable as well, Eden (among others) believed

⁹⁴ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 340. Eden further remarks in his memoirs that he would read *The Times* and talk to citizens to gauge the general opinion. On Page 346, he relates how his taxi driver, on the day after the crisis began, stated what would become the famous British response to the whole situation, that "Jerry can do what he likes in his own back garden, can't he?"

⁹⁵ In his first meeting with Hitler, the Chancellor had apparently remarked to Eden that the Locarno Treaty of 1925 was more valid than Versailles given that the Weimar Republic had "freely" entered into it opposed to the forced conditions of 1918-1919.

⁹⁶ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 340-341.

it would survive Germany's push for equality of status. The violation of that attitude with a show of force therefore dictated a firm response. Right before leaving for France, Eden cautioned the House of Commons, "let us not delude ourselves" just because "there is . . . no reason to suppose that the present German action implies any threat of hostilities."⁹⁷ In France, Eden and Lord Halifax⁹⁸ were surprised when they "discovered that [British] policy of condemning the German action and then developing a constructive policy to re-establish the European situation had no chance of acceptance."⁹⁹ Still, they were able to convince Flandin that a full meeting of the Locarno Powers (to include Belgium and Italy) was needed to determine the proper course rather than uni- or bilateral action against Germany. This action preserved the collective security apparatus which Locarno represented.

Just as the Locarno Treaty was still to be in effect, Flandin also sought to bring in other multilateral actors. He would take his case directly to London ahead of time: he wanted League of Nations-style sanctions to occur immediately, to which Eden initially demurred and Chamberlain later cited the public reaction in noting them to be unwise.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Eden, "Germany Reoccupies the Rhineland," *Foreign Affairs*, 91.

⁹⁸ Edward Wood, at the time serving as Viscount Halifax in the House of Lords, served as the Lord Privy Seal under Baldwin and later Chamberlain. He also had a dual role as Eden's Deputy Foreign Secretary and would serve in Eden's stead when he was ill or on vacation. Halifax accompanied Eden throughout the 1936 crisis.

⁹⁹ "The Locarno Treaty—German Reoccupation of the Demilitarised Zone," CAB 18(36), 23/83, March 11, 1936, 2.

¹⁰⁰ Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, 566-567. As Mowat cites, the Conservative paper *The Spectator* would write on June 19, 1936 of sanctions that "it was once believed that [the Englishman] would fight . . . That can no longer be assumed."

Here, Eden's judgment was likely clouded by the outcome of the sanctions regime against Italy which he had designed—many League of Nations members were by that point ignoring them. His own writings or speeches do not provide conclusive evidence that he did not fully consider such a course of action, but he still went in a different direction. The same evening as Flandin's request (March 11), Eden proposed to the Cabinet a new policy which became his special burden throughout the crisis: to request Hitler to reduce the Rhineland garrison and pledge not to construct fortifications in the DMZ during broader negotiations.¹⁰¹ Though backed by France, Eden's efforts towards this initiative through mid-1936 were conducted bilaterally through diplomatic channels with Germany. This departure from collective security would be brief, indicating that Eden either had not learned from the failure of Locarno or the Italian sanctions or, more likely, was easily frustrated by German diplomatic tactics.

Baldwin and Chamberlain were especially cautious during the crisis. The latter, through his role as Chancellor of the Exchequer, filled the most prominent Cabinet role and chose the Rhineland negotiations as the place in which he would begin to assert himself on matters beyond the British budget. A peer noted of Chamberlain at the time that he "seemed to take particular care not to hurt Germany's feelings," and joined his PM in shooting down Eden's early petition to engage the French in military staff talks.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ "The Locarno Treaty—German Reoccupation of the Demilitarised Zone," CAB 18(36), 23/83, March 11, 1936, 3.

¹⁰² Gilbert and Gott, *The Appeasers*, 42. Eden proposed such staff talks following Germany's acceptance to join in discussions related to its re-entry into the League of Nations. In a (then) secret memorandum to the British Cabinet, he noted that in any multilateral environment, the entangling web of mutual assistance pacts required such staff talks for coordination. For more information on his concept, see Eden, "Germany and the Locarno Treaty," C.P. 79(36), Foreign Office, March 15, 1936. The full text of

They were not persuaded by Duff Cooper, the War Secretary, who commented ahead of the Locarno talks that “in three years' time [1939], though we should have reconditioned at any rate to some extent our small forces . . . Germany would have 100 divisions and a powerful fleet. We should not relatively, therefore, be in a better position.”¹⁰³ Baldwin's reply to this concerned the fact that in democracies, “that a good deal of time was taken to educate public opinion and get a plan accepted, and consequently [Britain was] now caught at a disadvantage;” Chamberlain simply noted “that it was the task of this country to try and bring France and Germany together” rather than fight.¹⁰⁴ Chamberlain wrote to his sisters just following the crisis that he believed collective security could not succeed, and that he wanted to “reform the League and develop a series of regional pacts.”¹⁰⁵ This was based on his belief—backed by some evidence to that point—that Hitler “did not believe in multi-lateral pacts and preferred bi-lateral arrangements.”¹⁰⁶ He was thus surprised when Eden's proposals to Germany, which would be enforced by a broader

the Cabinet discussion on this topic appears under “Germany and the Locarno Treaty—Military Conversations,” CAB 21(36), 23/83, March 18, 1936, 9-10.

¹⁰³ “The Locarno Treaty—German Reoccupation of the Demilitarised Zone,” CAB 18(36), 23/83, March 11, 1936, 8.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Charmley, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace*, 23. This letter was written in April 1936.

¹⁰⁶ Chamberlain, “The Locarno Treaty—German Re-occupation of Demilitarised Zone—The Present Situation,” CAB 20(36), 23/83, March 12, 1936, 5.

“Second Locarno,” received broad support in the House of Commons.¹⁰⁷ Germany overplayed its hand in the meantime, however, leading to broader multilateral appeals.

As the Locarno Powers, with the exception of Germany,¹⁰⁸ met in London beginning March 12, 1936, the German Embassy passed a flurry of notes back to Berlin on the situation in Great Britain. Ambassador v. Hoesch met with British opposition leaders such as Lord Lothian,¹⁰⁹ who cautioned that “should the agitation against Germany be intensified, and should any really dangerous factors emerge, public opinion might swing.”¹¹⁰ When Eden then brought his proposals to v. Hoesch (for reducing the Rhineland garrisons and foregoing the construction of fortifications), Hitler bowed ever so slightly. While stating categorically that any issue of sovereignty was “out of the question where [Germany is] concerned,” he ceded that their garrison strength “will not for the time being be increased. There is at present no intention of moving these troops

¹⁰⁷ Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 66.

¹⁰⁸ Italy, it should be noted, was in a particularly foul mood owing to the League of Nations sanctions regime still in place over its conquest of Ethiopia. When Eden had pressed this issue in Paris, the Italian Ambassador to France had somewhat snidely replied that Italy “could not undertake any obligations while they themselves were exposed to sanctions.” Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 4.

¹⁰⁹ Philip Henry Kerr, the Marquess of Lothian, had served under Prime Minister Lloyd George from 1916-1922 and later ascended to the House of Lords. He is most famous for his role in including the War Guilt Clause in the Versailles Treaty, for which he not only would apologize but would also guide his efforts to as an adviser to Baldwin and Chamberlain in implementing appeasement.

¹¹⁰ v. Hoesch, “The Ambassador in Great Britain to the Foreign Ministry,” March 11, 1936, Document no. 74, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, V, 103.

nearer the French or Belgian border.”¹¹¹ Hitler then authorized the publication of this response, and Lothian's predicted swing in opinion did briefly occur, much to Germany's dismay.

With Germany making public Eden's negotiation terms, as well as its response, the Locarno negotiations almost immediately stalled. Chamberlain, who at the Locarno sessions had responded to Eden's proposal that “to prohibit the erection of fortifications in the Rhineland would be very difficult as Herr Hitler was extremely tender about his sovereign right,”¹¹² in essence predicted the official German response which came that day. Eden, however, had himself noted back to v. Hoesch when delivered that reply “that the content of [Germany's] communication would hardly contribute to a solution of the crisis,”¹¹³ and the public agreed with him. The German Military Attaché, Leo Geyer Freiherr von Schweppenburg,¹¹⁴ for instance, reported back that “an observer outside the Embassy whom I have come to know as an exceptionally good judge” derided the German stance and explanation as “not sufficiently serious.”¹¹⁵ V. Hoesch would

¹¹¹ Dieckhoff, Hans-Heinrich, “Memorandum by Ministerialdirektor Dickhoff,” March 12, 1936, Document no. 84: 6710/E506742-43, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, V, 113.

¹¹² Chamberlain, “The Locarno Treaty—German Re-occupation of Demilitarised Zone—The Present Situation,” CAB 20(36), 23/83, March 12, 1936, 4.

¹¹³ v. Hoesch, “The Ambassador in Great Britain to the Foreign Ministry,” March 12, 1936, Document no. 85, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, V, 116.

¹¹⁴ His full name was Leo Dietrich Franz Freiherr Geyr von Schweppenburg, however in all his memos he signed his name “Frh. v. Geyr.”

¹¹⁵ v. Schweppenburg, “Personal impressions in London on March 12, evening,” Document no. 87, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, V, 119.

describe the public German dismissal of Eden's proposal as a “shift of opinion . . . [which] has in the meantime made considerable progress, to our disadvantage.”¹¹⁶ V. Schweppenburg and the other Attachés to Britain would finally conclude to the German War Minister, Werner v. Blomberg, that “the situation [in London] should be regarded as exceptionally grave. An extremely unfavourable development may occur in the next few days.”¹¹⁷ Fortunately for Germany, an olive branch from the Locarno delegation gave Germany a way out which also definitively swung public perception back in its favor.

On March 14, amid overtures from Hitler that he would be willing to rejoin the League of Nations, an official offer to have a German delegation attend such negotiations was extended. German Foreign Minister Konstantin v. Neurath quickly accepted, and on March 18 dispatched Joachim v. Ribbentrop to London to lead that delegation. In his next weekly update, Ambassador v. Hoesch reported that this acceptance had been greeted in Great Britain “by a sigh of relief, for it was assumed that the danger of war had thereby been finally dispelled.”¹¹⁸ Though opinions on all side would sour as the negotiations sputtered between March 18-20, much of the blame actually went towards *French* intransigence rather than Germany. Eden generally sided with French (and to a lesser extent, Belgian) gloom about an impending general conflict. The Cabinet believed, however, it to be more “expedient to let M[onsieur] Flandin return to Paris in order to tell

¹¹⁶ v. Hoesch, “The Ambassador in Great Britain to the Foreign Ministry,” March 13, 1936, Document no. 91, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, V, 127.

¹¹⁷ Various, “Memorandum to Field Marshal von Blomberg,” March 13, 1936, Document no. 98, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, V, 134.

¹¹⁸ v. Hoesch, “The first phase of the crisis,” March 21, 1936, Document no. 178, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, V, 238.

the French people that [Britain] would not support France,” the logic being that “in view of the precarious position of the French Government, it was not worthwhile to make any concessions to them.”¹¹⁹ Germany did receive some of the blame, though; following v. Neurath's terse dismissal that the eventual League of Nations proposal to Germany represented “nothing more than a deliberate humiliation,”¹²⁰ v. Hoesch cautioned that public opinion “has been hardening more and more against the outcome of the consultations.”¹²¹ With v. Ribbentrop's mission to London failing¹²² in part due to the aggressive French position, it came down to Eden to soften the dialogue and ultimately end the immediate crisis.

With the Locarno discussions having ended and Flandin returning to Paris ahead of the forthcoming French elections, Eden met in private with v. Ribbentrop on March 19. In Eden's words, v. Ribbentrop “reacted violently” against several of the proposals,

¹¹⁹ “Germany and the Locarno Treaty—The French General Case,” CAB 21(36), 23/83, March 18, 1936, 12. Interestingly, some Cabinet members feared aloud that if Flandin reported this outcome to his public that his government would fall and might be replaced by one “anxious to ally itself with Germany.”

¹²⁰ v. Neurath, “The Foreign Minister to the Ambassador in Great Britain,” March 21, 1936, Document no. 176, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, V, 231. He later made a public response sometime in April 1936 which went on to state that “if the Reich German Government were to express their agreement to this proposal they would share the responsibility for the inevitable results, namely, a continued inner rejection of the humiliating subjection upon the German people under such conditions. The German Government will, however, not do this.” See Document no. 207, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, V, 285.

¹²¹ v. Hoesch, “The Ambassador in Great Britain to the Foreign Ministry,” March 25, 1936, Document no. 212, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, V, 293.

¹²² If Hitler's and v. Neurath's goal was for v. Ribbentrop to stall until such time as the negotiations break down, then perhaps it should not be viewed as a failure.

most especially the staff talks which Eden had in the end been able to include against Chamberlain's and Baldwin's wishes.¹²³ Halifax was astonished at this turn of events, later remarking publicly that “we want no encirclement of Germany. We want no exclusive alliances” which the staff talks may have suggested.¹²⁴ Believing French concerns to be valid, an uncowed Eden presented the Locarno proposals to the House of Commons on March 20. There he laid out his view of “the efforts which we must make to replace the Locarno Treaty,”¹²⁵ and now made the initiative his own. Knowing the provisional proposals to be doomed, his focus became not an agreement in principle, but a new round of negotiations that would come to be called “Second Locarno.” Asked for time by the Commons to review the proposals in depth, he presented the logic to the Cabinet on March 25 that regardless of the official German response, the French elections presented an opportunity both to stall for time until negotiations could continue and to conduct additional bilateral discussions with Germany.¹²⁶ In other words, perhaps to save

¹²³ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 361-362. According to Eden, Baldwin had appeared “anxious” on the idea of staff talks before the League of Nations proposal had been debated in the House of Commons; he feared that “the boys won't have it” in the Conservative Party.

¹²⁴ Edward Wood (writing as Viscount Halifax), “German Reoccupation of the Rhineland,” Speech in Bristol, March 23, 1936, *Speeches on Foreign Policy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), 37. Germany's professed logic was that owing both to Anglo-French and Franco-Soviet talks, an encircling effect was achieved. Given that the latter had supposedly launched the crisis, Eden and Baldwin would tentatively offer to include the German staff in those coordinating talks. As with so many other items in 1936, though the Anglo-French talks would proceed the promising idea of including Germany would not come to pass.

¹²⁵ Eden, “Germany and Locarno,” Speech in the House of Commons, March 20, 1936, *Foreign Affairs*, 101.

¹²⁶ Eden, “Germany and the Locarno Treaty,” CAB 24(36), 23/83, March 25, 1936, 1-2. His full comment was recorded as, “the fundamental point was to arrange a

collective security Eden believed he would be forced to rely on bilateral methods until British allies were again ready to participate. With the Cabinet's approval, Eden now had to sell this vision both to Parliament and the British public.

On March 26, Eden provided Parliament both open debate and one of the strongest speeches of his career. At one point dismissing Germany's illusion that “nobody has ever heard of the *diktat* of Locarno,” Eden reminded the House of Commons that having not only signed, but having originally proposed many of Locarno's points, Germany itself had hoped “that some guarantee from us . . . would be of service to her.”¹²⁷ He dismissed the doves who “mean we must turn a blind eye to all that happens in Europe, [which] is to take no account at all of realities.”¹²⁸ His famous line, “that it is the appeasement of Europe as a whole that we have constantly before us,” somewhat overshadows the point he later made in that speech which set out the policy Britain ultimately would follow as a result of the crisis: Britain's “policy is the Covenant and our membership of the League.”¹²⁹ Collective security, then, was the means to secure the

meeting of the Locarno Powers. It was, however, necessary to gain time so that negotiations should be postponed until after the French elections.” The key phrase here is “Locarno Powers,” meaning the inclusion of Germany in any future negotiations—in all previous Cabinet deliberations and minutes the delegation in London had been referred to as “the Locarno Powers, except Germany.” V. Ribbentrop had not arrived until after the other four Powers had completed their negotiations, but nor had Germany been invited except to the Council of the League of Nations.

¹²⁷ Eden, “The Effort to Rebuild,” Speech in the House of Commons, March 26, 1936, *Foreign Affairs*, 104-105.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 116 and 118. Eden elucidated this policy practically in bullet form, stating that “our objectives in this are threefold—first, to avert the danger of war; second to create conditions in which negotiations can take place; and third, to bring about the

appeasement of Europe. Finally, and most importantly, Eden beseeched the British public that “we cannot ensure peace if you refuse to take upon yourselves obligations to assist us at this time.”¹³⁰ Among the only dissenters to Eden's pleas were elements in the Labour Party and, not surprisingly, v. Ribbentrop himself.¹³¹ The speech had its intended effect though, both on the British public and in Germany. Remarking on it, Ambassador v. Hoesch reported back to Berlin that “Eden's speech went a long way towards weakening such opposition as was present in the House . . . [any risk] appears to have been dispelled by Eden's effective intervention.”¹³² Elements in the German military were even ready to compromise on some of Eden's proposals such as a prohibition on fortifications; though War Minister v. Blomberg suggested that the *Wehrmacht* was indeed willing to forego such construction for a period of six months, Foreign Minister v. Neurath declined to pass this offer on to the British.¹³³ Despite v. Neurath's reaction, v. Blomberg still issued a memorandum to all German soldiers garrisoned in or visiting the Rhineland that they must not approach within five kilometers of the French border while in uniform.¹³⁴

success of those negotiations so that they may strengthen collective security . . . [negotiations] which are indispensable to the appeasement of Europe to take place.”

¹³⁰ Ibid., Page 118.

¹³¹ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 366.

¹³² v. Hoesch, “The Ambassador in Great Britain to the Foreign Ministry,” March 27, 1936, Document no. 223, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, V, 317-318.

¹³³ Unknown, March 27, 1936, Document no. 230, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, V, 331.

¹³⁴ Unknown, March 31, 1936, Document no. 240, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, V, 353.

Though Germany's official rejection of the proposal came on March 31,¹³⁵ the peak of the crisis had sufficiently passed, to be followed by months of stagnant discussions on “Second Locarno.”

The Rhineland crisis had not surprised Great Britain but did subtly alter its perception of Germany's intentions and capabilities. For his part, Eden would later write how he noticed “shifts in power” resulting from “the gangster nations outside [the League] approaching equality in strength with the decimated League . . . [I had] to strengthen our alliances, hasten our rearmament, and inform British opinion.”¹³⁶ Halifax, who in his position as Lord Privy Seal had accompanied Eden for most of the discussions, remarked in a speech addressing German appeals for equal status that “the German Government [must] in fact recognize the duties towards all Europe that such equal rights entail . . . [T]rust begets trust.”¹³⁷ Following Eden's speech which had pacified the House of Commons on March 26, Baldwin had joined in that debate, stating along the lines of how “the British frontier was no longer the chalk cliffs of Dover but the

¹³⁵ Hitler's reply practically dripped with vitriol: “in the eyes of the German people and of their Government, this draft lacks that spirit of understanding of the laws of honor and equality of status.” The rest of the German reply, however, spelled out what Hitler intended as his “Peace Plan” for Europe, which Eden also rejected as making “no further contribution” to negotiations. Hitler, March 31, 1936, Document no. 242, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, V, 355.

¹³⁶ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 368.

¹³⁷ Lord Halifax, “Britain's Obligations to France and Belgium,” Speech to the House of Lords, April 8, 1936, *Speeches on Foreign Policy*, 50-51. His other remarks were borderline hawkish, including [on Page 47] how “it is a real guarantee of peace that it should be plainly stated in advance that this country would resist with all the means at its disposal any wanton disturbance of the peace.”

Rhine.”¹³⁸ On the other hand, Lloyd George would visit Hitler a few months later, and be so swayed that he penned in the *Daily Express* that under the Führer Germany no longer wanted “to invade any other land.”¹³⁹ A broad swath of British politicians and prominent press members, known as the “Cliveden Set,”¹⁴⁰ effectively summed up the remaining Cabinet's overall position as of April 1936, in which the Remilitarization of the Rhineland was viewed as a “demonstration of recovered status and equality and not an act of aggression.”¹⁴¹ This dichotomy in perception would be reflected in British appeasement policy—both real and proposed—through the rest of the Phony Peace.

Amid the palpable unease which pervaded the Cabinet in the wake of the Remilitarization of the Rhineland, Baldwin set up a series of focus committees. The Foreign Policy Committee was chartered April 30, 1936, and intended to afford better collaboration and discussion among the Cabinet and its offices. At Eden's suggestion, Baldwin also stood up the Plymouth Committee, which would study the topic of colonial concessions in response to Hitler's appeal for their return in his March 7 *Reichstag*

¹³⁸ Furnia, *The Diplomacy of Appeasement*, 197-198.

¹³⁹ David Lloyd George, “I Talked to Hitler,” *Daily Express*, September 16, 1936, quoted in Gilbert and Gott, *The Appeasers*, 36.

¹⁴⁰ The name Cliveden Set referred to the home of Nancy Astor where most of the group's meetings took place and was in fact a derogatory moniker offered up by Claud Cockburn, an editor of the Communist newspaper *The Week*. Though Cockburn accused the Cliveden Set of running a “shadow cabinet” during the Rhineland crisis, in fact many of the group's members *were* in the Cabinet, such as Halifax, or played advisory roles such as Lothian when he spoke on behalf of Labour. More information on this group can be found in either Gilbert and Gott, *The Appeasers*, Chapter 2, or in John L. Spivak, *Secret Armies* (New York: Modern Age Books, 1939).

¹⁴¹ Gilbert and Gott, *The Appeasers*, 42. Quotation attributed to Thomas Jones, writing following a meeting of the Cliveden Set on March 8, 1936.

speech. With the former only meeting sporadically and the latter not reporting back its conclusion until July 1936, rather than dally amid indecision Eden surged forward on what he thought was a mandate to pursue collective security. The response from his efforts to calm the nerves among the Locarno Powers would have bolstered this perception. Lord Halifax also voiced this logic against Britain's likely alternatives, concluding that "the policy, which in my view alone affords any real hope for the future . . . [is] loyalty to the League of Nations and acceptance of the collective obligations of the Covenant."¹⁴² Though Halifax's opinion was, unfortunately, mostly "his view alone," until such time as the Spanish Civil War presented other opportunities, the primary means in which Eden sought collective security was through Second Locarno. While both entities will receive greater treatment in forthcoming chapters, their introduction here serves simply as a reminder that they had their origins in the Rhineland, not Spain. Rearmament, on the other hand, actually predates both events.

While the British did drastically raise the defense budget in 1936, the move had little to do with the events in Germany. With the British fiscal year following an April 1—March 31 schedule, owing to Neville Chamberlain's support of the rearmament proposals the defense share of the budget increased from 17.7 percent in 1935 to 22.4 percent in 1936.¹⁴³ On March 2, with events already in motion but the die not yet cast,

¹⁴² Lord Halifax, "Germany Military Reoccupation of the Rhineland," Speech in Bristol, March 23, 1936, *Speeches on Foreign Policy*, 34. Halifax notes collective security's lesser alternatives in policy as "a return to the old system of [Balance of Power] alliances . . . [which] gives no encouragement to hope that war would not again result," or an isolation which "we have never been privileged to put into practice [as] we cannot be both of the world and out of it."

¹⁴³ Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, 568-569.

Chamberlain in his role as Chancellor of the Exchequer backed a White Paper entitled “Statement relating to Defence”¹⁴⁴ before the Cabinet which called for a plethora of military improvements: a new aircraft carrier along with two more battleships for the Royal Navy, a modernization program (to include four new battalions) for the army, and 250 airplanes for the Royal Air Force. In fact, during the discussion Chamberlain cautioned the Cabinet that owing to other contingencies “it was therefore not possible to say that the increase of £50 million and £88 million showed in the Defence Policy and Requirements Committee's Report for the next two years are increases resulting from the proposals in the White Paper.”¹⁴⁵ In other words, the military would be undergoing cuts elsewhere to pay for their new equipment and this budget increase was therefore capability neutral. While the increased defense budget would seem to suggest heightened tension with Germany, the budget having been set *before* the Remilitarization of the Rhineland removes rearmament from the perception equation in 1936. The White Paper would be published March 3, and the 1936-1937 budget that same week, with debate continuing throughout the proceeding months as if the Rhineland crisis had never even occurred.

Even after German troops had violated the DMZ, Clement Atlee, speaking on behalf of the Labour Party, lambasted Chamberlain's proposals as indicative not of collective security but of “going back to nationalism and isolation, which cannot give us

¹⁴⁴ John Simon, then acting as the Home Secretary, was also credited for the White Paper.

¹⁴⁵ Chamberlain, “Programmes of the Defence Services,” CAB 13(36), 23/83, March 2, 1936, 1.

peace or security but merely leads us on to world war.”¹⁴⁶ Though Labour did not control the purse strings, so to speak, this line of thinking was not unique just to the opposition party even if their alternative wasn't widely accepted. Preferring their own program of disarmament despite indications throughout the continent that other nations were building and shipping arms (including to Spain), the Labour opposition continued to oppose rearmament well into late 1936. This staunch counter to the logic for rearmament suggested that the Labour Party overall either did not view German actions as a threat or ignored them altogether due to ideological bias. If the party had known of the Cabinet's other policies during 1936, their kettle may have boiled over.

The final method of appeasement solidified following the Remilitarization of the Rhineland came in direct, bilateral negotiations with Germany. Though many in the public likely would not have batted an eye to this development, the Conservative politicians especially feared how a “raw bargain” may affect their chances in the upcoming 1937 elections. Primarily, these negotiations concerned concessions either in the form of returning colonies given up in the wake of Versailles or of permitting a greater German sphere of influence in areas with large ethnic German populations (such as Austria, the Sudetenland, and portions of Poland). In this arena the tactical differences between Baldwin and Eden were stark. The latter would time and again petition v. Hoesch, v. Ribbentrop, and v. Neurath on the subject of fortifications and garrison levels, always attempting to undermine the logic they presented in defense of those policies. Eden's motive, in response to Hitler's proposal for a series of non-aggression pacts, was

¹⁴⁶ Clement Atlee, House of Commons Debate, March 9, 1936, quoted in Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, 568-569.

to effect a compromise ahead of his preferred multilateral Second Locarno negotiations. Baldwin, however, sided with those who took a less confrontational approach; when the Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet, Tom Jones,¹⁴⁷ remarked to him that “if it is our policy to get alongside Germany, then the sooner [Ambassador Sir Eric] Phipps is transferred elsewhere the better,” Baldwin carried through on the suggestion in order to, as Jones put it, “enter with sympathetic interest into Hitler's aspirations.”¹⁴⁸

Amidst ongoing discussions between Great Britain and Germany in the wake of the Rhineland crisis, little progress occurred. Eden continually appealed to both v. Hoesch and v. Ribbentrop on the question of drawing down Germany's garrison and foregoing fortification construction, but all he received in return were guarantees that Germany would not send additional troops and that fortifications could not be easily finished during the period of negotiations.¹⁴⁹ He would also work with the new French government under Leon Blum on a questionnaire asking Hitler to reveal his specific policies and intentions, but the latter simply refused to answer following a series of requests for additional time. These bilateral approaches were given up for dead that summer as Hitler's stalling paid off when a new crisis captured British attention: the

¹⁴⁷ A lifelong civil servant, Jones was had noted pro-German tendencies. In February 1936, for example, he would write in his diary of how “I keep on and on preaching against the policy of ostracizing Germany” despite how “incalculable” Hitler's policies may be. As cited in Gilbert and Gott, *The Appeasers* 40.

¹⁴⁸ T. Jones, May 23, 1936, *Diary with Letters*, quoted in Gilbert and Gott, *The Appeasers*, 37-38.

¹⁴⁹ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 370. Of v. Ribbentrop's reply that “it would be impossible, for technical reasons, to construct fortifications in the next four months,” Eden demurred that “this was not worth anything.”

outbreak of war in Spain. With rearmament as a policy having been largely installed, and bilateral negotiations put on pause, collective security remained as the foremost British appeasement policy in the summer of 1936.

Great Britain's collective security blueprint during the Phony Peace lent itself to three policy initiatives: the League of Nations, the Second Locarno Treaty, and the Non-Intervention Agreement in Spain. While only the latter was a child of events in Spain, all of those policies would be impacted by the German military intervention. To be clear, the existing public record already indicates that Italy's intervention had greater implications on some of these British policies (including the long-gestating Anglo-Italian Agreement) due to its brazen scope.¹⁵⁰ As an indirect causal mechanism, however, much of Italy's actions either drove a parallel German decision or were the result of coordination with Germany. The ensuing discussion will examine each policy with respect to how the events in Spain—and more importantly, the British Cabinet's view of and reactions to German involvement in those events—affected British collective security policies during the Phony Peace.

¹⁵⁰ Anthony Eden “particularly detested [Mussolini] . . . His distrust of Mussolini grew as the Italian dictator poured more troops into Spain.” Furnia, *The Diplomacy of Appeasement*, 275. Eden cited Italy's intervention in Spain, among other transgressions, as a reason for his policy split with Chamberlain at the time of his resignation on February 20, 1938.

CHAPTER 4

“A LEAGUE OF SOME NATIONS”

The revival of collective security within British foreign policy at the end of 1935 set the stage for its first responses to German aggression in 1936. As was already shown in the previous chapter, the British Cabinet did not view the Remilitarization of the Rhine in and of itself as a reason to either accelerate its rearmament programs or enter into sustained bilateral negotiations with Germany. As a result, it largely continued existing policies under its collective security banner. The British use of multilateral fora, in particular, to engage Germany (and other belligerents such as Italy and Portugal) continued as a strategy once the Spanish Civil War broke out in July 1936. Though the venue(s) would change throughout the Phony Peace, multilateralism achieved through collective security thus remained Britain's foremost policy. As before, French assertiveness and concerns at the outset of the Spanish Civil War did little, at least initially, to sway a British Cabinet driven by fears of broader entanglements. Even though Germany was not the greatest agitator in Spain,¹⁵¹ the collective Axis pursuits there starting in 1936 finally enabled the Cabinet to redefine its European position and settle its collective security identity crisis. As was hotly debated at the time, that position was not always to Britain's benefit nor to its allies'. This chapter explores the League of Nations, the oldest of the collective security policies and which, having carried over from the

¹⁵¹ That dishonor belongs to Italy, even if its benefits vastly outweighed Mussolini's and Ciano's investments in Spain.

Rhineland crisis, failed spectacularly once events in Spain enabled Germany to control the reform narrative.

As the Spanish Civil War first broke out and then expanded into a war of attrition, Anthony Eden became the British politician with the greatest impact. Prime Minister Baldwin was absent from the Cabinet for long periods due to illness, and would only return to a prominent role in October 1936, after most of the collective security policies were already well established. Even then, he was consumed with domestic affairs, particularly the Abdication Crisis. This event saw King Edward VIII admit to an adulterous affair and, owing to legal issues when he attempted to marry his lover, depart the throne. During the earliest phase of the Abdication Crisis, according to multiple sources, Baldwin retorted to Eden that in light of upcoming “difficulties” with the King, “I hope that you will try not to trouble me too much with foreign affairs just now.”¹⁵² After Edward had abdicated, Baldwin remained focused on the upcoming coronation of King George VI through May 1937, at which point he then retired. Eden was not entirely alone during this time, as Edward Wood (better known as Viscount Halifax) would continue along with his role as Lord Privy Seal to serve as the Acting Foreign Secretary during Eden's absences. Robert Vansittart, the Permanent Under-Secretary, and Lord Plymouth, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary within the Foreign Office, would also contribute at times. Neville Chamberlain began to assert himself in foreign affairs beginning in March 1937, by which point championing the League of Nations—a policy

¹⁵² Eden provides his view on Baldwin's distractions in *Facing the Dictators*, 410. A more concrete analysis of Baldwin's role in the Abdication Crisis can be found in Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, 582-588.

he never supported to any great extent—had been mostly discarded by British concerns over Spain. As the architect of British foreign policy throughout the post-Rhineland phase, Eden continued to dominate the collective security discussion through July 1936 and beyond.

Death Knells in Geneva

As the situation in Spain deteriorated in mid-July 1936, British policy towards collective security seemed to be nearing a triumph: the return of Germany to the League of Nations. In his previous speech to the *Reichstag* on March 7, Hitler had offered up such a potential, and this proposal was repeated in the German Peace Plan communicated on March 31, 1936. The Germans knew that their proposals had played well in the British sphere, as Ambassador v. Hoesch reported back how Parliament, “like public opinion, desires the speedy start of negotiations.”¹⁵³ With speed, however, came several caveats. Eden wrote a minute stating that speed was key to “the policy of His Majesty’s Government to strengthen the forces of collective security, but that it did not seem to matter whether [such] strengthening took place before or after Germany became a member of the League.”¹⁵⁴ More important seemed to be the perception of the League itself as a result of Germany’s membership. In another memorandum, Eden wrote that

¹⁵³ v. Hoesch, “The Ambassador in Great Britain to the Foreign Ministry,” April 7, 1936, Document no. 263: 5729/E415427-33, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, V, 399.

¹⁵⁴ Eden, “Mr. Eden to Viscount Chilston (Moscow),” March 12, 1936, Document no. 63: C 1716/4/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, Vol. XVI: *The Rhineland Crisis and the Ending of Sanctions, March-July, 1936*, ed. W. N. Medlicott, Douglas Dakin, and M. E. Lambert (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1977), 98.

“the German proposals affected other Powers besides the Western Powers and it was very important to consider at an early date their reaction upon collective security and the League. It would, therefore, be unsatisfactory—indeed, in my view, fatal—to European peace in the end if we did not so handle the present situation as to maintain the authority of the League.”¹⁵⁵ The Cabinet was simultaneously presented with the dilemma, however, that however strong it might be, the public did not have faith in the League's ability to prevent future crises. Nigel Law, a former First Secretary in the Foreign Office who frequently reported back on public polling in London, noted how “in some quarters it is felt that the League has received a mortal blow. Some say that it is all the more reason for patching it up and trying to make it more effective in the future; others say that collective security has proved itself to be an irresponsible failure.”¹⁵⁶ In this context the Cabinet pursued negotiations for Germany's renewed membership even as it also sought reformation of the League Covenant through the summer of 1936. The outbreak of war in Spain, however, would ultimately scuttle Germany's desire to see through on this proposal and simultaneously result in Britain's near abandonment of its focus on and faith in the League of Nations.

The British reformation project for the League of Nations was later voiced by Lord Halifax as stemming from the fact that “the League is pledged to protect peace, but

¹⁵⁵ Eden, “Mr. Eden to Sir G. Clerk (Paris),” April 2, 1936, Document no. 199: C 2614/4/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVI, 271.

¹⁵⁶ Nigel Law, “Letter from Mr. Law to Mr. Sargent,” April 29, 1936, Enclosure to Document no. 280: J 3728/84/1, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVI, 385.

without any corresponding power.”¹⁵⁷ Eden had first proposed a need for League reform at an April 29 Cabinet meeting, following both the Rhine crisis and Italy's recent (and total) victory in Ethiopia, asking, “if the League was to be reformed, should this be linked up with Germany's re-entry?”¹⁵⁸ The astute German observers in London noted the effect of this policy crisis with Prince v. Bismarck, the Chargé d'Affairs, writing how “leading statesmen, with the Prime Minister himself at their head, have tried in the last few weeks to bring home to the people that the League of Nations in its present form has finally broken down.”¹⁵⁹ It was indeed a crisis, as Baldwin warned the Cabinet “that in the present difficult international situation the greatest care should be exercised by Cabinet Members in making any reference to Foreign Affairs in their speeches.”¹⁶⁰ Since British leaders had frequently stated the League's status as a backbone of its foreign policy, removing what faith remained while the Cabinet pushed forward with reforms could potentially be a dangerous signal to Germany and others.

¹⁵⁷ Lord Halifax, “Reform of the League of Nations,” Speech in the House of Commons, July 29, 1936, *Speeches on Foreign Policy*, 54.

¹⁵⁸ Eden, “General Review of Foreign Policy,” CAB 31(36), 23/84, April 29, 1936, 10. As a result, the Cabinet agreed on a committee to study potential League of Nations reforms and their effect on foreign policy. Coincidentally, it would take until July for the Cabinet to identify said committee.

¹⁵⁹ Archibald Otto Christian Fürst v. Bismarck (as Prince von Bismarck), “Observations on Current British Foreign Policy,” June 26, 1936, Document no. 405: 7621/357406-10, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, V, 691. Bismarck further detailed how the British view of the League of Nations had sobered since its defense earlier in 1936: “people are merely viewing it more realistically, exploring its weak points and considering, seriously and without haste, how it can be repaired.”

¹⁶⁰ Baldwin, “Political Speeches on Foreign Affairs,” CAB 42(36), 23/84, June 17, 1936, 26.

The basis of reforms being proposed by Baldwin would have to counter the principle of unanimity in the League, which stipulated that owing to the multitude of interests present in the Council of the League, achieving a unanimous vote was next to impossible. This ran counter to Eden's framing of the problem, as he wrote that "clearly the ideal system of collective security is one in which all nations are prepared to go to all lengths—military lengths—to deal with any aggressor."¹⁶¹ Pragmatism set in around this time, though, as he wrote to the British embassy in France that "whatever might be the best conception of collective security . . . I was afraid that one of the lessons which must be learnt from recent events was that nations would not in fact take steps that involved a major risk of war unless their own national interests were directedly affected."¹⁶² Amending the League Covenant to remove the unanimity principle was not a popular idea outside of Great Britain at the time, but bringing Germany back into the fold was seen as the key to securing such a reform.

Just days ahead of the attempted coup in Spain, Eden sat before the Cabinet on July 6, 1936, to relate what he had learned at Geneva. He described "the recent Meetings of the Council and Assembly as the most exacting and the most depressing which he had ever attended."¹⁶³ The idea accepted in that meeting, rather than "smashing the League" entirely, was "a series of regional obligations combined with economic sanctions to be

¹⁶¹ Eden, "Speech by Mr. Eden at the Assembly of the League of Nations," July 1, 1936, Document no. 395: J 5941/84/1, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVI, 540.

¹⁶² Eden, "Mr. Eden to Sir G. Clerk (Paris)," May 15, 1936, Document no. 330: C 3693/92/62, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVI, 437.

¹⁶³ Eden, "The Future of the Covenant," CAB 50(36), 23/85, July 6, 1936, 8.

imposed on an aggressor by the States which were not members of that particular regional arrangement.”¹⁶⁴ One such regional obligation was Second Locarno, and the Cabinet agreed that Germany should be invited to a Brussels Conference¹⁶⁵ to discuss both that and its return to the League.¹⁶⁶ At the following meeting, at Chamberlain's reminder of the idea, the membership named the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy as the venue to elicit the proposed suite of League reforms.¹⁶⁷ With Eden suggesting that the ideal time to officially broach reform would be at the next Council of the League in September 1936, the Cabinet assumed it had several months to finalize its proposals.¹⁶⁸ An unforeseen visit changed that.

On July 15, 1936, the Cabinet was informed that Germany had signaled a willingness to attend the Brussels Conference, if only it could be pushed to October.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴ “Alternative Policies,” CAB 50(36), 23/85, July 6, 1936, 10.

¹⁶⁵ The Cabinet repeatedly used the term “Brussels Conference” to signify the joint “Locarno Powers (with Germany) and German Re-Entry to the League of Nations” negotiations. That shorthand will be used here as well.

¹⁶⁶ “The German Colonies,” CAB 50(36), 23/85, July 6, 1936, 18. After this agreement, the question was raised on what to do during such negotiations. Owing to an unnamed Cabinet Member, “the suggestion was made that the policy of yielding to Germany on every occasion merely encouraged Herr Hitler to pursue aggressive policy.” Indeed!

¹⁶⁷ “Future of the Covenant,” CAB 51(36), 23/85, July 9, 1936, 6.

¹⁶⁸ Eden, “Speech by Mr. Eden at the Assembly of the League of Nations,” July 1, 1936, Document no. 395: J 5941/84/1, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVI, 540.

¹⁶⁹ “Proposed Brussels Meeting,” CAB 52(36), 23/85, July 15, 1936, Page 6. The Foreign Office hedged Germany's acceptance, which Halifax relayed to the Cabinet as “the German Government was saying that no business could be done before October.”

With Baldwin setting the Foreign Policy Committee scrambling, they received another shock the next day. Prince v. Bismarck, filling in for Ambassador Leopold v. Hoesch following his death the previous April,¹⁷⁰ had “called upon” Under-Secretary Vansittart in the Foreign Office

to enquire as to the prospects of a meeting of the Locarno Powers and had stated most confidently that his Government wished to participate. Speaking personally, the Chargé d'Affaires had added that he would sooner have the Meeting take place in the first fortnight of September, that is, before the Meeting of the League, than later. In any case he agreed that the latest date should be early in October. . . . He had left in an optimistic spirit.¹⁷¹

While much of the enthusiasm expressed at this turn of events concerned Second Locarno, Eden did warn that “one result might even be that Germany would return to the League of Nations and become associated with the proposed amendments to the Covenant.”¹⁷² The Foreign Office had come to this conclusion a few weeks prior as a result of discussions with France and Belgium. An internal memorandum there had suggested that “as regards the League, it is improbable that Germany would re-enter it in the present uncertainty which surrounds the future of the Covenant . . . [T]he fact must be realised that . . . the re-entry of Germany into the League would not, therefore in itself

¹⁷⁰ v. Hoesch died on April 10 while in London. While v. Ribbentrop would eventually succeed him beginning in August 1936, in the meantime Prince v. Bismarck, as the Chargé d'Affaires, oversaw Germany's London Embassy. This vacancy joined the long list of annoyances for Eden and the Foreign Office that year. In the British tabloid press, there was speculation that v. Hoesch had committed suicide, or perhaps been murdered by the Gestapo. Neither is likely.

¹⁷¹ Eden, “The Proposed Brussels or London Meeting,” CAB 53(36), 23/85, July 16, 1936, 2-3.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 4.

contribute materially to the restoration of confidence in Europe.”¹⁷³ Alas for the British Cabinet, Eden's warning would not be the only news on July 16, and the simmering rebellion in Spain would upset all these plans.

While also surging forward in plans for Second Locarno, Eden used a meeting of Britain, France, and Belgium in London on July 23 regarding the Brussels Conference to elicit considerations which the Cabinet used to adopt its League of Nations strategy. Halifax presented Britain's conclusions on League reform to the House of Commons on that day, and in the meantime, Great Britain had formally approached the other member states of the League of Nations on their ideas for reform with a request to receive all such replies by September 1.¹⁷⁴ However, as the Cabinet then prepared to recess for its summer holiday Spanish intervention became the foremost issue. The Spanish Ambassador, Julio López Oliván, visited Eden and all but pleaded for help. In his letter to Sir Henry Chilton, the Ambassador to Spain, Eden wrote how Oliván had essentially asked, “would it be possible for the League to do anything in this conflict? . . . If it could speak with the united voice of Europe in this conflict, it might be able to stop it in the name of humanity.” Eden also perceived that Oliván “feared that if left to itself this conflict would continue for many months; indeed, until one side or the other was virtually

¹⁷³ Orme Sargent and Ralph Wigram, “Memorandum on the proposed meeting of Locarno Powers,” July 13, 1936, Annex to Document no. 447: C 5052/4/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVI, 595.

¹⁷⁴ Hankey, “Memorandum on the Reform of the League of Nations”, Foreign Office Papers [F.P.] (36) 5, 23/83, July 13, 1936.

annihilated.”¹⁷⁵ The next day Eden presented his doubts on the topic to the Cabinet, especially how

it appeared impossible, however, for the League to interfere at the present time in the affairs of Spain. Possibly the moment might come when, either officially or unofficially, the League or this country, in concert with other countries, might have an opportunity to offer good offices. . . . [I]t was clear that the Cabinet shared the views of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.¹⁷⁶

Just days later, France would offer a solution to intervention “in concert with other countries” outside the League of Nations, and the reforms would never again gain the momentum they had in July 1936. Thus, owing to the League’s schedule and distractions in Spain, Germany found reason to stall for several more months. Seen by itself, the Cabinet did not consider this unusual as Chamberlain remarked to the Foreign Policy Committee on August 29 that “it seemed not unlikely that Germany would return to the League of Nations.”¹⁷⁷ Despite that optimism, other factors relating to Spain contributed to the League of Nations’ downfall as a British policy over the ensuing months.

The Communist Boogeyman

Eden's perception of Germany, particularly with respect to its parallel views on Soviet intervention, also clouded Britain’s potential employment of the League of

¹⁷⁵ Eden, “Mr. Eden to Sir H. Chilton (Madrid)”, July 28, 1936, Document no. 14: W 7174/62/41, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, Second Series, Vol. XVII: *Western Pact Negotiations: Outbreak of Spanish Civil War, June 1936—January 1937*, ed. W.N. Medlicott, Douglas Dakin, Gillian Bennett (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1979), 34.

¹⁷⁶ Eden, Anthony. “Possibilities of Intervention.” CAB 55(36), 23/85, July 29, 1936, 9-10.

¹⁷⁷ F.P. (36) 9, quoted in Colvin, *The Chamberlain Cabinet*, 37.

Nations early on in the conflict. Though initially removed from influencing policy decisions due to his own summer holiday, Eden reviewed his early analysis as predicated on the assumption that it would be “some months before outside intervention had any serious influence on the fighting.”¹⁷⁸ This assumption turned out to be erroneous almost from the start, however. At the end of July, Aretas Akers-Douglas (Viscount Chilston), the Ambassador to the Soviet Union, reported back to Eden that the “Soviet press . . . finds interest displayed by German and Italian press highly significant and indeed accuses Berlin directly and Rome less directly at having supplied ‘rebel generals’ in advance with material support in exchange for ‘undertakings of international importance.’”¹⁷⁹ Eden did not seem to consider this as evidence, though he did come to endorse the line that “whichever party is successful, it is to be feared that quiescence of Spain—as hitherto—in international affairs will cease, and that she will continued to be what she has now become—a focus for foreign propaganda and intrigue.”¹⁸⁰ Eden’s bias then came to the forefront, as when Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Alvarez del Vayo presented him concrete evidence of such claims against the Fascists in September 1936, Eden “gave him no encouragement to think that [Great Britain] would modify [its] policy.”¹⁸¹ Such a

¹⁷⁸ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 399.

¹⁷⁹ Viscount Chilston, “Viscount Chilston (Moscow) to Mr. Eden,” July 29, 1936, Document no. 32: W 7236/62/41, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVII, 36.

¹⁸⁰ Sir Owen St. Clair O’Malley, “Memorandum on Italian Foreign Policy in the Spanish Civil War,” August 19, 1936, Document no. 115: W 9885/9549/41, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVII, 137.

¹⁸¹ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 408.

stance makes even less sense given that around this time Eden was visited by Juan de la Cierva, a former conservative Minister in Spain, who opined that the more assistance Franco received from Germany and Italy the more likely his fascist tendencies would become.¹⁸² On September 28, del Vayo would go on to present his evidence to the League of Nations, which “brought bitter recriminations against Germany and Italy by the Soviet Union.”¹⁸³ As these accusations reached a fever pitch, Eden provided a weak defense as to why he rejected del Vayo’s evidence.

At their annual conference the first week of October, the Labour Party accepted the Spanish evidence of intervention and even decided to publish it in order to encourage a “speedy investigation.”¹⁸⁴ Despite reporting which confirmed¹⁸⁵ that German-produced and flown He-51 biplanes were strafing Republican positions outside Madrid,¹⁸⁶ Eden

¹⁸² Eden, “Mr. Eden to Sir H. Chilton (Hendaye)”, September 14, 1936, Document no. 193: W 10439/62/41, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVII, 263-264.

¹⁸³ Furnia, *The Diplomacy of Appeasement*, 214. Ironically, as Furnia explains on the next page, “by the end of October [1936], the Soviets had replaced the French as the chief source of aid to the Republicans.”

¹⁸⁴ Watkins, *Britain Divided*, 165.

¹⁸⁵ After del Vayo presented his evidence both to Eden and the League of Nations, an Associated Press bulletin in *The Chicago Tribune* on September 29, 1936, in a story entitled “Rebel Airmen Bomb Madrid; Begin New Push” reported that “bombardment of Madrid from the air was resorted to today, and planes were droning away from half a dozen airports in the direction of Madrid.” Reports of Germany involvement were available as early as July 26, when Jules Sauerwein of *Paris-Soir* had written to the *New York Times* that it was among “at least four countries . . . each of which is giving discreet but nevertheless effective assistance to one group or another among the insurgents.” Early press coverage is well documented as well in Puzzo, *Spain and the Great Powers*, 84-87.

¹⁸⁶ A German fighter squadron and bomber flight were operating in the vicinity of Cáceres and Talavera, the latter less than 50 miles Southwest of Madrid, between

rebuffed these conclusions for his own reasons.¹⁸⁷ Instead, he insisted that “the evidence we had at this time was more specific against [Russia] than against the dictators in Rome and Berlin,”¹⁸⁸ and went as far as to lament the “violent meeting of the [Non-Intervention] Committee” which resulted from Russia's accusations.¹⁸⁹ His logic was insufficient to reject the evidence against German intervention on its own merits, which points to his perceptions as a plausible substitute. Eden, among others,¹⁹⁰ wanted to believe that Soviet influence in Spain was a greater threat than the Fascists. That sort of belief could only have been tempered when Lord Cranborne reported how Pablo de Acárate y Florez, who would shortly become the new Spanish Ambassador, commented that if “the conflict was prolonged . . . the government itself would move steadily to the

September 14-28, 1936. The He-51 fighters and Ju-52 bombers flew armed reconnaissance, bomber protection, and aerial protection over Nationalist formations. During this time, they famously helped to break the Siege of the Alcázar of Toldeo, itself 30 miles South of Madrid, by driving off Republican infantry in the process of storming the Nationalist-held castle. For more on the pre-Condor Flight German combat contributions, see Raymond L. Proctor, *Hitler's Luftwaffe in the Spanish Civil War* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), 39-52.

¹⁸⁷ In his memoirs, Eden talks somewhat incorrectly of how “the [Spanish] Government had taken a shift to the left” and that del Vayo's “communist sympathies were in tune with this move.” *Facing the Dictators*, 407-408. Additionally, some of del Vayo's sources were in fact Communist sympathizers at the Hamburg docks, which may have discredited them to Eden. See Elstob, *Condor Legion*, 82 for notes on the earliest such transmission of this intelligence in September 1936; also see Proctor, *Hitler's Luftwaffe in the Spanish Civil War*, 47 for a discussion of the lack of dock security and such “leakages” to Moscow.

¹⁸⁸ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 411.

¹⁸⁹ Eden, “The Situation in Spain,” CAB 57(36), 23/85, October 14, 1936, 15.

¹⁹⁰ Baldwin's directive to Eden to keep Britain off “the side of the Russians” was issued on July 27.

Left.”¹⁹¹ Such an anti-Soviet bias even led Sir Samuel Hoare, now First Lord of the Admiralty, to conclude that “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 spread and particularly to Lisbon, would be a grave danger to the British Empire.”¹⁹² Hitler was only too happy to play *realpolitik* and supply the British with more ammunition for this narrative, causing them to continually erode their own collective security efforts.

Just as Hitler used Germany's so-called support for the Non-Intervention Agreement to obscure his move increasing German conscription on August 24, he wielded the threat of Communism in Spain to purposefully delay and undermine the Brussels Conference. Though the conference had greater implications for the Second Locarno initiative, this also impacted the League of Nation reforms. Early on in the war, Sir Eric Phipps reported from Berlin how Hitler “seemed particularly pre-occupied with events in Spain which have of course markedly strengthened his views on Communism.”¹⁹³ In the midst of the Nationalists' advances in September 1936, Hitler then launched an anti-Communist propaganda campaign to shape public opinion into

¹⁹¹ Lord Cranborne, “Record by Lord Cranborne of a conversation with Señor de Azcárate,” September 19, 1936, Enclosure to Document no. 219: W 11/928/62/41, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVII, 302.

¹⁹² Sir Samuel Hoare, “Note by Sir S. Hoare,” August 5, 1936, Annex to Document no. 56: W 7781/62/41, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVII, 63.

¹⁹³ Sir Eric Phipps, “Sir E. Phipps (Berlin) to Foreign Office,” August 6, 1936, Document no. 58: C 5750/4/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVII, 64.

believing that Hitler “was their man in the conflict with Communism.”¹⁹⁴ In fact, just days before Germany announced its conscription and anti-Communism stances, the Ministry of Propaganda issued a secret directive on August 21, 1936, which “urged that the intensified German Press campaign against the Soviet Union and the Red Army should already be creating a sufficient justification in the eyes of the world for future German steps.”¹⁹⁵ This step was not just a ploy, as Hitler agreed with Mussolini around this time to seek the “prevention of a Bolshevik regime in Spain.”¹⁹⁶ Still, this effect did not go unnoticed, particularly as Soviet intervention increasingly came to light and, as far as Eden was concerned, to blame. According to communiqués among the varying embassies, the German Foreign Office “sought every possible way to avoid setting a date” for the conference in order to allow Franco's forces to gain a more advantageous position.¹⁹⁷ Eden himself accepts this, writing later that “whatever faint hopes were raised by the acceptance of Hitler and Mussolini in July, dwindled as they exploited the Spanish turmoil” of Franco's march on Madrid.¹⁹⁸

As November progressed, the secret of the Condor Legion's deployment remained safe, and at this point Germany announced it had signed the Anti-Comintern

¹⁹⁴ Telegram from American Embassy in Paris, quoted in Furnia, *The Diplomacy of Appeasement*, 225.

¹⁹⁵ Hildebrand, *The Foreign Policy of the Third Reich*, 46.

¹⁹⁶ Whealey, *Hitler and Spain*, 44.

¹⁹⁷ Furnia, *The Diplomacy of Appeasement*, 225. In addition to the propaganda of countering Communist influence, Hitler hoped that the presence of Franco's forces near the French border would result in concessions from them.

¹⁹⁸ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 390.

Pact with Japan. While this would not seem to be linked directly to Spain, evidence has already been presented that Hitler had ratified the strategy of weaponizing “Anti-Bolshevism” vis-a-vis Spain both with Italy and the Reich's adviser to Franco, Oberst Walter Warlimont.¹⁹⁹ Mussolini's pronouncement of the Axis on November 1 served another nasty surprise to the Brussels Conference, for similar reasons. Just prior, Sir Eric Drummond, the Ambassador to Italy, wrote back to Eden on that embassy's view of the two nations possibly forming a pair. In essence, he hoped how Eden “will have realised Italy is playing up to Germany as hard as she can . . . This rapprochement is no doubt due . . . particularly to a common detestation of Bolshevism and a fear of the spread of communist doctrines.”²⁰⁰ Italian Ambassador Dino Grandi seemed to confirm as much when he concluded that “there could be only one reason for the Russian intervention: their desire to create a Communist State in Spain next door to France.”²⁰¹ Whatever teeth grinding Communist influence may have actually caused, the War Office still took exception to the Cabinet's attitude, sending a note stating how “our evidence does not

¹⁹⁹ The former conversation occurred in October, the latter early in December 1936.

²⁰⁰ Sir Eric Drummond, “Sir E. Drummond (Rome) to Mr. Eden,” October 21, 1936, Document no. 312: C 7457/4/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVII, 445-446.

²⁰¹ Eden, “Mr. Eden to Sir E. Drummond (Rome),” November 25, 1936, Document no. 411: W 16668/62/41, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVII, 595.

bear our Mr. Eden's statement . . . that 'there are other Governments more to blame than those of Germany and Italy.'"²⁰²

Owing to the schisms effected by the newly formed Rome-Berlin Axis, as well as Germany's pursuit of the Anti-Comintern Pact with Japan, the British strategy shifted to one in which regionalism would play a larger role at the expense of—rather than in tandem with—the League of Nations. Foreign Minister v. Neurath concluded Germany's view on this to Eden when, replying to an earlier memorandum on Second Locarno, he declared that Germany is “opposed to the new pact's being linked with the League of Nations.”²⁰³ Though Eden had proposed that the Council of the League act as arbiter to Second Locarno, the Germans rejected this in favor of solely a “Western Pact.”²⁰⁴ This forced Britain to consider, as November 1936 opened, that “the tool of general European appeasement had . . . reached the point of diminishing returns. The British could no longer bargain with the Germans over a treaty in which the former did not believe.”²⁰⁵ Eden would belabor his stance before the Cabinet on November 13, if for nothing else than because if

it was impossible to induce the German Government to accept a reference to the League, then we should at least be in the position of being able to represent to our own public opinion and the Dominions that we had done our utmost to include

²⁰² Major C. S. Napier, “Letter from Major C. S. Napier (War Office) to Mr. Roberts,” November 23, 1936, Document no. 406: W 16391/9549/41, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVII, 587.

²⁰³ v. Neurath, “The Foreign Minister to the Embassy in Great Britain,” October 13, 1936, Document no. 596: 1672/423840-48, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, V, 1076.

²⁰⁴ Furnia, *The Diplomacy of Appeasement*, 226.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 221.

reference to the Council of the League and that it was only rather than lose this hopeful treaty [Second Locarno] altogether that we had reluctantly abandoned the proposal.²⁰⁶

After months of work preparing for League reform and its role in collective security, the Cabinet was not pleased that Eden appeared to have lost faith in one of his preferred policies.

The championing of the League of Nations had been reduced to a ploy for public approval, and Baldwin called Eden out on this point. Fearing that “the risk of this course was that the Germans might run out,” he encouraged, and the Cabinet agreed, that Eden should redraft his proposal so that any reference to the League “should be put less categorically.”²⁰⁷ In the final agenda which the Foreign Office submitted to the other (potential) attendees of the Brussels Conference, Eden’s language on the League was relegated to stating that “whatever changes may be introduced in the working of the League, it appears probable, and it is certainly the view of His Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom, that the peace-preserving functions of the Council will become even more important than in the past.”²⁰⁸ That Germany had used the lull in Britain’s

²⁰⁶ Eden, “The Machinery for Deciding on Alleged Violations,” CAB 65(36), 23/86, November 13, 1936, 5.

²⁰⁷ To be fair, Baldwin did “strongly” support Eden’s overall premise that since the League of Nations was included in the original Locarno Treaty it should continue into the first draft of Second Locarno. Once he had aired the risk of losing Germany in the negotiations, however, he also mused that “if the Treaty was violated, events would proceed too rapidly for any machinery to prove effective.”

²⁰⁸ Sargent and Malkin, “Memorandum by His Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom regarding the Agenda of the Five-Power Conference,” November 19, 1936, Document no. 389: C 8265/4/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVII, 570.

League of Nations reform schedule to shift the British focus to the threat of Communism in Spain had in fact allowed them to control the narrative ahead of the now-floundering Brussels Conference, and Britain's League policy suffered for it.

Just as League reform faded into the background, the end of British reliance on the League of Nations as an effective policy tool—even as its spiritual reliance continued on for more than another year—came in December 1936. This episode decisively points to the anti-Communism propaganda campaign as a causal mechanism in the downfall of the British League of Nations policy. Owing to “considerable concern in London and Paris that Spanish Foreign Minister J. Alvarez del Vayo would seek to arraign Germany and Italy before the tribunal of world opinion at Geneva,” British policymakers quickly endeavored to squash Alvarez's attempts in favor of their own Non-Intervention policy.²⁰⁹ Specifically, France had earlier proposed to Britain to offer a *démarche* to Germany and Italy consisting of mediation between Spain and the intervening parties through the Committee formed to oversee the Non-Intervention Agreement. In the background, Eden met with Spanish Ambassador de Azcárate and pointed out the supposed hypocrisy of lambasting Fascist intervention while accepting pro-Communist volunteers and Soviet “technical experts” on the Republican side.²¹⁰ When the League met December 11-12,

²⁰⁹ Puzzo, *Spain and the Great Powers*, 189-190. Lord Cranborne, the British delegate to the League of Nations at the time, was specifically instructed “to hold the Spanish issue 'within a small compass.'”

²¹⁰ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 416-417. Eden notes his argument to de Azcarate boiled down to how “it could not be in the interest of Spain herself that thousands of foreigners should pour into the country and make Spain their battleground.” Azcárate, for his part, “was inclined at first to argue that there was a difference between individual volunteers arriving on the Government side [via the International Brigades] and actual military units from Germany serving with the insurgents.”

1936, the Council then “refused to stamp Germany and Italy aggressors . . . [and] instead, the Anglo-French *démarche* was praised and the nations urged to make the Non-Intervention Committee more effective.”²¹¹ Though Eden had once surmised that the League could become the arbiter in Spain, the primary British multilateral policy regarding that country going forward would be the Non-Intervention Committee, administered under their own hand in London.

In public at least, Eden did not despair of this result. As the Spanish were being rebuffed at the League of Nations, he remarked in a speech to his constituents in Leamington how “the defections from the League which have taken place in recent days have not changed our view that the principles of the League are the best yet devised for the conduct of international relations.”²¹² In private, he had even hoped that stymying the Spanish accusations would keep Italy as a member of the League.²¹³ Little could Eden know that a year later, Italy would discuss leaving anyways owing, as its Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano sneered with irony in his diary, to “the second anniversary of [Eden's] sanctions. This is how Italy remembers and takes her revenge!”²¹⁴ Whatever

²¹¹ Furnia, *The Diplomacy of Appeasement*, 231-232. Furnia also cites an American telegram to the State Department that following the aforementioned Council resolution, “the British delegate [Lord Cranborne] remarked to an American diplomat that the provision respecting non-intervention would at least, to some degree, result in Germany and Italy being more wary in giving aid to Franco or, in any event, that they would do so less openly.”

²¹² Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, Page 477.

²¹³ Eden, “Mr. Eden to Sir G. Clerk (Paris),” November 27, 1936, Document no. 417: W 16840/62/41, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVII, 600.

²¹⁴ Ciano, *Ciano's Hidden Diary*, 1937-1938, trans. Andreas Mayor (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1953), 24-25.

faint optimism Eden maintained for the League of Nations at the end of 1936 had dwindled by mid-1937, when he commented that “the future of League reform must depend on the evolution of world politics . . . [T]hough the League might continue useful[ly] as a League of Some Nations, it would not be a League of Nations in its original conception.”²¹⁵ Even this half-hope proved hypocritical, as later in 1937 the British Consul in Geneva again rebuffed attempts by the Spanish to bring a resolution to bear against German and Italian aggression.²¹⁶ Whatever personal feelings may have remained by this point, Great Britain's true spiritual divorce from this policy would only be complete after Eden departed Chamberlain's ministry.

The failure of the League of Nations as a policy during the Spanish Civil War was foreseen, just not by anyone within the British Cabinet. Writing years later of the meeting he had late in July 1936 with Ambassador Oliván, Anthony Eden remarked that he proved “a true prophet” in predicting the League's inability to prevent the Spanish insurgency from devolving into a full-blown civil war.²¹⁷ The escalation of the newly-

²¹⁵ “Minutes of the first meeting of principal delegates to the Imperial Conference, 1937,” Document no. 510:W 9516/7/41, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*. Second Series, Vol. XVIII: *Europeans Affairs, January-June 1937*, ed. W.N. Medlicott, Douglas Dakin, Gillian Bennett (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1980), 771.

²¹⁶ Document Nos. 206, 212, 218, and 223, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*. Second Series, Vol. XIX: *European Affairs, July 1, 1937—August 4, 1938*, ed. W.N. Medlicott, Douglas Dakin, Gillian Bennett (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1982).

²¹⁷ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 400. Discussing the issue two weeks into the civil war, Eden's full summary of Oliván's monologue went: “he asked whether the League could do anything in this conflict. He admitted the difficulties created by the League's loss of membership and authority, but even so, perhaps it could achieve something. He

formed Axis' intervention in Spain, and more importantly their casting of such actions as a defense against Communist assistance to (and influence on) the Republican Government, was the direct cause of the failure and abandonment of this policy. Despite claims of seeing through that ploy, biases bordering on cognitive dissonance within the Cabinet caused them to reject Soviet and Spanish evidence of Fascist intervention and view Communism in Spain as the larger issue. Not being privy to the Non-Intervention Agreement, this left Spain with the League of Nations as its sole means of bringing intervention to a halt, which Britain continually blocked at least in part due to that bias. This played directly into the Fascists' designs both in Spain and greater Europe.²¹⁸ Though Eden (and to a lesser extent, Halifax) remained for some time thereafter as a staunch supporter for the need to include the League of Nations in policy decisions, his exit allowed Chamberlain to formally champion his alternative, bilateral policy of appeasement. Chamberlain summed up this divergence before the House of Commons on February 21, 1938, stating that "the peace of Europe must depend on the attitude of the

feared that the struggle, if left to itself, would continue for many months, until one side or the other was virtually annihilated. In this Oliván was a true prophet."

²¹⁸ The historian Charles Loch Mowat was a critic of the Non-Intervention policy. In his *Britain Between the Wars*, 574, he writes that "the non-intervention policy was unfortunate, and its early popularity soon disappeared as its one-sidedness, to the advantage of the nationalists, became clear . . . Non-intervention hastened the erosion of peace and collective security in Europe. It evaded the League of Nations; it exalted the dictators both in prestige and power."

four major Powers—Germany, Italy, France, and ourselves.”²¹⁹ In the meantime the League of Nations was not the only collective security forum affected by Spain.

²¹⁹ Chamberlain, “Conversations with Italy,” Speech in the House of Commons, February 21, 1938, *Peace in Our Time* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1939), 58-59. He also famously noted in his “Out of Strength . . .” speech on March 7, 1938 in that same venue that “the League may some day be the salvation of the world. Since we must recognize that that day is still far away, we shall do well to take throughout for the perplexities of the hour, which will not wait.” *Ibid.*, 65.

CHAPTER 5

“STILL WAITING” FOR SECOND LOCARNO

While Eden's attempts to secure a Second Locarno Treaty would, for a time, overlap with Great Britain's attempts to reform the League of Nations and entice Germany to rejoin it, this policy was a much broader initiative that survived long after the Spanish Civil War started. As may be recalled, Germany had violated the Locarno Treaty through its placement of troops in the Rhineland in March 1936. It then suggested to renew its terms, or similar, in its Peace Plan offered to Europe several weeks later. Up until July, both France and Great Britain would not accept the start of such negotiations until such time as Germany made initial concessions which would (hopefully) have prevented the construction of fortifications and a drawdown of its new garrisons. Though neither was realized, Prince v. Bismarck's visit to Sir Robert Vansittart on July 14—as well as the clarification provided to Eden the next day—signaled a turning point in the seeking of a “general” multilateral settlement. The British Cabinet spent the remainder of that July, and through other committees the bulk of August, preparing for the Second Locarno negotiations. As a result, Germany's intervention in Spain and parallel anti-Communist campaign had a significant impact on the Cabinet's pursuit of this effort. When the Phony Peace concluded, the Second Locarno Treaty was both given up as stillborn and viewed as another reason (by Chamberlain especially) that the machinery of collective security was not viable.

Planning for a “General Settlement”

Even before Prince v. Bismarck had approached the Foreign Office, Eden's staff had been planning for a meeting of the Locarno Powers in Brussels that July 15. Italy then withdrew from these discussions owing to the continued sanctions over Ethiopia. With Italy potentially remaining obstinate despite the Cabinet's pending removal of the sanctions regime on July 16, Eden proposed a date of July 23 which was accepted by France and Belgium.²²⁰ With Italy's commitment still not secured a week out from that meeting, Eden postured to continue with just the other two countries “in order to show Europe that the Western democracies had views of their own and would like to make a contribution to a European settlement.”²²¹ The coincidence, then, of v. Bismarck's visit on the same day as that proclamation was not lost on the Cabinet. The early report that Germany wished to now wait until October dismayed the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Affairs, which agreed that “it would be difficult to adjourn the proposed Meeting of the Locarno Powers until October, as this would give the impression that the Western Powers had lost the initiative and that it was left to the Dictators.”²²² Though Germany would use Spain to wrest that initiative to its side, the British Cabinet would do all it could before that crisis to make progress on Second Locarno. Even more so than the League of Nations, Second Locarno was viewed by the Cabinet, and Eden in particular, as the collective tool most vital to securing peace in Western Europe.

²²⁰ Eden, “Germany and the Locarno Treaty,” CAB 48(36), 23/85, July 1, 1936, 8.

²²¹ Eden, “Proposed Brussels Meeting,” CAB 52(36), 23/85, July 15, 1936, 6.

²²² “The Proposed Brussels or London Meeting,” CAB 53(36), 23/85, July 15, 1936, 1.

The issue of initiative was a concern, especially to Eden, after the previous failure to get Germany's response to a pre-Second Locarno questionnaire. The initiative was so disastrous that Hitler had publicly thrashed it. Eden would later write that "as the summer passed, Hitler showed no sign of returning an answer to our questionnaire, which was hardly surprising if, as I concluded, he did not want to make his intentions known."²²³ V. Bismarck confirmed as much in a report back to Berlin. He wrote of Eden's near incessant badgering for a reply that "even a negative answer would be preferred here to no answer at all, since at least it would clarify the situation and would put Britain in a position finally to establish the new guiding principles of her policy."²²⁴ When the Cabinet petitioned Eden to include a reference to the questionnaire in his formal invitation to Germany for the Brussels Conference, he testily responded "that one object of the Meeting was to get away from the Questionnaire. . . . No-one, it was thought, would be likely to wish to revive these Questions."²²⁵ Not only had the failed questionnaire been a rebuke of bilateral efforts through regular diplomatic channels, but the Foreign Office worried that too many aborted starts towards a general settlement would erode Britain's leadership position. Just prior to that Cabinet meeting, they had passed around a pessimistic memo suggesting that "it does not seem that [in] the likelihood of failure we should abandon the negotiation [with Germany] . . . Any such

²²³ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 389. His full narrative on origins of this embarrassment appears on Pages 371-374.

²²⁴ v. Bismarck, "Observations on Current British Foreign Policy," June 26, 1936, Document no. 405: 7621/357406-410, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, V, 693.

²²⁵ Eden, "Proposed Brussels Meeting," CAB 52(36), 23/85, July 15, 1936, 7.

abandonment of a policy so long pursued by His Majesty's Government would be regarded throughout Europe as a striking indication of our weakness, and a fresh humiliation."²²⁶ Collective efforts among Britain, France, and Belgium then turned to the proper contents of those invitations.

Between July 16-29, plans moved forward for the Brussels Conference, first with the awaited meeting of Britain, France, and Belgium in London on July 23. The "Three Powers Meeting" in London would result in official invitations to the remaining Locarno Powers for Brussels, but also the stated perception by all involved that Germany would remain quiet until the Brussels Conference owing to the start of its hosting the Olympics. Eden even quipped at the meeting, "the Germans were at present busily engaged in trying to persuade British public opinion that they were the quietest people in the world."²²⁷ After the invitations were sent out, however, Eden's annoyance was evident days later as "no reply had yet been received from Germany or Italy, and he had no indication of what the tenor of that reply would be."²²⁸ As would become a broken record in the ensuing months, events in Spain served to interrupt the progression of Second Locarno talks.

Even before the first shots were fired by the Nationalist forces, the world watched with baited breath as Spain descended into anarchy. As the numbers of kidnappings and

²²⁶ Orme Sargent and Ralph Wigram, "Memorandum on the proposed meeting of the Locarno Powers," July 13, 1936, Annex to Document no. 447: C 5052/4/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVI, 595-596.

²²⁷ "Record of conversation between British, French, and Belgian Ministers," July 23, 1936, Document no. 477: C 5450/4/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, Second Series, XVI, 641.

²²⁸ Eden, "Germany and the Locarno Treaty," CAB 55(36), 23/85, July 29, 1936, 2.

murders proliferated, the Embassy in Madrid warned that “now that political leaders have begun to fall under the gunman’s bullet they have a strong inducement to act.”²²⁹ The Three Powers Meeting came a week into the conflict, and the next day George Clerk, the Ambassador to France, lamented how “events in Spain have restricted the space which would otherwise no doubt have been diverted in the press to discussion of the London conversations.”²³⁰ Clerk’s solemn rejoinder from Paris would foreshadow the effect of the Spanish conflict on Second Locarno and Britain’s broader collective security efforts. The Cabinet still declared the “Three Powers” meeting a success after that group issued a formal communiqué to Germany and Italy with a public invitation to the Brussels Conference. This invitation seemed firm in proposing to “liquidate the situation created by the German initiative of the 7th March” as well as “to facilitate the general settlement of those problems which [the Locarno Powers] conceive to be essential to the tranquility of Europe.”²³¹ The latter point, while referencing the German Peace Plan, seemed to make it clear that Britain would design the general settlement. Using both the Cabinet recess and those same “events in Spain” to continually stall or deflect attention, Germany would have none of that scenario.

²²⁹ George Ogilvie-Forbes, “Mr. Ogilvie-Forbes (San Sebastian) to Mr. Eden,” July 14, 1936, Document no. 3: W 6458/62/41, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVII, 7.

²³⁰ Clerk, “Sir G. Clerk (Paris) to Mr. Eden,” July 24, 1936, Document no. 14: C 5471/4/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVII, 15.

²³¹ Appendix—Draft of Final Communiqué, CAB 54(36), 23/85, July 22, 1936, 1(3).

All Preparation, No Brussels Conference

Though Germany accepted the invitation to discuss Second Locarno, Foreign Minister v. Neurath took a firm line that Germany desired careful preparations ahead of the Brussels Conference. He also hedged bets on the Spanish distraction, as the Embassy in Berlin reported that v. Neurath

informed us officially that the German Government would be happy to accept the invitation to a Five Power Conference but not before the middle of October at the earliest in order to give ample time for thorough preparation diplomatically . . . [He] declared that he could not rest assured that perfect calm would prevail in the intervening period.²³²

This strategy bought time but also forced Britain to tip its hand on its designs for the “general settlement.” A week after v. Neurath’s acceptance of the Brussels invitation the French issued a new one, this time for Europe to join in a new Non-Intervention Agreement towards the Spanish Civil War. That same day, August 6, the Berlin Embassy wrote to the Foreign Office that “affairs in Spain and its possible consequences seems for the time being more in the front of the mind of those in authority here than the October meeting.”²³³ Several early Spanish scandals involving German transport planes and the slaughter of their citizens in Barcelona erupted in the following weeks, ensuring the very diversion which v. Neurath had warned would delay German preparations for the Brussels Conference.

²³² Phipps, “Sir E. Phipps (Berlin) to Mr. Eden,” July 31, 1936, Document no. 41: C 5653/4/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVII, 45.

²³³ Sir George Mounsey, “Record by Sir G. Mounsey of a conversation with M. Cambon,” August 6, 1936, Document no. 63: W 7981/62/41, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVII, 67.

The “perfect calm” to which v. Neurath had alluded proved ironic in the sense that for the remainder of the Second Locarno negotiations, much of the turmoil which would distract the Germans came from their own designs. The Ju-52s which the Republicans seized were, in fact, on their way to participate in the airlift of Franco’s troops from Morocco. Though the Spanish government likely had every right to both seize the planes and detain the crews given their evasion of Spanish authorities in their first attempted landing at Madrid, the diplomatic uproar over the incident persisted throughout August 1936. With dramatic effects as well on the beginning of the Non-Intervention Agreement, the British record does in fact indicate an awareness that German actions in the Western Mediterranean and at the negotiating table were linked. What the British failed to realize was that Spain was a signal that Germany had no intentions of participating in a broader collective security regime. Instead, they perceived that the success of collective security in Spain would lead to the fabled general settlement.

Orme Sargent, who had received that Embassy letter regarding v. Neurath’s stance on the need for calm in Europe, saw the connection between the non-intervention efforts and Second Locarno almost immediately. He minuted for Eden on his return that “events in Spain are bound to have their effect on the relations of the Powers who have agreed to meet together to negotiate a Five Power Pact²³⁴ and to explore the possibilities

²³⁴ The Locarno Treaty was at times also referred to as the Five Power Pact.

of a general settlement in Europe.”²³⁵ Though his logic seems fairly obvious, he went on to warn that

if the principle of non-intervention in the affairs of Spain breaks down . . . it may well be that the first step will have been taken in dividing Europe henceforth into two blocs, each based on a rival ideology . . . This cleavage could not fail to show itself in the negotiations of the proposed Five Power Conference.²³⁶

Eden bought into this logic, himself noting towards the end of August for the Foreign Policy Committee how “it is, of course, necessary to bear in mind the necessity for not unduly antagonizing Italy (or Germany) at this stage, when we are looking forward to a five-Power meeting at which their cooperation will be essential.”²³⁷ For the remainder of August British attention would be locked into securing the participation of the Fascist powers in the Non-Intervention Agreement, and only then did their minds turn back to Second Locarno.

As the Foreign Office labored over the contents of the Brussels Conference, they issued what they considered to be formal invitations on September 9 for the conference to be held in the latter half of October. Two days later, Prince v. Bismarck again visited Vansittart, who came away

fear[ing] that the exchanges and preparations might continue in such a fashion as to relegate to a quite distant future a conference in which all here [in Britain] were

²³⁵ Orme Sargent, “Minute by Mr. Sargent on the danger of a creation of rival ideological blocs in Europe,” August 12, 1936, Document no. 84: W 9331/62/41, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVII, 90.

²³⁶ *Ibid.* The blocs to which Sargent referred would, with respect to the Spanish Civil War, end up becoming the Communist and anti-Communist blocs.

²³⁷ O’Malley, “Memorandum on Italian Foreign Policy in the Spanish Civil War,” August 19, 1936, Document no. 115: W 9885/9549/41, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVII, 138.

anxious to make progress. Prince Bismarck replied . . . that his Government anticipated great difficulties in the course of the preparations.²³⁸

As luck would have it, that same week Eden finally sent a memorandum to v. Neurath agreeing that “the British Government considered a thorough diplomatic preparation of the Five Power Conference to be necessary,” and outlined a series of non-aggression pacts under League arbitration as well as an air pact as amendments for Second Locarno.²³⁹ With no reply immediately forthcoming, Eden surmised that the German delays were tactical, writing to Premier Blum how he “thought that on the whole there was considerable advantage in our not showing ourselves in too much of a hurry just now.”²⁴⁰ In his rejection on October 13 of Eden's memorandum, v. Neurath proved that it was the British who had made the tactical error in focusing on other policies in the meantime. He came just short of dismissing outright the British proposals, remarking on the need for a “pact similar to Locarno” but without League arbitration. The air pact, having previously been offered by Hitler, remained on the table (for now). Just as the Cabinet would shockingly conclude a week later that due to Germany's (and a lesser

²³⁸ Sir Robert Vansittart, “Record by Sir R. Vansittart of a conversation with Prince von Bismarck,” September 11, 1936, Document no. 186: C 6431/4/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVII, 258.

²³⁹ Eden, “Memorandum from the British Foreign Minister to the German Foreign Office,” September 18, 1936, Document no. 546, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, V, 981 and 984.

²⁴⁰ “Stenographic Notes of the Sixth Meeting of the Non-Intervention Committee,” October 10, 1936, Document no. 278: W 13856/11115/41, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVII, 396.

extent, Italy's) reply to Eden's proposals "the situation, therefore, was far from easy,"²⁴¹ more delays would stymie any further progress. This time, however, the delays were not of German design and proved Sargent a prophet about intervention's impact on the treaty negotiations.

During the third week of October, Baldwin returned to the Cabinet but pointedly eschewed being "troubled too much with foreign affairs" owing to the Abdication Crisis. At the same time, Soviet accusations against the Fascists in the Non-Intervention Committee all throughout the month prevented Eden from fully focusing on the Brussels Conference. Again speaking with Blum, he fretted how the Soviets "had unnecessarily complicated matters" by publishing their evidence and unleashing a flurry of press attacks among the burgeoning European blocs.²⁴² Eden was quick to reject the Soviet accusations due to his own biases, but another point that he seemed to have overlooked was that Franco's forces were only on the offensive owing to Fascist assistance (such as the airlifts), a fact which itself drew the Soviets further into the conflict. Had he also known of the instructions being given to Ambassador v. Ribbentrop, he may have been more alarmed at German attitudes instead. In a memorandum on November 2, the Acting German State Secretary, Hans-Heinrich Dieckhoff, instructed the Ambassadors that "since opinions on all substantial points are still widely divergent, it would be premature to think of convening a conference proper . . . [A]t the same time it should, however, be

²⁴¹ "Preparations for Proposed Conference with the Locarno Powers," CAB 58(36), 23/85, October 21, 1936, 6.

²⁴² Eden, "Record by Mr. Eden of a conversation with M. Blum," October 10, 1936, Document no. 281: W 13351/9549/41, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVII, 398.

emphasized that, in spite of the obvious difficulties, we are maintaining our positive attitude.”²⁴³ Eden’s earlier tactical errors in not pushing the Brussels Conference would now have strategic consequences as the originally proposed date was missed entirely and the topic would not be seriously broached again until 1937.

Ironically, in preparing in early November 1936 for an annual debate on foreign policy which would open the new Parliament several weeks later, Eden insisted in front of the Cabinet that despite all pretenses for seeking friendship, they “were not going to let the Germans ‘pull the wool over our ears.’ . . . To avert internal trouble, German Ministers were stirring up their people to think that [their] misfortunes were due to this country.”²⁴⁴ While the first statement is often referenced regarding Spain in some literature,²⁴⁵ the latter points to other, more general German propaganda. Second Locarno was not discussed as a solution to that problem, but within the Cabinet “a good deal of support was given to the suggestion that efforts should be made to ease the present tension in Germany, and that, as action on the political side was very difficult, it should be found, if

²⁴³ Hans-Heinrich Dieckhoff, “The Acting State Secretary to the Embassies in Great Britain and France and to the Legation in Belgium,” November 2, 1936, Document no. 1: 3317/E007816-17, 819-25, *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Series C, VI (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1983), 2.

²⁴⁴ Eden, “Debate on the Address,” CAB 62(36), 23/86, November 4, 1936, 6-7. In fact, Ambassador Phipps lodged a complaint with v. Neurath on this topic the previous day. V. Neurath, in truly belligerent fashion, responded that the Foreign Office “did not understand German sufficiently well.” He was, also, “almost compelled to infer from it that they had a bad conscience, and I asked him to pass on this remark to Mr. Eden from me.” The full text summarizing this exchange can be found via v. Neurath, November 3, 1936, Document no. 2. *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, VI, 7.

²⁴⁵ K. W. Watkins in his study of Spain's impact on British domestic politics, *Britain Divided*, makes use of this very quote to undermine the British Conservative's general pro-Fascist policies.

possible, on the economic side.”²⁴⁶ Though some discussions along this line—such as access to raw materials in colonial markets—did occur, the broader point seemed to be that collective security was no longer a high priority in British policy. As Eden was now set to address Parliament on the progress (or lack thereof) on the policies regarding Spain, the League of Nations, and Second Locarno, a quick aside on his images with respect to Nationalist Spain is warranted.

As the foreign policy outlook provided to Parliament seemed firm and in control, at this point it should be noted that Eden's somewhat pro-Nationalist views in Spain had not shifted. In a conversation at a dinner party with Prince v. Bismarck on November 2, he “emphasized that Franco had assured the British Government that his attitude to Britain was a friendly one; in Nationalist circles . . . no anti-British mood of any kind prevailed.”²⁴⁷ In that same discussion, he also hinted to v. Bismarck that his chief concern with Second Locarno was “the German desire that the new Western Pact be detached from the League of Nations . . . [but] he too saw no insuperable difficulties.”²⁴⁸ Eden's address to the House of Commons occurred on November 5, 1936, and of Second Locarno he noted publicly this time that the “divergences” in positions, “though they are very formidable, they are not necessarily insuperable . . . [and] we shall continue to do

²⁴⁶ “Debate on the Address,” CAB 62(36), 23/86, November 4, 1936, 8.

²⁴⁷ v. Bismarck, “Counsellor of Embassy Prince Bismarck to Acting State Secretary Dieckhoff,” November 3, 1936, Document no. 6: 387/211435-39, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, VI, 14.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

what lies in our power to bring about the success of this meeting.”²⁴⁹ The Battle of Madrid would, however, prove to be a new difficulty. As Nationalist forces launched their assault on Madrid three days later, the Republican government fled to Valencia and the world turned its eyes back to Spain.

The Siege of Madrid is another reminder of how German intervention detracted from British collective security efforts. General Mola led the initial attack for the Nationalists on November 8, supported in part by German Mark I *Panzers* and later planes from the *Legion Condor*, but that same day the first forces from the International Brigades arrived. Over the next fortnight, those volunteers combined with superior Russian heavy tanks and fighter aircraft blunted any technical superiority the Nationalists may have to that point possessed. Eden cautioned on November 11 that “General Franco had by no means yet defeated his opponents, and the possibility of a protracted struggle could not be excluded.”²⁵⁰ By November 20 a stalemate took hold, and owing to their frustrations both sides committed atrocities such as massacring 1,000 prisoners of war (Republicans) or ordering the aerial bombing of civilian sectors of the city, with up to 2,000 more killed (Nationalists). Eden issued a report during a special session to discuss Second Locarno that “the situation in Madrid was deteriorating considerably, with the result that British subjects were in great danger.”²⁵¹ The Foreign Office’s focus came to

²⁴⁹ Eden, “A Call for Strength and Unity,” Speech to the House of Commons, November 5, 1936, *Foreign Affairs*, 159-160.

²⁵⁰ Eden, “The Situation in Spain,” CAB 64(36), 23/86, November 11, 1936, 4.

²⁵¹ Eden, “The Situation in Spain,” CAB 65(36), 23/86, November 13, 1936, 8. So many refugees also came to the British Embassy that multiple reports to Eden over the

rest on the evacuation of British nationals from Madrid, only for another diplomatic wrinkle to emerge. Even with the Nationalists settling in for the siege, Germany and Italy granted recognition to Franco's forces and the question of belligerency rights now pressed the Cabinet for most of November.

On November 21, Eden wrote in his diary of "a heavy and difficult day at the office . . . I do not want even to appear to follow Hitler and Mussolini at the moment" in granting such recognition as it would grant the Nationalists and their benefactors greater agency outside Spanish borders.²⁵² In the meantime, planning for the Brussels Conference was relegated to "an interim Despatch . . . [which] only summarised the present position of the negotiations."²⁵³ The Cabinet even spent a special session November 13 to help Eden redraft some portions of the proposal "to use some other phrase[s] which [were] not likely to prove so unacceptable to the Germans."²⁵⁴ The fact was the refugee crisis in Madrid—itself exacerbated by the presence of foreign troops and weapons—and the question of recognizing Franco meant the Cabinet could do little more than tweak its ongoing Second Locarno proposals. Collective security had given

ensuing weeks complained of food shortages and security concerns that anyone turned away would be murdered by roaming mobs.

²⁵² Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 413.

²⁵³ Eden, "The Proposed Five-Power Conference," CAB 64(36), 23/8, November 11, 1936, 2.

²⁵⁴ "The Machinery for Deciding on Alleged Violations," CAB 65(36), 23/86, November 13, 1936, 6-7. The context of this directive to Eden came as "the suggestion was made that the essential object of this document was to get into conversations with the Germans," and any language which may prove offensive to them, therefore, should be adjusted.

way to reacting to crises in Spain. The Anti-Comintern Pact, which leaked on November 15 and then was officially announced November 25, proved another stumbling block. Informal polling in the Foreign Office showed that while “Germany’s professed fear of communism is not considered sincere in [Great Britain,] nor is it justified by the facts . . . London’s official but, of course, not declared appraisal of Chancellor Hitler’s anti-communism is that it is camouflage to conceal and later on to justify development of his expansionist policies.”²⁵⁵ Though Eden’s views of Franco’s burgeoning regime wouldn’t change as a result, in light of these events his opinion on the intervention which supported Franco soon would.

As the Cabinet waffled over the issue of belligerency rights for the Nationalist forces in Spain, the Foreign Office was also forced to consider a new “supervision scheme” in the Non-Intervention Committee to address reports of additional “volunteers” arriving on all sides of the Siege of Madrid.²⁵⁶ In the background, Eden submitted the revised Second Locarno memorandum to the other Powers on November 19. In effect, nothing happened save a conversation between v. Ribbentrop and Halifax where the former, speaking “in a private capacity, expressed his disappointment at the contents of

²⁵⁵ Charles A. Selden, “Britain Sees ‘Anti-Red Pact’ as a German Screen,” *New York Times*, November 26, 1936.

²⁵⁶ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 416. Whereas previously Eden all but ignored such evidence, he did admit that by the end of November 1936, “the truth was that the dictator powers were now engaging themselves more heavily. Five thousand Germans, formed into battalions, had recently arrived in the south and regular units were pouring in from Italy.” The German battalions were, of course, the Condor Legion.

the British Note on the Western Pact.”²⁵⁷ The Abdication Crisis reached its peak the first week of December, and that Spanish Foreign Minister del Vayo planned an upcoming appeal to the Council of the League with additional evidence of intervention provided yet another distraction. On December 8, a frustrated Eden “called in [new German Ambassador Joachim v.] Ribbentrop and [Italian Ambassador Dino] Grandi and told them that at the present rate of progress the nations of Europe would soon be fighting each other on the battlefields of Spain.”²⁵⁸ In a speech at Bradford on December 14, he would then tie the multitude of multilateral efforts together in announcing that “we desire, and should cordially welcome, the cooperation of Germany not only in a Western agreement, but in European affairs generally.”²⁵⁹ In the context of such affairs he relayed his concerns that only through a “comprehensive settlement” could Europe prevent a “conflagration sweeping a continent or hemisphere.”²⁶⁰ To underline that prediction, Eden concluded his speech with a warning that “if we, the nations of Europe, cannot collaborate to deal with the Spanish problem, then we shall be moving into deeper and

²⁵⁷ Ernst Woermann, “The Chargé d’Affaires in Great Britain to the Foreign Ministry,” November 20, 1936, Document no. 48: 1873/423860, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, VI, 89.

²⁵⁸ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 416.

²⁵⁹ . Eden, “The Abdication,” Speech in Bradford, England, December 14, 1936, *Foreign Affairs*, 182. The intertwined policies which Eden mentioned would come to include rearmament later in the speech, in the context that should multilateralism fail then the country must be “prepared to make sacrifices quickly and effectively to equip itself strongly.”

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.

more dangerous waters.”²⁶¹ The Foreign Secretary was signaling that British policy now revolved around bringing Germany back to the table, a point that was not lost on that country as the British Cabinet recessed until January 1937.

During the Cabinet's winter recess Eden was still at work trying to bring the Germans back around. He met with v. Ribbentrop on December 17, and during the discussion both Second Locarno and Spain were topics. This time v. Ribbentrop harangued the Second Locarno proposals on the old topic of the League of Nations and the Franco-Soviet Pact, noting the German concerns that “one might well live to see half of Europe devastated before a commission met in some Swiss town or other.”²⁶² When Eden could “say no more,” v. Ribbentrop “expressed [his] regret at the negative results of [their] discussions, to which Mr. Eden replied with a gesture of regret.”²⁶³ When Eden attempted to bring up an “intensification in non-intervention, above all in relation to the question of volunteers” in Spain, v. Ribbentrop essentially punted in giving the German “point of view in the customary way . . . that [they] might again discuss the matter in the New Year.”²⁶⁴ Hitler reviewed v. Ribbentrop's notes, and his instructions back to London once again revealed the essential futility of Eden's efforts. In a side note, the Ambassador revealed “that the Führer's decision as to whether [Germany] should eventually take part

²⁶¹ Ibid., 186.

²⁶² v. Ribbentrop, “Discussion with Mr. Eden at the Foreign Office on December 17, 1936,” December 20, 1936, Document no. 103: 1873/423887-98, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, VI, 200.

²⁶³ Ibid., 201.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

in a Western Pact *after all* still remained open.”²⁶⁵ Furthermore, Ambassador Phipps reported from Berlin at the end December that “the German Government felt that negotiations would be greatly facilitated once [the] Spanish affair [was] out of the way.”²⁶⁶ The momentum on Second Locarno had, for the time being, been lost. Eden's consternation at German negotiating tactics only grew.

A Scathing Rejection

As 1937 opened, Baldwin was nearing his retirement and Eden all but remained in charge of foreign policy until Neville Chamberlain increased his assertiveness beginning that spring. In the meantime, the Spanish problem dominated the British Cabinet. Still apparently fuming from his setbacks to close out 1936, Eden began the year with a memorandum on the foreign situation on January 7. Here he introduced a new policy which would come to be called cunctation, or the buying of time. Though the time sought referred to the need to rearm, its roots were in intervention in the Spanish conflict, not in broader European instability. Eden stated this fact in writing how “it is important above all to visualise this Spanish problem in relation to Germany.”²⁶⁷ Missing from the

²⁶⁵ Friedrich Gaus, “Memorandum by the Director of the Legal Department,” December 23, 1936, Document no. 107: 3618/E027376, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, VI, 210-211. Emphasis added.

²⁶⁶ Phipps, “Sir E. Phipps (Berlin) to Foreign Office,” December 31, 1936, Document no. 524: C 1/1/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVII, 746.

²⁶⁷ Eden, “Memorandum by Mr. Eden on Spain,” January 8, 1937, Document no. 32: W 1612/1/41, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVIII, 38. Around this time, the War Office would begin to report on Germany’s use of the conflict to field test new airplane designs, tactics, and general organization. The Cabinet would

resulting discussions was any mention of Second Locarno, as the complete attention of the Cabinet turned to Spain. Responding to Eden's overview of Germany's role in the international situation, Halifax admonished him that "in the Spanish affair he thought that the Germans had some justification for their resentment against the sympathy expressed for France in this country and the criticism of Germany."²⁶⁸ Chamberlain reminded them "there was, however, a difference between France and Germany in so much as German volunteers were organised and armed, whereas the French volunteers were unarmed."²⁶⁹ Eden's reply to all of this was that "he was making as much use as possible of the German Ambassador."²⁷⁰ Unbeknownst to the Cabinet, however, Eden's attempts to "make use" of v. Ribbentrop, particularly with regard to Second Locarno, were floundering.

Any renewed progress along diplomatic channels was severely retarded in January 1937 owing to a scandal in which v. Ribbentrop alleged leaks in the British Foreign Office. Dating back to December 28, 1936, he had pointed out to Eden of Polish reports on their December 17 meeting in regard to Germany's continued objections to the Franco-Soviet Pact. In attempting to assuage v. Ribbentrop's accusations, Eden in a letter on January 5 also wanted to clarify with the Ambassador Germany's proposal to move

issue instructions to provide frequent updates on rearmament to coincide with reports from Spain, thereafter linking the two.

²⁶⁸ Halifax, "The International Situation," CAB 1(37), 23/87, January 13, 1937, 3.

²⁶⁹ Chamberlain, "The International Situation," CAB 1(37), 23/87, January 13, 1937, 3.

²⁷⁰ Eden, "The International Situation," CAB 1(37), 23/87, January 13, 1937, 5.

past the subject of arbitration. V. Ribbentrop's reply two weeks later, that “obviously it would hardly be appropriate to raise the question of proposals”²⁷¹ until the so-called leakage scandal was resolved, went into the void. The Cabinet received reports that

a German ship landed war material and personnel at Melilla [in Morocco]. The latter were believed to consist largely of airmen. . . . It had to be remembered also that German economic activity in Spanish Morocco was very great, and that large amounts of iron ore required for the construction of German armaments were being shipped to Germany.²⁷²

In being asked later as to what else may be driving this intervention, Halifax replied on Eden's behalf that “the indications were that the German and Italian Governments' principal desire at present was that there should be no Bolshevist Government in Spain.”²⁷³ Discussion of Second Locarno in the Cabinet ceased altogether until March as the British Embassy in Berlin was tasked with fleshing out the Moroccan situation. Though Germany may not have had true designs on Spanish Morocco, the very perception that they might clouded the Cabinet's ability to focus on other topics such as collective security.

Hitler himself seemed to signal in a January 30 speech that his decision on “taking part in a Western Pact” had been made, and to this Eden and his staff finally responded. After the Spanish situation ebbed, he eventually noted to the Cabinet on February 3 that Hitler's diatribe “held out no prospect of any advance in the direction of international

²⁷¹ v. Ribbentrop, “Ambassador Ribbentrop to Foreign Secretary Eden,” January 20, 1936, Document no. 149: 2550/523548-549, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, VI, 304..

²⁷² Eden, “Spanish Morocco,” CAB 1(37), 23/87, January 13, 1937, 10.

²⁷³ Halifax, “Spain,” CAB 4(37), 23/87, January 27, 1937, 1-2.

cooperation. The Germans apparently intended to pursue the path they had chosen and did not mean to be very helpful.”²⁷⁴ Vansittart then met with a “confidant” of v.

Ribbentrop's a few days later and intimated to the source how he hoped that

he hoped there would not be no more speeches but that a long period of calm in international affairs might set in. . . . As regards the Western Pact, Vansittart seemed to have in mind a somewhat Utopian solution by which the East, that is Russia, should be completely excluded, while Central Europe would have to be firmly attached, in some form, to such a Western Pact.²⁷⁵

When v. Ribbentrop attempted to meet with Halifax to confirm this proposal, however, yet another “scandal” emerged, this time over the use of the Nazi salute. In the meantime, the Battle of Jarama erupted outside Madrid.

The Jarama River, flowing to the Southeast of Madrid, was a critical line of communication between the Republican government in Valencia and the defenders in the Spanish capital. Franco's forces launched an offensive on February 6 to sever those communications, and the Condor Legion was pivotal in aiding the Nationalists both to achieve their initial breakthroughs and to retain their gains against repeated Republican counterattacks.²⁷⁶ Both Halifax and Lord Plymouth, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, kept the Cabinet otherwise occupied on the supervision scheme being pitched to the Non-Intervention Committee. During this time, Halifax met with v. Ribbentrop, on or about February 14. In a most interesting reply, when the former

²⁷⁴ Eden, “Herr Hitler's Speech,” CAB 5(37), 23/87, February 3, 1937, 3.

²⁷⁵ v. Ribbentrop, “The Ambassador in Great Britain to the Foreign Ministry,” February 6, 1937, Document no. 182: 1382/358261, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, VI, 378-379.

²⁷⁶ Proctor, *Hitler's Luftwaffe in the Spanish Civil War*, 105-107.

asked for a German answer to the long-gestating British proposal of November 19, the Ambassador noted that “as a result of the acute situation in Spain, this matter had receded somewhat into the background in the last few months,” and he would need to reengage the Foreign Ministry.²⁷⁷ He used the occasion to reiterate to Halifax “that Germany would in no circumstances permit a Soviet Republic to be established in Spain.”²⁷⁸ As they had done before, the Germans were using their own participation in Spanish battles to press the British into believing they were too distracted to focus on other topics. That fact need not matter, as Halifax himself was plenty distracted already with other elements of the conflict to focus on Second Locarno.

Halifax promised to report on his conversation with v. Ribbentrop regarding Second Locarno to the Cabinet, but this did not occur. Instead, v. Ribbentrop sent an abrupt telegram back to Berlin later that day following what he called “distorted reports in the press about failure to observe the Court ceremonial,” as he had in fact given the new King of England the Nazi salute upon presenting his diplomatic credentials.²⁷⁹ Even as v. Neurath signaled to v. Ribbentrop to continue in the Second Locarno discussions, a note on behalf of Halifax to the German embassy on February 20 went unanswered. Returning from Geneva, Eden then placed a call to v. Ribbentrop personally on February

²⁷⁷ v. Ribbentrop, “Conversation with the Acting Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax,” February 14, 1937, Document no. 201:1455/366190-207, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, VI, 419.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 421.

²⁷⁹ v. Ribbentrop, “The giving of the German salute by the German Ambassador,” February 14, 1937, Document no. 202: 1455/366217-19, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, VI, 423.

26, wondering that since “the Spanish question having come into smoother waters[,] if Germany were able to make suggestions about the Western Pact” in response to the British proposals?²⁸⁰ With the final Republican counterattack petering out, the Battle of Jarama ended the next day. V. Ribbentrop journeyed to Berlin as well, and promised Eden, “I would report to my Government when I was in Berlin, and we agreed to take up these informal talks again after my return.”²⁸¹ Germany's reply to the Second Locarno proposals would eventually arrive on March 11, 1937, just as the Nationalists in Spain launched another offensive.

With the hope of a reply finally in the offering, it was Halifax's turn during Eden's sabbatical in February 1937 to update the League of Nations Union on the progress of Second Locarno. He justified the move from a League approach to “regional pacts” such as Locarno, arguing that “it would have the effect of making it quite plain to potential aggressors that, if they disturbed the peace, they would be able to count in advance the opposition.”²⁸² On March 3, in a debate in which a peer in the House of Lords suggested an update to foreign policy, he went back to the stump to remind them that the League policy was not yet truly dead, detailing how “the regional pact is not in competition with the League, nor is the pact the instrument to which we should look to remedy

²⁸⁰ v. Ribbentrop, “The Ambassador in Great Britain to the Foreign Ministry,” February 26, 1937. Document no. 232: 2558/523973-74, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, VI, 482.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 483.

²⁸² Lord Halifax, “Regional Pacts,” Speech to the League of Nations Union in Southampton, February 24, 1937, *Speeches on Foreign Policy*, 69.

injustices.”²⁸³ Luckily, Halifax did not need to worry so much about the Guadalajara offensive slowing down the upcoming German reply. Though one of the largest operations of 1937, it was primarily supported by Italian troops. The true injustice in his remarks, though, was that neither he nor Eden predicted the nature of the German response.

V. Neurath telegraphed the German reply to Second Locarno proposals to the London embassy on March 10, 1937, along with instructions for their interpretation. In short, he declared that “because the French government . . . very emphatically advocated that the exchange of memoranda be brought to an end and that oral discussions be started,” the German answer could only be that “we see no prospect of success in joint oral discussions between representatives of the five Powers of the Western Pact.”²⁸⁴ For one, the first phase of the reply noted that because “the guarantees of the old Rhine Pact were politically a joint and united obligation on the part of the United Kingdom and Italy,” the evolving Rome-Berlin Axis meant that Germany “must consider such an unrestricted reciprocal assistance pact between the five Powers as an impossibility.”²⁸⁵ The memorandum went on to state that any linkage of Second Locarno to either the

²⁸³ Lord Halifax, “Obligations under the Covenant,” Speech to the House of Lords, March 3, 1937, *Speeches on Foreign Policy*, 77. Of note, Halifax would submit that rearmament was a suitable alternative to collective security, but that is for another chapter.

²⁸⁴ v. Neurath, “The Foreign Minister to the Embassy in Great Britain,” March 10, 1937, Document no. 258: 1874/423963-64, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, VI, 522-523.

²⁸⁵ v. Neurath, “Memorandum,” March 10, 1937, Enclosure to Document no. 258: 1874/423963-64, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, VI, 524.

League of Nations or the Kellogg-Briand Pact (which Chamberlain and others had insisted Eden included in the November 19 proposals), “*represent a one-sided restriction of the non-aggression agreement to Germany's disadvantage*,” as it was not a party to those.²⁸⁶ It also repeated v. Ribbentrop's earlier charges of favoring the Franco-Soviet Pact, in that France “would be permitted, *despite* her obligations of non-aggression, to take military measures against Germany without having to fear the intervention of the guarantors against herself.”²⁸⁷ The only proposal which Germany accepted, in essence, was the request of Belgium to remain a neutral state protected by all parties. For all intents and purposes, Germany had just scuttled the Second Locarno Treaty, but the drama would fester on into the summer of July 1937.

Eden's memoirs make no mention of the death of the Second Locarno talks. As one of his largest political failures during his first stint as Foreign Secretary, it is easy to see why his mention of that effort in his memoirs ceases as of April 1936. Ribbentrop discussed Germany's reply with Eden on March 13, where he relayed that “it would not be possible to have a meeting of the Five Powers until all the fundamental points were virtually settled. This was unfortunately far from being the case at present.”²⁸⁸ Eden's official response to v. Ribbentrop on Germany's counter proposals, on March 19, was in effect that he was going on a holiday and didn't want to discuss the topic until sometime

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 525. Emphasis in original.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 527. Emphasis in original.

²⁸⁸ Eden, “Mr. Eden to Sir E. Phipps (Berlin),” March 13, 1937, Document no. 286: C 2061/1/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVIII, 416.

in April.²⁸⁹ This did not occur. Instead, Belgium requested to be released from its security guarantees to France, itself a blow to any supposed “progress.”²⁹⁰ This release occurred on April 24, 1937, to which the “Belgian government were clearly relieved,” but when Eden broached the topic of Second Locarno the reply had been that Belgium “was not prepared to make a forecast of what could be done.”²⁹¹ In losing support of one of its Locarno allies, Britain was faced with the choice to continue on with an agitated France or let the initiative perish. In the existing literature, much is made that at this time Eden has “sharpening views”²⁹² as “he did not fully recognize the dangers of Hitler and Mussolini until 1937,” but the truth is more that his failed strategy revealed a different kind of threat than he had previously perceived: the failure of collective security.

Shortly after Germany’s reply, Eden regretfully informed the Foreign Policy Committee that “the chances of reaching agreement for a basis of a Five Power Pact were very small indeed.” Lord Halifax seemed to agree for different reasons, remarking that “it would be a mistake to take too pessimistic a view of the situation . . . If Germany had no intention of keeping her word, then the Pacts were mischievous and dangerous.” William Ormsby-Gore, the Under-Secretary of State for Colonies, offered some hope that

²⁸⁹ v. Ribbentrop, “The Ambassador in Great Britain to the Foreign Ministry,” March 19, 1937, Document no. 285: 3317/E007887, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, VI, 578.

²⁹⁰ Eden, “Belgium: The Five Power Conference—Release from Undertaking of March, 1936,” CAB 18(37), 23/88, April 21, 1937, 1.

²⁹¹ Eden, “Belgium: The Five Power Conference—Release from Undertaking of March, 1936,” CAB 19(37), 23/88, April 28, 1937, 1.

²⁹² Watkins, *Britain Divided*, 99.

“Germany’s present attitude might be temporary and provisional, due to her preoccupations in Spain.” Despite Eden’s at times apathetic attempts to resurrect the idea, Germany had in fact successfully used the Spanish Civil War to delay the Second Locarno treaty into oblivion. Where Eden wanted a multilateral settlement, the world had moved on to other topics, many of them related to Spain.²⁹³ The German strategy to scuttle Second Locarno—and collective security more broadly—against the backdrop of the Spanish Civil War was by this point becoming devastatingly successful. V. Neurath could have issued his scathing rejection at any point between July 1936 and March 1937, but by waiting until the British had been worn down by events in Spain he likely undermined their resolve on the matter. At the same time, instructions given to German diplomats to all but avoid discussing the stalled negotiations further frustrated any British attempts to revive them.

The next record in the German documents of Eden approaching its representatives on the topic comes on May 13. In a meeting with War Minister v. Blomberg, he tried to undermine the role of the Axis in Germany’s version of Second Locarno, to which after some vague assurances Eden “turned the conversation to Spain.”²⁹⁴ A British

²⁹³ “Extract from conclusions of the seventh meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy,” March 18, 1937, Document no. 307: C 2303/37/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVIII, 449-459.

²⁹⁴ v. Blomberg, “Memorandum on the conversation between Field Marshal von Blomberg and Mr. Eden in London, May 13,” May 18, 1937, Document no. 371: 1465/367357-69, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, VI, 760-761. Eden’s remarks were translated as, “Germany too must realize that it was not possible for Britain to place the decision as to the coming in effect of the obligation to assist, solely in the hands of the guarantor Powers, Britain and Italy, since in this case it would always be possible for Italy to block any action by refusing her consent.” This was, of course, Germany’s ploy!

memorandum appeared two months later on July 16, again somehow summarizing the “progress” of the Second Locarno Notes,²⁹⁵ which in itself earned a note of condemnation from the German Foreign Ministry. The German embassies were instructed to tamp down on any talk of progress, given

a preliminary department examination of the “basic principles” on which the proposed Western Pact is to be based [concluding] that their content is very meagre [sic], as was indeed only to be expected given the state of the negotiations. . . . The British Government are proceeding from an erroneous assumption if they believe that the “basic principles” represent a common view which has been sufficiently clarified between the Governments concerned. Still further negotiations through diplomatic channels will, rather, be required.²⁹⁶

At this point the Second Locarno talks mostly disappear from the records entirely, but for good reason: Italian “pirate” submarines in August 1937 launched an offensive against pro-Republican vessels off Spain. This event grabbed the entire world's attention and brought it all down upon the Non-Intervention Committee, to which this paper now turns.

²⁹⁵ The series of memoranda exchanged via diplomatic channels.

²⁹⁶ Ernst von Weizsäcker, “The Foreign Ministry to the Missions in Great Britain, France, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands and the Consulate at Geneva,” July 31, 1937, Document no. 505: 3317/E008913-16, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, VI, Page 992.

CHAPTER 6

“PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE” FOR NON-INTERVENTION IN SPAIN

Reviled but entirely necessary, the greater effort to secure non-intervention in Spain consumed nearly as much of the world's attention as the actual events in that country. The policy was a critical test of the democratic nations' ability to negotiate with and control the Fascist powers. As much as its supporters could cite favorable polls for the policy in most countries, critics often (correctly) pointed to the early, ongoing, and catastrophic failures of the agreement to seemingly do the job for which it was intended. Remarkably, though shots were indeed fired upon one another by most of the parties in Spain, belligerent or otherwise, broader “Non-Intervention” did in fact keep the peace. If for nothing else, for that reason the French and British efforts—the latter again led largely by Anthony Eden—should be lauded. Simultaneously, they ignored the evidence in Spain that the Fascists were not ready to fight and wished only to keep stalling for better negotiating positions. For the British, the best effect of the Non-Intervention Agreement and its supporting Committee was in changing how several key British Cabinet Ministers viewed Germany. Though the British collective security strategy during this period can broadly be viewed as a failure given its wider goals, a few concrete victories did emerge from the Non-Intervention policy which, in hindsight, may have provided a better blueprint for its other engagements with Germany.

The Hope and Sobering Reality of Non-Intervention

Along with the Second Locarno efforts, the Non-Intervention policy was Eden's primary means of multilateral foreign policy after the Spanish Civil War began. In

reality, he had little to do with its formulation or initial implementation, but from the beginning he had cautioned the Cabinet on supplying the Republican government in Spain with oil or arms outside of normal procedures. Just before departing for his summer vacation, he remarked to the Portuguese Foreign Minister on July 30, 1936, that “we were not willing to mix ourselves up in the internal affairs of Spain.”²⁹⁷ He gave his reasons thusly, “first, because if the fighting in Spain were once internationalized, its consequences would be uncontrollable. . . . Secondly, the British Government had no wish to be involved in a Spanish civil war, nor were they convinced that, whatever its outcome, the Spaniards would feel any gratitude to those who had intervened.”²⁹⁸ Even though on vacation, he responded to Lord Halifax's dispatches such that when French Premier León Blum originally proposed the Non-Intervention Agreement on August 2, Eden replied back to Halifax that Germany and Portugal should be included alongside France's suggestion of themselves, Italy, and Great Britain.²⁹⁹ Once the French made the formal proposal to Europe on August 9, several dozen countries quickly signaled an

²⁹⁷ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 401.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 401.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 402. Though Halifax, and to a lesser extent Eden, certainly assisted the French in formulating the Non-Intervention Agreement, they were always careful to give full credit to the French for first suggesting the idea. As Eden describes on Page 405, once rumors leaked in the press that the Foreign Office had come up with the proposal, he went as far as even denying the portions of the rumor which were true, including that portions of the plan had been worked in London during preparations for the Brussels Conference. The coy Eden was able to deny the allegations, if only because non-intervention itself had not yet been discussed at that time.

affirmative reply, with the exception of the Fascist countries and the Soviet Union.³⁰⁰ As much as Germany had used its intervention in Spain to scuttle the Brussels Conference and fend off other British collective security initiatives, up until the *Anschluss* its greatest impact would be on the British Non-Intervention policy.

Though a multilateral effort, the Non-Intervention Agreement was not a treaty with legal or moral obligations. As the name suggested, it was more an attempt to align European policy towards a single outcome: confining the civil war to Spain. It can be treated as collective security owing to its reliance on its multitude of signatories to police violations (and later, to actively engage in military action). Though the French ultimately proposed the policy, the British in effect convinced France to halt their initial aid to the Republican government. Though no record of this appears in the Cabinet archives or in Eden's memoirs, apparently on July 21 the Foreign Office learned of Blum's "tacit approval" to provide war matériel and signaled to French Ambassador Charles Corbin of "the grave concern felt by the British government that France might become embroiled in Spain."³⁰¹ Though during this early period the French did in fact sell "obsolete weapons at inflated prices" to the Republicans,³⁰² Corbin convinced Blum to fly to London to meet with Baldwin and Eden on July 24, during the previously scheduled Second Locarno discussions. At the meeting, Eden pulled Blum back on this new policy. He warned Blum

³⁰⁰ Once they signaled their agreement, 27 countries had ratified the French proposal, a huge diplomatic victory for Blum's precarious government.

³⁰¹ Puzzo, *Spain and the Great Powers*, 86-87.

³⁰² Antony Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War* (London: Orbis Publishing, 1982), 110.

that such assistance “might conceivably develop a most critical international situation, especially in view of the Italian and German attitudes.”³⁰³ Blum convinced the French Cabinet on July 25 to rescind its offer and declare a strict policy of neutrality.³⁰⁴ Their non-intervention proposal arrived a week later, with both Halifax and Eden assisting the French over the course of August 1936 to help guide the agreement into place.

With the British Cabinet in recess until September, the Foreign Office provided the primary legwork to support the French. With Eden providing some guidance via telegram, Halifax helped solidify non-intervention policies ranging from the sale of airplanes to propaganda, monetary policy, and humanitarian intervention.³⁰⁵ French anxiety during this period persisted, as their Chargé d’Affairs, Roger Cambon, impressed upon the British “the great embarrassment in which [they] were being placed by German and Italian actions in Spain . . . Only, M[onsieur] Cambon said, by the exhibition of Anglo-French solidarity . . . could M. Blum resist the elements in France who are determined to support the Spanish Government.”³⁰⁶ Eden hurriedly responded back to

³⁰³ Furnia, *The Diplomacy of Appeasement*, 209-210. Furnia also notes of the call Corbin received that “the British were extremely agitated” over French intervention.

³⁰⁴ At the time this occurred, the Spanish Prime Minister, José Giral, remarked that “nothing is more mistaken than the view, so firmly held in Spain, that the British Foreign Office never makes mistakes and always acts with wisdom. By forcing the hand of Paris they have committed more than a crime, they have committed an enormous ineptitude for which sooner or later they will have to pay.” Indeed, that the Soviet Union became the Republicans' sole benefactor would play right into the Fascists' hands. Quoted in Puzzo, *Spain and the Great Powers*, 90.

³⁰⁵ Alan Campbell Johnson, *Viscount Halifax* (New York: Ives Washburn, 1941), 409.

³⁰⁶ George Mounsey, “Minute by Sir Mounsey,” August 4, 1936, Document no. 51: W 7748/62/41, *British Documents on Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVII, 56.

Cambon that the British shared their “anxiety to avoid any risk of complications” from foreign intervention,³⁰⁷ which helped to buy time for the draft agreement to be circulated on August 6 to the other European governments for comment. During the comment period, Cambon proposed on August 12 the idea that eventually became the Non-Intervention Committee. Now seeing an “acquiescent attitude” being portrayed in British press to Fascist intervention, a nervous Eden phoned the Foreign Office on August 14 requesting additional urgency for the public exchange of notes on non-intervention between France and Britain.³⁰⁸ He returned early from his holiday on August 16 only to discover that Baldwin, “whose health had been poor all summer, had now been ordered three months' complete rest and was convalescing in South Wales.”³⁰⁹ In that vacuum Eden unilaterally announced a full arms embargo against Spain on August 19, and instructions were even given to the Labour Party that “any active expression of sympathy with the Republican Government of Spain would at that time be against the interests of Great Britain and therefore unpatriotic.”³¹⁰ Obtaining agreement from Germany would take yet another week, owing directly to their ongoing actions in Spain.

Despite early indications from Italy and Germany that they agreed in principle on non-intervention, both governments kept adding on riders to the official French proposal. The major German contention stemmed from the fact that a Ju-52 transport plane bound

³⁰⁷ Eden, “Letter from Mr. Eden to M. Cambon,” August 4, 1936, Document no. 52: W 7504/62/41, *British Documents on Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XVII, 58.

³⁰⁸ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 402-403.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 403.

³¹⁰ Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War*, 110.

for Franco had been seized by the Republicans on August 9 after it had *twice* gotten lost and landed on Republican-held airstrips. The German Foreign Ministry informed the French Ambassador on August 12 that it could not join the Non-Intervention Agreement (NIA) until such time as the Ju-52 and its crew were returned.³¹¹ Reports of atrocities in Barcelona also included the news that several German civilians had been killed. The Germans not only demanded the return of their airplane, but stipulated that to secure their agreement a reciprocity clause be inserted to ensure that the Spanish also observed the policy of the “neutral” powers.³¹² In the meantime the Foreign Ministry, which initially “was at a loss” to comprehend Hitler's decision to intervene,³¹³ ultimately came up with the scheme which allowed Hitler to save face on the aircraft issue and accede to the NIA. Foreign Minister v. Neurath himself suggested, so as not to appear to be “sabotaging the whole matter,” for the Führer to coincide the announcement of Germany's joining the NIA with one that extended the length of German conscription to two years.³¹⁴ Both announcements came on August 24, 1936, and so from the outset, Germany's feigned involvement in non-intervention only served other purposes.

While attempting to secure commitment from the Fascists³¹⁵ and Soviet Union, work on the details of the Non-Intervention Committee (NIC) continued throughout

³¹¹ Puzzo, *Spain and the Great Powers*, 107-108.

³¹² Furnia, *The Diplomacy of Appeasement*, 212.

³¹³ Hildebrand, *The Foreign Policy of the Third Reich*, 45.

³¹⁴ Puzzo, *Spain and the Great Powers*, 115.

³¹⁵ Portugal was the last nation to sign, on August 27. Armino Monteiro, the Portuguese Foreign Minister, quipped at the time to the German Ambassador to Portugal that “he simply did not understand the British policy and called France her own

August 1936. As the NIA had been designed to be non-legally binding, the moral aspects of the policy were not otherwise trusted as any violations would only be breaking the “spirit” of the accord.³¹⁶ The NIC would then serve as an investigative and arbitration body similar to those employed by other collective security for a. Just as the French had proposed the NIC, they were also considered to be too close to the situation to serve as impartial arbitrators. Germany was not initially keen on the idea as a result, and v. Neurath adopted the stance that the NIC would be counterproductive. According to German documents, Italy played a role in this portion of the planning, having hinted to Germany that it could accept the British as the lead instead. Remarking on this turn of events, Hans-Heinrich Dieckhoff suggested to v. Neurath that

we would probably be quite alone in our negative attitude . . . I hardly believe that the plan could really entail any serious danger for us. The word 'control' does not appear in the French note. . . . We ourselves, after all, can play a part in seeing that this London arrangement does not develop into a permanent political agency which might make trouble for us. . . . It can, in fact, only be agreeable to us if the center of gravity, which after all has thus far been in Paris because of the French initiative, is transferred to London.³¹⁷

V. Neurath's attitude was changed in seeing such possibility for subterfuge within the NIC, and Hitler was given assurances that “the work of the committee would not expand in an undesirable manner.”³¹⁸

gravedigger.” September 7, 1936, Document no. 70, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series D, III of the British version, quoted in Waktins, *Britain Divided*, 81.

³¹⁶ Puzzo, *Spain and the Great Powers*, 118-119.

³¹⁷ Hans-Heinrich Dieckhoff, August 29, 1936, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, III, quoted in Puzzo, *Spain and the Great Powers*, 115-116.

³¹⁸ Puzzo, *Spain and the Great Powers*, 115.

Even though in private the Foreign Ministry had moved forward on the idea of arbitration, they informed Eden that Germany was still not convinced on the need for the NIC itself. Noting that “Germany was the most important,” to ensuring success of the NIA and NIC, in a September 2 Cabinet meeting he passed on a counter proposal from Germany “that there should be no international clearing house system, but that His Majesty's Government should alone act as a clearing house in the matter. Germany had been informed that we could not entertain this suggestion, and had been pressed to come into line with the other principal European powers.”³¹⁹ When Britain hesitated on this proposal Germany finally relented, and London was therefore chosen as the seat of the NIC with Lord Plymouth presiding over the first meeting from September 8-9 in the Foreign Office.

Defending the Policy's Early Failures

From the outset, the Non-Intervention policy was beset by mistrust and misdeeds on all sides. Eden pressed for time from Parliament to see the effort gain momentum before reporting on his overall strategy in Spain. According to Eden, 26 countries (except an always-tardy Portugal) were present for the first meetings which “passed off amiably enough.”³²⁰ However, proceedings were immediately stalled by Germany’s demurring over the Junkers incident.³²¹ Once all parties were eventually settled, the first agreement out of the committee was one which would continually frustrate the Spanish Republicans

³¹⁹ Eden, “Non-Intervention,” CAB 56(36), 23/84, September 2, 1936, 16.

³²⁰ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 407.

³²¹ Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War*, 121.

for the next several years: “when breaches of the Agreement were alleged, the complaint must be laid by a government which was a party to the Agreement.”³²² As Spain was not a party to the NIA, this meant the Republican government could either petition others to champion its cause, or resort to other fora such as the League of Nations. It would try both, which over the next few months presented numerous challenges to both the French and British governments. The Republicans had a point in doing so, as from the outset the NIA was plagued by breaches.

Owing to Baldwin's illness the Cabinet only met once between July and the middle of October 1936. Once the NIC had launched, Eden and the Foreign Office were primarily focused on this effort given the stunted progress of the other collective security policies. During those first few weeks that group was continually distracted by reports that Franco, Mola, and other Nationalist parties may have promised Spanish territory in return for Fascist support, beginning as early as August.³²³ Eden later commented that “while the generals had spoken of their determination to preserve Spanish integrity, it was impossible to ignore either German activity in connection with the Canaries or Italian activities in the Balearics.”³²⁴ During this time Spanish Foreign Minister del Vayo

³²² Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 407.

³²³ This matter drove the largest part of the Cabinet's sole discussion of Spain at its September 2, 1936. Owing to reports of increased Italian activity, Ciano had on August 17 given “formal and categorical assurance” that the “Italian Government nor any Italian had had any dealings with General Franco nor was there any truth whatsoever in suspicions that Italy had done a deal or was contemplating dealing with [Nationalist] Whites for the cession of Ceuta, Spanish Morocco or Balearic Islands.” Gascoyne-Cecil, Robert (as Viscount Cranborne), “Italian Foreign Policy in the Spanish Civil War,” CAB 56(36), 23/85, September 2, 1936, 13-14.

³²⁴ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 408.

had first petitioned Eden, and then the League of Nations on September 28, regarding proof of intervention without success. To pull the focus off of the League, the British in turn presented that evidence before the NIC at its next meeting on October 8-9; however, in doing so they stated they were not convinced of its truthfulness. This drove an immediate wedge among the parties most interested in Spain, and Eden wrote that the NIC “had that morning experienced its stormiest meeting to date.”³²⁵ The results in the Committee over the next two weeks had far-ranging implications both for the Non-Intervention policy and the course of the war in Spain.

Far from it being the Germans, the Soviets were actually the most vocal critics in the NIC through October 1936. Often acting “without any proof” and “in bad faith” according to Eden, Soviet Ambassador Maisky lashed out at the Fascist powers, including Portugal, on both their breaches and general *laissez-faire* attitude towards the Agreement in general.³²⁶ That meeting ended in acrimony with Portugal lodging a protest, but the Cabinet’s general anti-Communist sensibilities led them to continue to blame the Soviets. Some of this ire was well-founded, as after Lord Plymouth rebuffed Maisky’s proposal for a joint British and French naval patrol off Spain, the Cabinet received information a few days later “that the Russians were sending aircraft to Barcelona.”³²⁷ Increasingly fed up with the Committee, Russia then “openly declared that

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid., 409.

³²⁷ Eden, “The Situation in Spain,” CAB 57(36), 23/85, October 14, 1936, 15.

it would not be bound to a greater extent than the Fascist powers.”³²⁸ It again presented evidence of the continued flow of German and Italian materials to the Nationalists on October 23, and when the Germans presented a flat-out denial to the charges, matters truly came to a head. Corbin pulled Eden aside to address “his anxiety about the Committee's future,”³²⁹ and by the end of the meeting Russia “announced that she would send help to the Republic.”³³⁰ Eden then spent most of the month trying to drum up support for both continued faith and time for the NIC.

Eden's first stump speech for the Non-Intervention Committee came on October 14. He remarked to a public crowd that

I am well aware of the criticisms which are being directed against the agreement. It is even being suggested that the time has now come to give up the effort. His Majesty's Government do not share that view . . . they support non-intervention. That view has strongly held and has never wavered. We are for our part determined to carry out loyally our own undertaking and to promote in every way possible the execution of the terms of the agreement. We consider this is the best, if not the only, way, to avert the dangerous developments which are inherent in the Spanish situation.³³¹

The Cabinet became concerned of the negative press the policy was receiving, and on October 21 asked Eden for a strategy. Just as its other collective security issues—League of Nations reform and Second Locarno—were at risk, they did not want Non-Intervention to stumble as well. Owing to the Soviet issue, Eden then considered that “it was

³²⁸ Puzzo, *Spain and the Great Powers*, 111.

³²⁹ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 411.

³³⁰ Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, 575.

³³¹ Eden, “War in Spain,” Speech in Sheffield, October 14, 1936, *Foreign Affairs*, 151-152.

undesirable to give the appearance of making accusations against one government only . . . when the Parliament met the Government were certain to be asked questions as to what evidence of breaches of the agreement they had received, and it would then be necessary to make some disclosures.”³³² Extensive discourse revealed that evidence against the Fascists did exist, but once again Eden kept to the line that the only substantive information was against the Soviets. The Cabinet did not seem convinced.

On October 28, the day before Eden was to finally address Parliament on the progress of the Non-Intervention policy, he attempted one final time to bring the Cabinet on to his side. He now explained the previous anti-Soviet stance differently, remarking that

as the insurgents appeared to be getting the upper hand there would seem to be some danger that the civil war might end with a Government in power in Spain that was somewhat resentful of our attitude, while Portugal was also critical [due to Soviet accusations in the Committee]. This might easily give the Portuguese government a push towards the Fascist Governments of Europe.³³³

The Cabinet approved this logic, as well as his *mea culpa* for having sponsored the Spanish evidence which the Russians had gone on to exaggerate to great effect throughout the month. Eden finally made his presentation before the House of Commons on October 29, as follows:

The chief complainant among the nations against the working of the Non-Intervention [A]greement is Soviet Russia. . . . No single government has withdrawn from this agreement. They are still on the committee, even Soviet Russia. . . . There is no alternative policy except to allow the free export of arms to either side—not by us, but one set of governments supporting the one side and the other the other. . . . In that way lies confusion, international recrimination, and, maybe, war . . . [Non-Intervention] is a device, admittedly a device, by

³³² Eden, “Non-Intervention,” CAB 58(36), 23/85, October 21, 1936, 8-9.

³³³ Eden, “The Situation in Spain,” CAB 60(36), 23/86, October 28, 1936, 3.

means of which we hope to limit the risks of war. It is an improvised safety curtain.³³⁴

Though it was proving less popular over time, the NIA and its Committee retained enough support through the upcoming Battle of Madrid that, though he had not initially guided the NIC's machinery, Eden would play a far more prominent role for the rest of its existence. Once again, however, Eden would first have to smooth over what the Cabinet began to believe were German manipulations of their own anti-Communist sentiments.

Previous sections dealt with Germany's anti-Communist propaganda campaign attempting to soften British attitudes. In the preparation for Eden's follow-up speech to open the new Parliamentary year, "it was pointed out that the Germans want our friendship in order to resist Bolshevism" and any rejection of that "would cut across the whole of the German policy, which was based on their anti-Bolshevist attitude."³³⁵ Eden wrapped this theory into his speech to the House of Commons on November 5, where he noted that friendship was based on more than just public proclamations. At the same time, he commented how he "was glad to note the interpretation placed by an important German newspaper on the Gracious Speech."³³⁶ It is there interpreted as this country's resolve once again to take the lead. That is precisely our intention."³³⁷ This new resolve

³³⁴ Quoted in Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 412.

³³⁵ Eden, "Debate on the Address," CAB 61(36), 23/86, November 4, 1936, 6-7.

³³⁶ King George's first address to Parliament as the new sovereign, on October 30, 1936. Each year, His/Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech opens the new session of Parliament.

³³⁷ Eden, "A Call of Strength and Unity," Speech to the House of Commons, November 5, 1936, *Foreign Affairs*, 165.

faced its first stiff test with the Battle of Madrid and the deployment of the Condor Legion, the latter of which threatened to bring down the entire Non-Intervention Committee.

Following the October 30, 1936 decision to deploy the *Legion Condor* to Spain, the Germans were worried that the continued sloppiness of their contracted shipping would reveal their secret. Here, apparently, Hitler thought of “testing the reaction of the British . . . in association with the idea of a rapid withdrawal in the event that the German intervention misfired.”³³⁸ The first ships began to arrive between November 6-7 at Cádiz, the day before Madrid was assaulted by Nationalist forces. As it would take almost a month for the Legion to disembark, stage, and reorganize into a functional force, it essentially sat out the Battle of Madrid. Though the first flights began as early as November 15, the bombers' targets were Soviet transport ships at the port of Cartagena.³³⁹ When the first Condor Legion flights over Madrid occurred between November 18-22, the battle had wound down with the Nationalists' final assault coming on November 19. Over the next few days it delivered strikes and practiced its formations and tactics, with disappointing results.³⁴⁰ Its preparations did not go unnoticed, as the Germans feared.

During November 1936 the Foreign Office, in collaboration with the other British Ministries and Departments came up with what came to be called the “supervision

³³⁸ Hildebrand, *The Foreign Policy of the Third Reich*, 46.

³³⁹ Proctor, *Hitler's Luftwaffe in the Spanish Civil War*, 65.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

scheme.” In his memoirs, Eden gave credit to the original idea to both Corbin and Maisky in which the Foreign Office “proposed to supervise the entry of all war material into Spain, an ambitious project” made necessary by “so many breaches of the Agreement . . . that a new scheme was imperative.”³⁴¹ Without acknowledging any specific details, Eden opened a new debate within the Cabinet on the NIC on November 18, presaging it with his belief that while necessary “in view of the many breaches, however, it was impossible to maintain the present position.”³⁴² When asked what sort of breaches, he outlined the “steady importation of arms into Barcelona from Russia, and to some extent to other ports from other countries.”³⁴³ He then presented the first draft proposal for the supervision scheme, but had to return to the drawing board given its cost and fears it would be voted down at the NIC. Much to the surprise of the British,³⁴⁴ the revamped proposal was accepted unanimously by the Committee. Lord Plymouth, who chaired the NIC, visited the Cabinet on November 25 with details on the agreement, in that “broadly, the proposal was to establish groups of agents at points of ingress on sea and by land.”³⁴⁵

³⁴¹ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 415.

³⁴² Eden, “The Non-Intervention Committee,” CAB 66(36), 23/86, November 18, 1936, 8.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 416. He notes that the French were not caught unaware to the general mood of the Non-Intervention Committee. He recalled that “the French Government thought that, as Franco was not doing too well militarily, the dictator powers might welcome an opportunity to rid themselves of an embarrassing commitment.”

³⁴⁵ Lord Plymouth, “The Non-Intervention Committee,” CAB 67(36), 23/86, November 25, 1936, 6.

With the Cabinet's (pessimistic) blessing, on December 4 Lord Plymouth made the official proposal to the NIC, but the earlier enthusiasm was dampened as "the replies were slow in arriving and lukewarm when they did. The truth was that the dictator powers were now engaging themselves more heavily."³⁴⁶ In the delay between the birth of the concept and its formal introduction, intelligence and press reporting had identified the arrival of a substantial German force in Southern Spain.

Intensified Intervention

A very neutral third party, the United States press, helped to scoop the arrival and scope of the Condor Legion, but Great Britain was in the end caught totally unaware of this development. Though reports were not made public, American correspondents in Nationalist territory passed notes to the Embassy in Madrid (which would soon relocate) that the port of Cádiz had been swarmed "owing to visits of numerous German vessels."³⁴⁷ Hints of a large scale German effort first appeared in *The New York Times*, when it noted that eight planes reportedly on their way to Spain had been forced to make emergency landings due to fog over Serbia on November 17.³⁴⁸ That paper followed up with another report that "there have been ominous rumblings out of Berlin . . . [W]hat the French do fear is that there will be an intensification of the present clandestine support

³⁴⁶ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 416.

³⁴⁷ Puzzo, *Spain and the Great Powers*, 125.

³⁴⁸ "8 German Planes Land on Reported Trip to Spain," *New York Times*, November 17, 1936.

for both sides.”³⁴⁹ On November 27, the Spanish delegate to the League of Nations signaled the Republicans' intent to bring new charges of German and Italian intervention before the Council. Soon after, a raid on Alicante on November 30 (which was in fact conducted by the Condor Legion) was alleged to involve “a German ship on the high seas”³⁵⁰ and sightings of potential German spies. Finally, the full news broke on December 1. The Foreign Office received a report “from British consular and naval sources” that let the cat out of the bag “that 5,000 Germans had landed at Cádiz.”³⁵¹ *The New York Times* related that “Mr. Eden was so perturbed when he heard of the landing of the Germans at Cádiz that he canceled an important engagement to speak tonight at the Royal Institute of Foreign Affairs, and hurried to the House of Commons.”³⁵² If Eden had been tired at the semi-crises of the Battle of Madrid, Fascist recognition of Franco's regime, and the ensuing question of belligerency rights throughout November, events in December 1936 would considerably up the ante.

The uproar that followed could in no way have been predicted when Eden quietly announced to the Cabinet on December 2 “that telegrams had been received confirming the news that some 5,000 Germans had arrived in the South of Spain . . . the latest

³⁴⁹ Herbert L. Matthews, “Spain is Battleground of 'Little World War,’” *New York Times*, November 20, 1936.

³⁵⁰ “German Aid is Charged,” *New York Times*, November 30, 1936.

³⁵¹ Charles A. Selden, “5,000 Germans Land at Cadiz, London is Informed,” *New York Times*, December 1, 1936.

³⁵² *Ibid.*

information looked like an intensification” of previous German assistance.³⁵³ The Cabinet, again pessimistic, decided to allow the transmission of this evidence to the NIC while also supporting the proposed French *démarche* for a mediation between the two conflicting sides in Spain. As previously shown, Spain's attempts to force the issue on the new German and Italian deployments at the League of Nations failed, as Britain and France played up the possibility of the *démarche* at the NIC.³⁵⁴ Spanish Foreign Minister del Vayo also came to accept the idea of the supervision scheme. In the meantime, American correspondents again passed remarks to the American Ambassador, Claude Bowers, that Franco's headquarters in Salamanca looked like “a German military camp, German officers predominating.”³⁵⁵ At the Non-Intervention Committee on December 7, Britain asked for its new evidence to be considered, however the only agreement that could be reached that day was on the subject of “indirect intervention, a euphemistic phrase which was admitted to cover the regular foreign troops in Spain”³⁵⁶ such as the transport of “volunteers.”³⁵⁷ Against a background of noise over the Abdication Crisis

³⁵³ Eden, “The Situation in Spain,” CAB 69(36), 23/86, December 2, 1936, 2.

³⁵⁴ Curiously, the American Ambassador to Britain, Robert Bingham, reported back to the Department of State that “the British and French Governments are anxious for their own records that such an action [as the *démarche*] should be taken especially before the meeting of the Council on December 10 . . . [They are] at the same time reinforcing the position and authority of the London Committee upon which the great nations most concerned in the Spanish situation (except for Spain itself) are represented.” Quoted in Puzzo, *Spain and the Great Powers*, 189-190.

³⁵⁵ Quoted in Puzzo, *Spain and the Great Powers*, 125-126.

³⁵⁶ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 416.

³⁵⁷ The use of the term “volunteers” with quotation marks was essentially British code to differentiate between the civilians who fought in the International Brigades and the regular troops sent by the intervening powers. As those powers freely admitted their

which was then at its peak, Eden oversaw the dispatch of the mediation request to the European powers on December 5, as well.

As the British and French themselves had predicted, the *démarche* fared no better. We have already seen how Eden called both v. Ribbentrop and Grandi to his office on December 8 to discuss both the lack of progress in the NIC and their recent deployments, but that event also provides context to the mediation effort. In what was probably another truly vexing day for Eden, while Germany and (to a lesser extent) Italy later agreed in principle to the idea of mediating an end to the Spanish Civil War, opposition was immediately signaled by *both* of the principal combatants in Spain. As *The New York Times* reported on this setback, “the leaders of both factions are still proclaiming that they will fight to the last man until the enemy surrenders.”³⁵⁸ Though they were vocal on that subject, Eden was frustrated at the same time that “neither party in Spain was making any haste to give an opinion on the projected scheme of supervision, nor was there any check to the arrival of the well-drilled ‘volunteers.’”³⁵⁹ Whether a prevention or cessation of intervention was the aim, the NIC was proving to be unworkable as a collective security body owing to intransigence by most parties in Spain. Though all their other schemes failed to hatch, Eden was surprisingly wrong on the lack of any check against more volunteers.

soldiers were present, also calling them volunteers, the British were resigned to public use of the *entendre* to prevent a diplomatic row. See footnote 63 for one such use in the derogatory sense by Anthony Eden.

³⁵⁸ “London, Paris Find Unity on Mediation,” *New York Times*, December 12, 1936.

³⁵⁹ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 417.

Late in December the French intercepted a series of exchanges between German agents in Spain and the Foreign Ministry. Later, *The New York Times* revealed, in what turned out to be a leak, that the new German Chargé d'Affairs to the recently-recognized Nationalist regime, General Wilhelm Faupel, had “asked that important reinforcements be sent to the rebels in order to assure their victory.”³⁶⁰ Given the current row, numerous German personnel were horrified at the idea. Colonel Warlimont, having previously been relieved of command in Spain when the Condor Legion arrived, was called in to advise Hitler on the request from December 21-22, 1936. He cautioned the Führer that “such an act could not possibly remain a secret and the international repercussions, particularly from France and England, would be profound.”³⁶¹ Warlimont had coordinated this response with the *Wehrmacht's* Chief of Staff, General Ludwig Beck, who had agreed that “it would be fatal for us to send whole divisions to Spain, along the British Window and the French Door.”³⁶² Hitler declined Faupel's petition, and Warlimont later paraphrased Hitler's logic along the lines of

I have listened to both of you and I understand each of your points of view. But, my decision is founded on another train of thought, our only interest in Spain is that Franco should not lose. On the other hand, I am not interested in that he should finish it quickly. With the continued conflict in Spain, Europe will be interested in events there and be less concerned with Germany and my objectives.³⁶³

³⁶⁰ “Reich Cautioned by Paris on Sending Men to Spain; Assurances Are Reported,” *New York Times*, December 24, 1936.

³⁶¹ Proctor, *Hitler's Luftwaffe in the Spanish Civil War*, 76.

³⁶² Quoted in Proctor, *Hitler's Luftwaffe in the Spanish Civil War*, 74.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 77.

Though they may not have liked the reasoning, had they known of the full extent of the denied request for more than 60,000 troops, the British would probably have enjoyed that early Christmas present.

As 1936 came to a close, the Foreign Office was still somehow in high hopes about the prospects of the Non-Intervention Committee. The intelligence out of Berlin was indeed a welcome respite. *The New York Times* even reported that

alarmist rumors in many capitals, including London, found no echo among the hardheaded diplomats in Whitehall, who have never underestimated the dangers involved in the Spanish civil war. . . . There was growing hope that Germany would decide, in her own interests, to avoid any desperate action in Spain. . . . It is argued here, a decision to send a full-fledged army into Spain would be too expensive economically and diplomatically.³⁶⁴

Eden had also devised a new approach to the supervision scheme. He argued to the Cabinet on December 16 that “the present situation could not be allowed to continue without an effort to put it right, as very large numbers of volunteers were pouring into Spain and changing the whole aspect of the war.”³⁶⁵ He now suggested naval patrols, but was countered with “the fact that so far the Government had kept this country out of the Spanish war was popular.”³⁶⁶ In a rare sign of unanimity both Baldwin and Chamberlain backed Eden's secondary proposal for a conference of the major powers in the NIC to

³⁶⁴ Ferdinand Kuhn, Jr., “London Forecasts Yielding by Berlin,” *New York Times*, December 27, 1936.

³⁶⁵ Eden, “Proposed Mediation and Non-Intervention,” CAB 75(36), 23/86, December 16, 1936, 3.

³⁶⁶ John Simon, “Proposed Mediation and Non-Intervention,” CAB 75(36), 23/86, December 16, 1936, 5.

discuss this new supervision proposal in January.³⁶⁷ The Cabinet then adjourned for the year. Eden hinted at the idea of an “intensification of non-intervention” the next day with v. Ribbentrop,³⁶⁸ and the stage was set for a renewed push for the policy in 1937.

Acceptance and Delays for the Supervision Scheme

At the beginning of January 1937, Eden summed up the situation in Spain and the need to curtail intervention. Addressing the Cabinet, he wrote in a memorandum that

the Spanish civil war has ceased to be an internal Spanish issue and has become an international battleground. 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 therefore my conviction that unless we cry a halt in Spain, we shall have trouble this year in one or other of the danger points I have referred to. It follows that to be firm in Spain is to gain time, and to gain time is what we want. . . . 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. . . . It is only by showing them that these dangerous distinctions are false that we can hope to avert a greater calamity.³⁶⁹

As was his goal, Eden's perception and resulting strategy caught the attention of the Cabinet. At a special meeting in the Foreign Office conducted on January 8, he presented fresh evidence that several thousand more Italian and German troops had flooded Cádiz. The Cabinet had its longest, most thorough meeting to date that day on Spanish intervention, and set the boundaries for the Non-Intervention policy for the rest of its

³⁶⁷ “Proposed Mediation and Non-Intervention,” CAB 75(36), 23/86, December 16, 1936, 5-7.

³⁶⁸ v. Ribbentrop, “Discussion with Mr. Eden at the Foreign Office on December 17,” December 19, 1936, Document no. 103: 1873/423887-98, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series C, VI, 201.

³⁶⁹ Quoted in Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 433-434.

existence. Owing to the failures of their other collective security efforts, this seeming militarization of Cabinet decision-making reveals both their frustration and lack of commitment to the same *realpolitik* tactics employed by its adversaries.

Eden supplemented his New Year's memorandum to the Cabinet with reports from other parties showing similar concerns. He reported that "his advisers felt that if this state of affairs continued, the moderate influences in Germany would be silenced and the Germans would undertake other adventures; in Czecho-Slovakia, perhaps."³⁷⁰ Eden had during the recess also consulted with the Labour and Liberal opposition parties, of whom Francis Acland³⁷¹ had also concluded "that if the sending of volunteers to Spain were not checked here and now the Germans would go on to other adventures."³⁷² The point clearly being made was that a wide swath of foreign policy experts, to include Eden himself, now believed that German intervention in Spain was building confidence in Hitler's regime for more aggression in Europe. While only anonymous sources had previously suggested to *The New York Times*, among others, that the Reich's actions the past few months had been a smoke screen, the collective concern was much more palpable following the Fascist recognition of Franco's government and the news of the Condor Legion's deployment.³⁷³ In the midst of this anxiety, Sir Samuel Hoare cautioned

³⁷⁰ Eden, "The Situation in Spain," Notes of a Meeting of Ministers, CAB (37), 23/87, January 8, 1937, 2.

³⁷¹ Acland had himself served as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs under Edward Grey from 1911-1915.

³⁷² "The Situation in Spain," Notes of a Meeting of Ministers, CAB (37), 23/87, January 8, 1937, 2.

³⁷³ Along with, it should be noted, whole divisions of Mussolini's Black Shirts.

of the success which may be had in halting Franco's support given "there were others, including perhaps some members of the Cabinet, who were very anxious that the Soviets should not win in Spain."³⁷⁴ After a debate on the technical difficulties of any blockade, Halifax finally responded to Hoare's observation by commenting that "Germany and Italy were apparently only prepared to stop their intervention if they were convinced Russia had stopped it."³⁷⁵ The Cabinet discussion on Spanish intervention now came down to its perception of those activities.

What had previously been a docile Cabinet (with the exceptions of members such as Halifax or Chamberlain) which had sat listening to Eden's reports and proposals now made its collective voice fully known. Kingsley Wood, the Minister of Health, "said he had the impression from the German and Italian Notes that their object was, while appearing to accept [non-intervention], to impose such difficult conditions as to make realisation impossible." Sir John Simon, the Home Secretary, agreed that the Fascists "might have their 'tongues in their cheeks' to the extent they thought the conditions could not be fulfilled," and queried Eden on whether his proposals were "merely a gesture" in that light. The Foreign Secretary responded that "he only contemplated some kind of watch on non-intervention," not a fully successful blockade, to which Hoare thought it a waste of time "to undertake a blockade that might prove ineffective." Duff Cooper, the Minister of War, finally summed up what he believed to be the assumptions and

³⁷⁴ Samuel Hoare, "The Situation in Spain," Notes of a Meeting of Ministers, CAB (37), 23/87, January 8, 1937, 3.

³⁷⁵ Lord Halifax, "The Situation in Spain," Notes of a Meeting of Ministers, CAB (37), 23/87, January 8, 1937, 7.

conclusions of the discussion: 1) that the point of non-intervention was to “shorten the war in Spain;” 2) “prevent the Civil War in Spain becoming a European war;” 3) “that General Franco should not win the war;” and 4) “to make a demonstration to satisfy public opinion in this country.” The only reply he got was from Kingsley Wood, who “pointed out [to Cooper's third point] that many people in this country would be equally troubled if the Bolsheviks achieved a victory.” The Cabinet then moved back to policy implications.³⁷⁶

Eden's proposals now set the Cabinet in motion. Thomas Inskip, the Minister for the Coordination of Defence, noted how a flaw among Eden's ideas was that the Fascists had not previously agreed on “the withdrawal of the volunteers already in Spain,” and that it may be easier to only focus on new ones instead. During any disagreement on new terms, he argued, “the volunteers would continue to pour into Spain.” Lord Stanhope, the First Commissioner of Works, “thought that the various nations were more inclined to come to agreement now than in the past. The situation [in Madrid] was, to a certain extent, one of stalemate and disillusion.” Baldwin agreed with Stanhope on that impression. Kingsley Wood argued that Eden's previous proposal of a conference would be a good start, as “the Non-Intervention Committee was not a very effective body for working out a plan.” Finally, Simon tried to call an end to the debate, offering that if the British were to make a unilateral legislative act prohibiting volunteers that may set a standard for the other governments to follow. William Morrison, the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, seconded this idea under the notion that within the NIC, “the

³⁷⁶ “The Situation in Spain,” Notes of a Meeting of Ministers, CAB (37), 23/8, January 8, 1937, 7-10.

difficulty was that the members were not plenipotentiaries and every question had to be referred by [the Ambassadors] to their Governments.” Though Eden argued that all this would only serve to delay any decisive action, Baldwin sided with the Cabinet on the need to submit a new diplomatic Note with questions to the other governments. The Foreign Secretary was right, of course—trust in collective security did not necessarily beget enforcement. Eden, in one small victory, did receive agreement from Hoare to continue discussing the idea of a blockade behind the scenes.³⁷⁷

Though the collective of Eden's proposals would not ultimately go forward, the architecture of the Non-Intervention policy started to see gains in January. The Cabinet concluded the new framework on January 9, and following positive comment from the French, submitted their Note to the other European governments on January 10. The next day, Eden announced that under the Foreign Enlistment Act of 1870, British citizens were prohibited from signing up to participate in the International Brigades. As the NIC was meeting in London, he partially explained this logic in a speech on the evening of January 12. There he argued that “Spain, which continues to give rise to the greatest anxiety throughout the world . . . will in time evolve her own Spanish form of government. The less the foreigner interferes the shorter that time will be.”³⁷⁸ Eden still

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 11-18. Eden, of this lengthy debate, notes that while he walked in with broad support from Baldwin and Halifax, “the discussion went badly . . . Baldwin said nothing on behalf of my plan, and I was unable to convince my colleagues . . . I was bitterly disappointed . . . An arresting British action might have drained the Spanish ulcer of its poison.” His full account of the formation of his proposals and this Cabinet session can be found in *Facing the Dictators*, 433-437.

³⁷⁸ Eden, “Heroism and Heroics,” Speech to the Foreign Press Association, January 12, 1937, *Foreign Affairs*, 189-190.

attempted to force the Cabinet to come around to his view on supervision and a blockade during their meeting of January 13, at which time he happily reported “good progress” in the NIC and that a new plan “was being worked out between the Foreign Office and the Admiralty. [This time] he could reassure the Cabinet that it did not involve independent action by this country.”³⁷⁹ Luckily for the Cabinet, during this month the Condor Legion was facing its own crisis with a near mutiny over the severely outclassed He-51s they were still flying.³⁸⁰ Air Secretary Viscount Swinton confirmed, essentially, that “the German Fighters were not very good.”³⁸¹ That internal crisis meant that even as the Battle of Jarama unfolded in February, Eden's efforts for non-intervention would have enough momentum to go essentially unimpeded.

The month of February 1937 finally saw the breakthrough for Eden's supervision scheme. His promises of progress in mid-January had not been an illusion, and Lord Cranborne, the new Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, reported to the Cabinet on January 27 that “the German and Italian replies to the question of volunteering were considered by the Foreign Office to be fairly satisfactory, but they stipulated that agreement should be reached on various matters. These would come before the Non-Intervention Committee on the morrow, when a scheme of control would

³⁷⁹ Eden, “The Situation in Spain,” CAB 1(37), 23/87, January 13, 1937, 9.

³⁸⁰ Proctor, *Hitler's Luftwaffe in the Spanish Civil War*, 89. Though squadron commanders complained of “an utterly hopeless situation” against Russian planes, they would soon see new planes which altered the course of European rearmament and aerial warfare.

³⁸¹ Cunliffe-Lister, Philip (as Viscount Swinton), “The International Situation,” CAB 1(37), 23/87, January 13, 1937, 4.

be under consideration.”³⁸² Lord Plymouth reported back to the Cabinet on February 3 that within the NIC “a new scheme had been drawn up involving operations outside Spain. . . . An essential part of this scheme was a [naval] patrol, in which several Navies would participate, to check the entry of ships into Spanish ports.”³⁸³ This time, Hoare backed the proposal as “the Admiralty were prepared to cooperate within a specified zone if other countries would do the same. They regarded the zone system as fundamental” to the success of the supervision scheme.³⁸⁴ Chamberlain was “dubious as to the probability of success being achieved by the scheme, but as it appeared to be the only method by which agreement could be reached on a ban on volunteers for Spain he felt bound to advise acceptance.”³⁸⁵ The Cabinet then authorized Lord Plymouth to signal Britain's acceptance of the new scheme, subject of course to similar ratification by the other governments involved. Eden was ecstatic when, on February 20, 1937, the Non-Intervention Agreement was expanded to include the new supervision scheme. He wrote “that the Committee took this action, at least on paper, and there was a lull for a while.”³⁸⁶ The devil for the scheme would of course be in the details for the patrol zones,

³⁸² Lord Cranborne, “Spain,” CAB 4(37), 23/87, January 27, 1937, 1.

³⁸³ Lord Plymouth, “The Non-Intervention Committee,” CAB 5(37), 23/87, February 3, 1937, 8.

³⁸⁴ Hoare, “The Non-Intervention Committee,” CAB 5(37), 23/87, February 3, 1937, Page 8.

³⁸⁵ Chamberlain, “The Non-Intervention Committee,” CAB 5(37), 23/87, February 3, 1937, 9.

³⁸⁶ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 438.

and as those negotiations stretched on into March and April, a new series of crises in Spain confronted the international community.

The difference between the handshake deal on the supervision scheme and previous “agreements in principle” was the integration of the patrol zones and the volunteer question. The issues which had plagued the framework before—notably the consent of the Spanish belligerents and the thorny topic of inspecting cargo ships at ports of embarkation—were solved by keeping most of the non-intervention observers in international waters. The projected cost was also now spread more equitably among the most interested parties, whereas before Hoare and others had been concerned of Britain being forced to swallow most of the projected £1M per year cost of any patrol or blockade scheme. Conflicts of interest were settled by having patrolling countries observe areas of the coast contrary to their leanings, e.g., the Soviets would patrol off Nationalist-held ports. The only party to abstain from the supervision negotiations was Portugal, but by February 15 it was clear that the scheme would go forward. Given that most of the “volunteers” arrived direct in Spanish ports, the British allowed the debate to move forward as Portuguese acceptance may not truly have been needed.³⁸⁷ Once the Portuguese finally relented to allowing British non-intervention observers, the new framework was set to begin on March 6, 1937—that is, until the Russians began to complain about the “somewhat stormy sector of the Spanish coast” to which their navy

³⁸⁷ “The Situation in Spain,” CAB 8(37), 23/87, February 17, 1937, 2-3.

had been assigned.³⁸⁸ This new debate continued into March, just as a new series of Nationalist offensives took place, including along the Northern coast of Spain.

The Russians did not just complain about their assigned patrol zone before the Committee throughout March. While Eden was proud of the new scheme, “which could have been made to work if there had been the will to do so,” he was still frustrated by the “many irritating delays” resulting from Russian obstinacy.³⁸⁹ The scheme’s March 6 start was then missed. Maisky then balked when other nations then presented evidence that gold from the Republican government may have been shipped to the Soviet Union. Eden concluded that “his attitude . . . was used by Hitler and Mussolini as a pretext for stalling on the withdrawal of volunteers already in Spain. . . . British and French intelligence from the battlefield left no doubt that Fascist forces in Spain were now very large.”³⁹⁰ While all this was going on, the Nationalists launched an offensive at Guadalajara on March 8, primarily backed by the Italian Corps of Volunteer Troops. The respite in German involvement allowed them to engage the British on the Second Locarno negotiations, but now Italian Ambassador Dino Grandi took his turn as an obstructionist. He effectively shut down the NIC on March 24 following a tirade in response to questions of Italian volunteers' involvement and supposed withdrawal. Grandi had reason to be upset, as the Italians at Guadalajara were in the midst of suffering their most humiliating defeat since World War I. That the other countries at the NIC were only

³⁸⁸ Eden, “The Non-Intervention Committee,” CAB 9(37), 23/87, February 24, 1937, 1.

³⁸⁹ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 439.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

using Italy's public proclamations supporting or bragging of its troops' performance in Spain to dog Grandi with questions was of little importance—he would use German tactics to forestall any progress. The rest of the world had little time to chortle³⁹¹ at Italian embarrassment as a more vigorous campaign was unleashed on March 31 in the Basque Country.

“What Is This New Devilry?”

The Nationalist offensive in the North brought immediate concerns to the British as most of its merchant shipping (acting illegally by this point, of course) used the Basque ports to deliver their cargo. The danger here was real, as Franco announced a blockade of the entire Basque territories, especially its principal port at Bilbao. This did not stop merchants from trying to run the blockade or sit off shore waiting for such an opportunity; without protection from the Royal Navy attacks on British ships escalated severely throughout April.³⁹² Eden was called upon to defend the NIC once more, which he did on April 12, the same day Baldwin signaled increased naval protection for British merchants in international waters off Northern Spain.³⁹³ Beseeching the public to “not

³⁹¹ Mussolini complained so vigorously of British coverage of the Italian defeat that Grandi pulled Eden aside the day of the March 24 NIC meeting to warn him that the Duce was considering a full diplomatic grievance over the matter. For Eden's own part, he then cautioned the Cabinet that it might be time to “induce” the press to drop their constant of Spain. Notes on the March 24 NIC meeting and the press episode are in CAB 13(37), 23/88, March 24, 1937, 1-5.

³⁹² Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, 576.

³⁹³ Once British ships began providing proper escorts the Nationalist blockade at Bilbao faltered. Franco's navy, it turned out, had no interest in flirting with a fight. Eden provides an excellent synopsis of the British reaction to the blockade in *Facing the Dictators*, 442-443.

belittle what has been achieved,” he argued that “the supervision of the Spanish land and sea frontiers, which will shortly come into operation, can be made effective.”³⁹⁴ Eden also revealed the true purpose of the framework, which was to expose hypocrisy among the intervening powers. He explained how

once that agreement is in force the prolonged period of rumour, of charge and counter-charge will be at an end. We shall be able to ascertain facts and no longer have to deal with hearsay evidence. If, however, reports should then be received from the competent observers under the proposed scheme that violations of the agreements are still taking place . . . [such a move would] be calculated to produce a new and dangerous situation.³⁹⁵

Whatever his frustrations, the delays of the prior month proved temporary, and finally on April 19 the enforcement scheme came into effect. What should have been celebrated as a concrete victory for collective security fell by the wayside, however, when news of mass atrocities in Northern Spain revealed the horrors of aerial warfare to the world.

During April 1937, the Condor Legion conducted a number of strategic missions in the Basque Country as part of the Nationalist drive on Bilbao. At least, that is how the Germans themselves depicted even those missions which later turned out to have little if any military value. While Guernica captured the world's attention, at least four other such bombings took place the month prior on March 31, the day the Nationalist offense began. The worst was at Durango where approximately 250 civilians died, though Spanish General Queipo de Llano later proclaimed on a radio statement that “communists and socialists locked up the priests and nuns, shooting without pity and burning the

³⁹⁴ Eden, “Live and Let Live,” Speech in Liverpool, April 12, 1937, *Foreign Affairs*, 197-198.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 198.

churches.”³⁹⁶ Eyewitnesses related tales of waves of bombers and the use of incendiary bombs, and reports reached the Associated Press that the towns of El Orrio, Ochandiano, and Ubidea were also struck.³⁹⁷ Though the Germans purported that the bridges in Durango had been their target,³⁹⁸ the other towns were, at best, only targets of opportunity along the Basque militia's main supply route. Ochandiano did become a true military target several days later, as on April 4 the rebels forced a retreat into and through the city; both the Condor Legion and Italy's *Aviazione Legionaria* repeatedly strafed the withdrawing columns and “completely routed their forces.”³⁹⁹ Any argument of prior value is without merit, however, as Durango wasn't captured for another three weeks beyond that, and in bypassing it entirely the Nationalists also blamed El Orrio's charred houses on “Anarchists.”⁴⁰⁰ Unfortunately, none of these early bombings captured enough attention in the Cabinet.

Guernica proved another matter, and all but forced the Cabinet and Parliament to act. At the time, the event was blamed on everything from the weather affecting what was another attempt on bridges⁴⁰¹ or the pretense that after the first such runs failed, the smoke let off by the town's wooden buildings obscured those targets on subsequent

³⁹⁶ Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War*, 164.

³⁹⁷ “Rebels Kill Many in Air Raid,” *New York Times*, April 1, 1937.

³⁹⁸ Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War*, 164.

³⁹⁹ Proctor, *Hitler's Luftwaffe in the Spanish Civil War*, 123.

⁴⁰⁰ William P. Carney, “Advance Continues, Rebels Report,” *New York Times*, April 28, 1937.

⁴⁰¹ Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War*, 167.

attempts.⁴⁰² Regardless of the scapegoat, the Condor Legion systematically bombed Guernica first with 250 kg heavy explosives and then fire bombed and strafed those attempting to flee shelters not designed for such punishment.⁴⁰³ It initially went unmentioned on April 28, the first Cabinet meeting after the bombing had occurred two days earlier. Later that day, however, reports that General Mola had threatened a similar fate for Bilbao caused several Members of Parliament to sponsor, with the blessing of the Foreign Office, the evacuation of civilians from that city to Britain, France, and the Scandinavian neutral countries.⁴⁰⁴ During question time in the House of Commons, Eden was assailed by Members of the opposition parties, to which he could only weakly respond, “His Majesty's Government deeply deplores the bombardment of the civil

⁴⁰² Proctor, *Hitler's Luftwaffe in the Spanish Civil War*, 128-130. Proctor substantially cites the diary of (then) Oberst Wolfram von Richthofen, Condor Legion's Chief of Staff. Richthofen, who apparently was not even aware that the town had been bombed until two days after the fact, personally toured Guernica on April 30. Though he seemed shocked at the devastation, he still had the temerity to note in his diary that because the town was “completely closed off for at least 24 hours” it would have allowed the Nationalists to swamp the Basque militia had Spanish General Emilio Mola ordered his troops forward.

⁴⁰³ G.L. Steer, “Historic Basque Town Wiped Out; Rebel Fliers Machine-Gun Civilians,” *New York Times*, April 28, 1937. Steer, who had arrived at Guernica less than 8 hours after the bombing had concluded, reported that at least five small villages outside the town had been struck, including some farmsteads. He also notes that “Heinkel fighters” specifically targeted civilians attempting to hide in fields outside the city. A later statement by the Nationalists on May 3 attempting to condone the bombing stated that Guernica was “an important crossroads filled with troops” which also contained “an important factory [which] had been manufacturing arms and munitions for nine months.” Steer, however, reported that such potential military targets like the factory and several barracks outside the town limits were “untouched.” He did note that the railroad station had been targeted but missed.

⁴⁰⁴ Associated Press, “Bilbao Evacuation Studied by British; Rebels Pushing On,” *New York Times*, April 28, 1937. Eden, for his part, lashed out against “savagery on either side.”

population in the Spanish civil war.”⁴⁰⁵ American Ambassador Bowers then held a private conversation with Eden to notify him of the “utmost horror” with which the American public viewed it, and begged for a stronger response from Britain.⁴⁰⁶

The concerted press—both journalistic and diplomatic⁴⁰⁷—somewhat forced Germany's hand for the next few weeks. The British and others did press v. Ribbentrop on the matter at the first NIC meeting after the raid; though he could only stall for time when asked his feelings on the “question of the bombing of the civil population,” it was reported erroneously that he had refused to discuss Guernica.⁴⁰⁸ Later on, though lobbying accusations of “false reports circulated by a section of the British press,” v. Ribbentrop confirmed in person to Eden that Germany “would cooperate in a move to prevent airplane attacks on civilians in 'open towns' in Spain.”⁴⁰⁹ The next day, May 6, German planes systematically attacking the roads leading out of Miravalles were ordered “not to bomb, under any circumstances, villages or populated areas.”⁴¹⁰ In the wake of that diplomatic success, Eden took to the House of Commons and warned that “if this kind of

⁴⁰⁵ “Commons Stirred by Guernica Raid,” *New York Times*, April 28, 1937.

⁴⁰⁶ Eden, “Situation on the North Coast,” CAB 20(37), 23/88, May 5, 1937, 1.

⁴⁰⁷ Though leadership transitioned from Baldwin to Chamberlain in May 1937, as Eden had already been identified to continue on as Foreign Secretary his staff did not suffer any turnover. The Cabinet recessed as a result between May 6-26. The account that follows of the Foreign Office's maneuvers were mostly gleaned from public sources as a result.

⁴⁰⁸ Eden, “Situation on the North Coast,” CAB 20(37), 23/88, May 5, 1937, 1.

⁴⁰⁹ Associated Press, “Germany Now Ready to Limit Air Raids,” *New York Times*, May 5, 1937.

⁴¹⁰ Proctor, *Hitler's Luftwaffe in the Spanish Civil War*, 136.

thing is repeated and intensified on a larger scale, it is going to mean a terrible future for Europe.”⁴¹¹ In that same speech, he referenced “the considerable depths of feeling aroused in this country” in defending the NIC, stating “the scheme of control is not perfect, but I am quite sure it will check the influx of foreign ships” as well as backing an investigation “not so much in an effort to pillory the past as to better the future.”⁴¹²

Though careful not to blame Germany publicly, in private Eden may have possessed a change of heart on the Spanish situation around this time. According to his memoirs, at least, Eden solemnly reviewed his anti-Communist view of events in Spain following the massacres in the Basque Country, noting how he “became more concerned lest the insurgents should win, because the foreign powers backing them were themselves a menace to peace. From the early months of 1937, if I had had to choose, I would have preferred a [Republican] Government victory.”⁴¹³

Britain's efforts in the wake of Guernica were not limited solely to Germany. At the NIC on May 7, Lord Plymouth proposed to all parties present “to renounce entirely the use of bombing from the air.”⁴¹⁴ However naïve such a request may have been, the motion passed that the Committee members should review the British proposal with their governments. Another example is the diplomatic Note that the Foreign Office sent to

⁴¹¹ Eden, Speech in the House of Commons, May 6, 1937, quoted in “Guernica Inquiry Favored by Eden,” *New York Times*.

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 441.

⁴¹⁴ Quoted in “Ban on Air Bombing is Urged by Britain,” *New York Times*, May 7, 1937.

Franco on May 3, bluntly asking “whether he intends sending his planes to raze Bilbao.”⁴¹⁵ What again seemed an almost petulant inquiry bore fresh concern when reports came to light on May 19 of civilians killed by bombs and strafing runs in both Munguia and Galdacano, suburbs outside Bilbao.⁴¹⁶ When the final assault against the city began in June, the Nationalists announced that “under no circumstances was Bilbao to be destroyed,” and to prevent even an accidental bombing of the civilian areas planes and artillery were ordered not to fire on any targets within even 3 kilometers of the city.⁴¹⁷ The damage to public opinion, however, had been done, and Britain believed that Germany would go to greater efforts to repair that opinion. Though the Foreign Office was not initially mistaken on Hitler's motives, Spain continued to impede their efforts.

Guernica's aftermath also led to a fresh initiative to withdraw volunteers from Spain. Numerous press reports had by now publicized fact of Germany's direct involvement, especially given that the sources for some of these stories were captured German pilots themselves! The Foreign Office remained wary of a formal accusation in light of its view that any success of the Non-Intervention Committee relied above all on German and Italian participation in the supervision scheme. It had already watched their withdrawal from other collective bodies, after all. Thus, though skeptical as to its chances, Eden and the French Foreign Minister, Yvon Delbos, circulated a new diplomatic Note on May 24 calling for an armistice during which the volunteers and other

⁴¹⁵ “Britain Inquires on Bilbao's Fate,” *New York Times*, May 3, 1937.

⁴¹⁶ G. L. Steer, “Town Devastated by Rebel Bombers in Drive to Bilbao,” *New York Times*, May 19, 1937.

⁴¹⁷ Proctor, *Hitler's Luftwaffe in the Spanish Civil War*, 137.

civilians could be evacuated from the combat zones. *The New York Times* polled the Ministry in the wake of this new proposal, reporting that “British official quarters believe Hitler wants to continue the trend of friendly relations . . . [as] it is necessary to counterbalance British newspaper descriptions of German planes used in the Guernica massacre.”⁴¹⁸ Rumors swirled in diplomatic circles, as well, “that Germany is anxious to get her nationals out of Spain and would accept a solution provided it were sufficiently face-saving.”⁴¹⁹ Though Eden remarked to the American Consul at the League of Nations, Prentiss Gilbert, that the armistice *démarche* was “finished” before it started,⁴²⁰ Germany's reaction was in line with the broader perception much to the consternation of both Italy and Franco.⁴²¹ Attacks on German naval patrols then interrupted the progress the armistice *démarche* may have made.

Whatever its other objections and tactics, the German Navy did at least set the pretense of patrolling off Spain. Some of these patrols did seem to support the new

⁴¹⁸ T. J. Hamilton, “London Hopeful,” *New York Times*, May 26, 1937.

⁴¹⁹ Prentiss Gilbert, “The Consul at Geneva (Gilbert) to the Secretary of State,” May 24, 1937, Document no. 159: 852.00/5509. *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1937, I: General* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1954), 303.

⁴²⁰ Ibid. The offer itself, according to Gilbert, may have only been halfhearted since Spanish Foreign Minister del Vayo was again attempting to present evidence of intervention to the League in the wake of Guernica. Both Eden and Delbos related to Gilbert that the *démarche* “will serve the purpose of giving Eden and Delbos something to say in response to del Vayo.” At the same time, the initiative was first announced to v. Ribbentrop by Eden on May 15; by May 24 v. Neurath had made clear to the new British Ambassador, Neville Henderson, that any items on Spain should be settled in the NIC.

⁴²¹ William Dodd, “The Ambassador in Germany (Dodd) to the Secretary of State,” May 26, 1937, Document no. 115: 852.00/5524, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1937, I*, 304-305.

enforcement features of the Non-Intervention Agreement, but others were ostensibly to escort German war material shipments. The latter type of “patrol” was subject to Republican air attacks on May 23 near the port of Palma in Mallorca. Though accounts differ, the Spanish government pointedly noted that Mallorca was outside Germany’s assigned patrol zone.⁴²² The ship involved, the *Deutschland*, was then towed to Ibiza. In another disputed incident on May 29 it was this time successfully bombed by Soviet-flown planes, resulting in 105 casualties (including 31 killed).⁴²³ On May 31, the German ship *Admiral Scheer* retaliated by shelling the coastal city of Almería, killing 19. At the same time, Germany informed Lord Plymouth that it was withdrawing v. Ribbentrop from the NIC and that its vessels would cease its patrols “until [the German] Government has received guarantees that in future there will be no further unwarranted attacks such as on the *Deutschland*.”⁴²⁴ Shortly after the tensions between Germany and the Republicans escalated, Eden informed the Cabinet that “the international situation had received a setback owing to the bombing . . . [and] he had considerable apprehension as to whether the [supervision] scheme could be maintained.”⁴²⁵ Owing to behind the scenes

⁴²² Walter Thurston, “The Counselor of Embassy in Spain (Thurston) to the Secretary of State,” May 29, 1937, Document no. 652: 852.00/5552, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1937*, I, 306-307.

⁴²³ The Republican government claimed that the planes had been fired on, while the German Foreign Ministry countered that the ship was actually in port so that its sailors could partake in shore leave.

⁴²⁴ Dodd, “The Ambassador in Germany (Dodd) to the Secretary of State,” May 31, 1937, Document no. 122: 852.00/5562, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1937*, I, 309.

⁴²⁵ Eden, “Spain,” CAB 23(37), 23/88, June 2, 1937, 5.

discussions between Eden and v. Ribbentrop, he was able to report on some progress via a diplomatic Note on June 12 to the belligerent parties in Spain. Germany's machinations would now thwart the supervision scheme once and for all.

Support for non-intervention was beginning to lag in Britain. Eden had professed that by mid-June his own staff in the Foreign Office “had doubted whether it was worth going on with the scheme, but he had reached the view that the state of affairs would be worse if the scheme were dropped.”⁴²⁶ However, v. Neurath then accepted a proposed visit to London in the aftermath of the *Deutschland* incident, and the premise was to discuss Spain among other topics.⁴²⁷ Eden then stepped before the House of Commons on June 16, and to cheers announced the Fascists' return to the NIC, adding for effect, “our information goes to show that the flow of foreign volunteers to Spain has been checked . . . the scheme for international supervision was drawn up for this purpose.”⁴²⁸ Just as it appeared that the Germans would resume their naval patrols, on June 18 they issued a statement that another of its cruisers, the *Leipzig*, had been torpedoed by submarines.⁴²⁹ A day later v. Ribbentrop demanded retaliation by all of the navies involved in the

⁴²⁶ Eden, “The Situation in Spain,” CAB 24(37), 23/88, June 17, 1937, 2.

⁴²⁷ Eden, “Germany,” CAB 24(37), 23/88, June 17, 1937, 4. Interestingly, the minutes record an observation by Eden that it was a signal from the Italians that the Germans should resume participation in the NIC which helped open this particular endeavor.

⁴²⁸ Eden, Speech to House of Commons, June 16, 1937, quoted in “Foreign Nationals in Spain,” *Times* (London), June 17, 1937.

⁴²⁹ According to an article in *The Times* (London) citing the German News Agency, the Germans stated that two separate attacks occurred, on June 15 and 18. See both “Torpedoes at Cruiser” and “German Demand for Action” in the June 21, 1937 edition.

supervision scheme. Wary of the lack of any evidence having been presented, the British and French requested an investigation at the NIC,⁴³⁰ and over the ensuing days neither side could come to terms. On June 21 v. Neurath canceled his planned visit, and the next day v. Ribbentrop informed the NIC that Germany was withdrawing from its patrols. Amidst reports that “the German Government was contemplating action which would gravely aggravate an already serious situation,” Ambassador Phipps reported from Berlin on June 23 that v. Neurath had informed him that Germany was withdrawing its fleet entirely.⁴³¹ They were followed shortly thereafter by the Italians, and the supervision scheme ceased. Despite the British offer of belligerent rights status to Franco's regime in the event naval patrols resumed, the Fascists had all but walked out of the NIC just as had been feared. Nervous that the Non-Intervention policy was on life support, Chamberlain agreed that “the right course was to play for time,”⁴³² and the French and British vowed to press on without them. While Germany stewed on the sidelines, Italy saw a wonderful new opportunity.

⁴³⁰ The Cabinet notes on June 21 mention that the only evidence presented by v. Ribbentrop were visual sightings of torpedo wakes in the water and a declaration that the Leipzig had been “touched” by a torpedo. Several days later the Germans would refuse to submit the Leipzig for visual inspection of the supposed impact. The rigorous discussion in the Cabinet on the Leipzig incident can be found in “The Alleged Attacks on the German Cruiser 'Leipzig,’” CAB 25(37), 23/88, June 21, 1937, 4-11; and “The Situation in Spain,” CAB 26(37), 23/88, June 23, 1937, 3-5.

⁴³¹ Eden, “The Situation in Spain,” CAB 26(37), 23/88, June 23, 1937, 5. Most ironically, “general satisfaction was expressed by the Cabinet at the attitude adopted by the German Government.”

⁴³² “Belligerent Rights,” CAB 27(37), 23/88, June 30, 1937, 4.

The Democracies Finally Stand Up to the Fascists at Nyon

The Nationalists' attempt at a blockade off Northern Spain in the Spring of 1937 had been frustrated by what amounted to British naval escorts of merchant shipping. For once the Cabinet had acted decisively, having as early as March 24 received both notification of Franco's intent to intensify the blockade and having put in the escort program by April 12.⁴³³ The escorts were successful in getting a number of blockade runners into Spanish ports, but at the same time Franco's aim to interdict ships beyond territorial waters hinted at the interference of a submarine fleet well beyond the Nationalists' capability.⁴³⁴ That the Cabinet then proceeded to dither on that topic for weeks after the fact is beyond the simple point that a strong message backed by gunboat diplomacy succeeded. The initial success of the supervision scheme from mid-April into June would help to ease any suspicions, but the *Deutschland* and *Leipzig* incidents enabled the Fascists to skirt the new agreement. As the Northern campaign came to a successful conclusion in favor of Franco at the end of June, the Nationalists settled in to secure their new holdings.

At this time, Chamberlain was beginning to take a tighter hold on the Cabinet. In July 1937, some of the first wounds between him and Eden opened regarding the Non-Intervention Committee. In short, Eden preferred multilateralism while Chamberlain

⁴³³ Eden, "Threatened Interference with British Shipping," CAB 13(37), 23/88, March 24, 1937, 6.

⁴³⁴ Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, 576. Though Mowat's insinuations seem farfetched, intelligence presented to the Cabinet confirmed that at least two German U-Boats were operating in that area. Also see "Protection of British Shipping," CAB 16(37), 23/88, April 14, 1937, 6.

opted for a hands-on, bilateral form of negotiating. Chamberlain was already upset that the *Leipzig* incident and its effect on the NIC had scuttled his invitation to v. Neurath to visit London, and as the NIC remained in a deadlock for weeks on end,⁴³⁵ he saw an opportunity to effect his version of policy. On July 28 he pushed Eden to take a holiday during what was ostensibly another Cabinet recess; instead it met five times in the next few weeks during which Chamberlain approved Halifax's proposal to open direct negotiations with Germany and Italy about an armistice in Spain.⁴³⁶ That the initiative failed was not the point, except to signal the start of Chamberlain's push to dominate both Cabinet politics and British foreign policy. He used both the stalled collective security policies and Eden's absence to do so. Throughout the latter part of that month, for instance, Chamberlain sent personal letters directly to Mussolini, and wrote to Halifax proclaiming "it was very necessary to remember that the dictators were men of moods . . . we must make Mussolini feel that things were moving all the time."⁴³⁷ In reality, Mussolini was to ensure that events would be moving throughout August.

⁴³⁵ Eden himself provided this label to the Cabinet, and he noted that "it had become clear that no nation wanted a breakdown, though no-one saw a way out." Its status would not change by the time he went on vacation at the end of July. See CAB 30(37), 23/89, July 14, 1937, 1.

⁴³⁶ Colvin, *The Chamberlain Cabinet*, 47-48. In the Cabinet's notes from July 28, Chamberlain had also explicitly stated "that this was likely to be the last discussion of Foreign Affairs" until Parliament return to session." For a full description of Chamberlain's tribute to Eden, see "The Foreign Secretary," CAB 32(37), 23/89, July 28, 1937, 9.

⁴³⁷ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 454-456. Halifax apparently made a copy of Chamberlain's correspondence available to Eden while he was on vacation, with the cited letter having been dated August 7.

Though his blockade off Bilbao had failed, Franco still intended to starve out Republican resistance. He now controlled nearly two-thirds of Spain, including almost the entire North. Any such attempts could now focus solely on the Mediterranean. Sometime around August 3, 1937, Franco made his first petition to Italy to interdict Soviet shipping headed for Republican ports. Two days later, members of Franco's regime arrived in Rome to discuss options, to which Foreign Minister Ciano replied that "the Duce was in principle still inclined to do everything he could to put a stop to [Soviet transports]—not with surface vessels, to be sure, but only with submarines."⁴³⁸ Italy had already been randomly poaching merchant ships to Republican ports since July, including the oil tanker *British Corporal* on August 6.⁴³⁹ By the second week of August, however, Mussolini officially replied that he "was prepared to carry out the measures requested by Franco for preventing the transit of Russian war matériel through the straits south of Italy."⁴⁴⁰ Through the remainder of August 1937, an intensified Italian piracy campaign wreaked havoc on shipping in the Mediterranean.

⁴³⁸ Document no. 408, German Foreign Policy Documents, D, III, quoted in Puzzo, *Spain and the Great Powers*, 196.

⁴³⁹ "British Corporal Sailing To-Day," *Times* (London), August 10, 1937. Eden mentions this incident specifically in *Facing the Dictators* as kicking off the piracy crisis. He recounts on Page 457 that his Permanent Under-Secretary, Vansittart, "gave the Italian Chargé d'Affaires, Signor Crolla, a private warning two days later. He said that we knew for a fact that these aeroplanes were based on Palma [de Mallorca], where the Italians were prominent."

⁴⁴⁰ Puzzo, *Spain and the Great Powers*, 195-196. Puzzo cites numerous documents out of *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series D, III to recount Mussolini's decision.

Seemingly within hours of Mussolini's announcement of support, reports of the effects of the Italian submarine campaign began appearing in newspapers throughout the world. According to Eden, in the first incident—otherwise unrecorded in the newspapers—on August 12, a Republican oil tanker was sunk by a destroyer off Tunisia.⁴⁴¹ A Danish ship carrying a non-intervention officer was put to the bottom by airplanes off Barcelona the same day.⁴⁴² A Spanish ship hauling a “small and unimportant cargo” was claimed in another destroyer attack off Tunisia the next day.⁴⁴³ Ambitious Italian submarines then sat off the Turkish straits, poaching one ship on August 14 and another four days later.⁴⁴⁴ By August 17, *The Times* ran a lede on a “Drastic Order to the Navy” that “Ships [were] to be Protected.” This pattern continued throughout the next two weeks, and in the end Italian ships claimed 26 merchants—eight of them British—which the Italians claimed were carrying more than 200,000 tons of material for the Republicans.⁴⁴⁵ That “drastic order” was issued after Eden called a special meeting at the Foreign Office which breathed new life into the Non-Intervention policy. Despite its earlier commitment issues to the NIA, the British Cabinet were now prepared to endow its collective security policies with some hard power.

⁴⁴¹ “Sinking of Spanish Tanker,” *Times* (London), August 13, 1937.

⁴⁴² “Danish Ship Sunk by Aircraft,” *Times* (London), August 13, 1937.

⁴⁴³ “Another Spanish Steamer Sunk,” *Times* (London), August 17, 1937.

⁴⁴⁴ Walter S. Washington, “The Chargé in Turkey (Washington) to the Secretary of State,” August 27, 1937, Document no. 50: 852.00/6301, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1937*, I, 377.

⁴⁴⁵ Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War*, 202-203.

Eden's efforts from August into September 1937 are essentially a response to Italian actions, but the Cabinet's presumptions on the success of their new policies still centered, in part, around Germany. Eden's emergency session on August 17 came as Parliament was in a recess, but owed to the fact that "the Admiralty held reliable information that Italian submarines had orders to attack oil tankers of any nationality sailing to ports controlled by the Spanish Government."⁴⁴⁶ The Admiralty then issued its release to the British press which stated, given how "His Majesty's Government have been seriously perturbed by the increasing number of attacks upon shipping," that the Royal Navy was authorized to counterattack any submarines it found engaged with merchants.⁴⁴⁷ The British also pressed Ciano for a resolution on August 23, and though he bragged of how he "replied quite brazenly" to Chargé d'Affairs Maurice Ingram's "friendly *démarche* about the torpedo attacks," Ciano wrote a week later of his concern that the Italian intensification has "serious risk of wrecking the negotiations with London."⁴⁴⁸ Whatever the risk, the Italian piracy campaign persisted into early September, when on the 2nd in a brazen attack the submarine *Iride* attempted to torpedo the British destroyer *Havock* and a short pursuit ensued. Ciano then lamented how "international opinion is getting worked up. Particularly in England . . . the row has already started."⁴⁴⁹ At another emergency meeting that day, with Chamberlain's backing

⁴⁴⁶ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 457.

⁴⁴⁷ "Ships to be Protected," *Times* (London), August 17, 1937.

⁴⁴⁸ Ciano, *Ciano's Hidden Diary*, 3 and 6.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

Eden backed a new patrol scheme proposed by the French which immediately led to the deployment of additional British destroyers to the Mediterranean.

After the new British flotilla had arrived off Spain, Eden worked with the French Chargé d'Affairs, Roger Cambon, on the idea of a Mediterranean Conference to enlist support for the anti-submarine patrols under the Submarine Protocol of 1936. In order to avoid a pretense that the League of Nations would be involved, the nearby town of Nyon, Switzerland was picked instead of Geneva. Despite French protests over the invite of the Fascists (particularly Italy), Eden professed to Foreign Minister Delbos that Germany must also have an opportunity to attend given its status as a “principal power.”⁴⁵⁰ This invitation was issued on behalf of both governments to their peers in Europe on September 5, and the Nyon Conference convened on September 10. However, from the outset Eden did not expect the Germans' participation, even preparing a memorandum detailing how possible patrol zones and their scope might be affected.⁴⁵¹ His pessimism from the previous course of the NIC led him to categorically state that as “no reply to the invitation to attend the Nyon Conference had been received from the Italian and German governments[,] [i]t might be expected that those Governments would act together in the matter.”⁴⁵² In other words, he could no longer trust German intentions as through the Axis its policies were linked with Italy's on intervention in Spain.

⁴⁵⁰ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 462.

⁴⁵¹ Eden, “Situation in the Mediterranean,” C.P. 213 (37), September 7, 1937, i. Note: This document can be found as Appendix III to CAB 34(37), 23/89, September 8, 1937.

⁴⁵² Eden, “The Proposed Mediterranean Conference,” CAB 34(37), 23/89, September 8, 1937, 19.

While the Italian response and “participation” in the anti-submarine patrols which resulted from the Nyon Conference make for somewhat humorous reading,⁴⁵³ the full outcome of that forum is largely outside the scope of this paper. It was, however, the last signature multilateral policy employed by the British under the Non-Intervention banner. Ironically, the Conference itself need not have been a success, and Ciano's diary entry on September 4, the day before the Nyon invitations were issued, provides some enlightening details as to why:

A full day. Many conversations, morning and evening . . . without [British] recognition [of Ethiopian claims] there is no possibility of agreement . . . I have ordered Cavagnari to suspend naval action until further orders. But the storm looks like subsiding. Conde brought me a telegram from Franco saying that if the blockade continues throughout September it will be decisive. True. However, for the moment we must suspend it.⁴⁵⁴

As after Guernica, simply the threat of a concerted response was enough for the Fascists to call off an aggressive campaign. Nyon was also one of Eden's last true successes as Foreign Secretary.

With Ciano having called off the Italian submarine fleet, the Nyon Conference and its patrols were hailed as successes for the Non-Intervention policy (even if the NIC itself was not involved). The coincidental lack of Italian piracy only helped. *The Times*, for instance, declared that “they have produced a scheme which is likely to prove a serious deterrent to further outrages. . . . The vigour displayed by the British delegation at

⁴⁵³ According to Ciano, for example, Mussolini remarked along the lines that the Britain's problem “was that they have their minds in the seat of their trousers.” See *Ciano's Hidden Diary*, 12. Eden would retort in turn that Nyon set aside “a large area, as befitted Fascist dignity, to Mussolini, who could then send his warships to hunt his own submarines where it mattered least.” See *Facing the Dictators*, 467.

⁴⁵⁴ Ciano, *Ciano's Hidden Diary*, 9.

Nyon and the readiness of His Majesty's Government to assist the weaker Mediterranean states are wholly to be praised.”⁴⁵⁵ The next day, Eden wrote a note to Churchill detailing how although Nyon “only deals with one aspect of the Spanish problem . . . it has increased our authority . . . and has done something to put us on the map again.”⁴⁵⁶ For what one might later assume to be posterity purposes, he also etched a letter to Chamberlain in which he claimed that Britain has the “support of all public opinion and the Dominions . . . whatever decision Hitler may take, German opinion will feel no enthusiasm for a Mediterranean controversy.”⁴⁵⁷ His perception here may not have been far off the mark, as reports out of Berlin commented that “it may be assumed accordingly that German advice to Italy has been to cooperate with the Nyon Arrangement for the present” even though both countries did not view it “with anything but disfavour.”⁴⁵⁸ That Nyon occurred just before Mussolini's secret visit to Berlin was an unforeseen master stroke, and Eden later wrote “perhaps the Nazi Government was surprised at the speed and expedition of Nyon. For a few days the German press did not know what to say, for there was nobody present in Berlin competent to give it instructions.”⁴⁵⁹ Beaming with pride on this success for collective security, Eden famously declared “I'll eat my

⁴⁵⁵ “Success at Nyon,” *Times* (London), September 13, 1937.

⁴⁵⁶ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 468.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 469.

⁴⁵⁸ “German Hopes of Settlement,” *Times* (London), September 21, 1937.

⁴⁵⁹ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, 471.

hat!” if more ships were sunk. He could not have prophesied that by early 1938 he would be gone from the Cabinet, and collective security with him.

Strength through Ignorance

Throughout the Fall of 1937 Chamberlain continued to usurp Eden's authority, just as the Nationalists achieved one decisive strategic victory after another in Spain. Even after Nyon, Eden alluded to the weakened status of the Non-Intervention policy on September 29, when he told the Cabinet how “the Foreign Office had cherished the hope that the victory of one side or the other would be purely Spanish. That view was no longer held . . . and it would be against British interests that Franco should win in Spain so long as he was dependent on foreign aid.” When pressed on French agitation at continued Italian reinforcements, he regretted that “it must now be realised that unless the non-intervention policy could be made to work better,” escalation of the conflict was still possible. The effect of Nyon on Germany and Italy was also discussed between him and Chamberlain, and here again the wedge between multilateral and bilateral policy was broached. Eden believed that the publicity of Nyon was driving the Italians back to the negotiating table, but Chamberlain persisted that “his aim had been, if possible, to avoid joint action with the French” due to the Italian conspiracy theories, and “he would therefore have preferred for us to conduct the negotiations alone.” Though the Cabinet sided with Eden that day, the stage was set for its gradual departure from Non-Intervention.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁶⁰ “The General Situation,” CAB 35(37), 23/89, September 29, 1937, 5-13. This long-winded discussion in the Cabinet also touched on other multilateral efforts such as

In public, however, Eden continued to defend the collective security that Nyon and Non-Intervention promised. But he could not have known the futility of his remarks on October 15, when he declared “I am convinced that the policy of non-intervention, pursued by His Majesty's Government and endorsed by the British people as a whole, was the right one,”⁴⁶¹ that the last Basque positions in Asturias would fall days later. Nor would he have known, opining that “the next few days will show whether or not the nations are prepared to make a sincere effort to deal with the Spanish problem in a spirit of real international cooperation,”⁴⁶² that the Republican offensive against Teruel in December, in which they were decisively defeated, would be the last time they took the initiative in the conflict. The fact was that the Fascist designs on Spain were great enough that nothing short of the democracies' own intervention may have prevented Franco's takeover. The Nationalists were kept in the fight by the Fascists, and by October 1936 a *New York Times* correspondent in Spain wisely remarked “that the 'backbone' of the rebel army was Italian, German, and Moorish.”⁴⁶³ Franco was only prevented from earlier success by Soviet support to the Republicans (particularly in Madrid in November 1936). By that light Non-Intervention, the last bastion of collective security, must be viewed as a failure just as the League of Nations and Second Locarno before it. By this point other

the League of Nations and a tripartite conference with Italy on non-intervention. Eden was consistently on the defense from the other Ministers.

⁴⁶¹ Eden, “After Nyon,” Speech at Llandudno, October 15, 1937, *Foreign Affairs*, 228.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, 229.

⁴⁶³ Puzzo, *Spain and the Great Powers*, 129.

British policies showed more promise for a “European settlement” even if they had no direct impact on Spain itself.

Many Cabinet Members never viewed collective security as an end to itself. Eden, Halifax, Duff Cooper, Hoare, and even Baldwin recognized with varying degrees of awareness that British strength made such a policy successful. In that context, Eden would indeed prove prophetic in his “After Nyon” speech when he remarked

I cordially welcome the progress that is being made in our own rearmament and still more the Prime Minister's indication that that progress was to be further accelerated. . . . But in the meantime we have a duty to our own people. We have to deal with conditions not as we want them to be, but as they are . . . [M]eanwhile we cannot but be conscious of the daily anxieties that beset us. Obligations are ignored, engagements cynically torn up, confidence has been shaken, methods of making war without declaring war are being adopted, while all the time each nation declares that its one desire is for peace. . . . We must not hide our eyes to what is unpleasant, thereby deluding our own people, but with a full grasp of reality we must concentrate on what can be done.⁴⁶⁴

For both Eden and Chamberlain, despite their misgivings over the collective security policies rearmament was what had to be done. Unilateral strength could achieve what collective approaches could not.

⁴⁶⁴ Eden, “After Nyon,” Speech at Llandudno, October 15, 1937, *Foreign Affairs*, 232, 234-235.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Just as with the Remilitarization of the Rhineland, the *Anschluss* did not catch the British off-guard. By mid-February 1938 warning signs of an alteration in Austria's status consumed the British Cabinet over all other foreign policy topics. This same Cabinet faced another issue as the Anthony Eden-Neville Chamberlain showdown resulted in the former's resignation just days into the Austrian crisis. The weakened state of many of the policies which Eden had championed, particularly collective security, led to Chamberlain's summary rejection of them for a more bilateral stance towards the Axis. Though the Spanish Civil War, to include Germany's intervention on behalf of General Francisco Franco, impeded those same bilateral efforts as well as the British rearmament program, those events most greatly impacted British collective security policies. The three most prominent initiatives—the League of Nations, Second Locarno Treaty, and Non-Intervention in Spain—were all delayed, damaged, or even aborted as a result. Without the conditions those failures set, Chamberlain would have faced more resistance in forcing his policies on the Cabinet and Foreign Office. As a result, by the time the Phony Peace concluded with the *Anschluss*, British optimism towards its relations with Germany had mostly been subsumed by foreboding, resignation, and an urgency to finally accelerate rearmament.

“This Foe is Beyond Any of You”

The British reliance on—and championing of—the League of Nations had survived several crises by the outset of the Spanish Civil War. If Japanese and Italian

aggression prior to 1936 had damaged the League's credibility, Germany's rejection of the Versailles-based Covenant's very principles led, in part, to Great Britain's efforts to finally lead that body's reforms. With both Hitler and the German Foreign Ministry signaling willingness to rejoin the League under the right conditions, the British genuinely believed by the summer of 1936 that they were close to achieving that goal. Reform proposals and comments from the other member nations were due by that September, and the League would be a topic at the Brussels Conference tentatively scheduled for late October 1936. The Nationalist insurrection in Spain not only served as a distraction throughout Europe, but Germany realized that the League's mechanisms⁴⁶⁵ would serve as an impediment to their assistance to the rebel forces. Through diplomatic stalling centered around their own actions in Spain, as well as a manipulation of the British Cabinet's feelings towards Soviet influence and intervention, the British ultimately abandoned the League.

Through the latter half of 1936, the Germans used Spain—to include complications resulting from their own actions—as an alibi to delay any further negotiations on their League status. Similarly, they contrived to paint the civil war as an ideological struggle against Communist forces, to include recruiting Italy (and to a lesser extent, Japan) into that scheme. Though varying Cabinet Ministers denied the effectiveness of the latter in particular, their statements and actions suggest a strong ideological bias which impeded their ability to appropriately respond to German actions. Whether or not evidence against Soviet intervention was in fact stronger, for example, the

⁴⁶⁵ More specifically, their inability in their absence to subvert or divert those mechanisms.

British should still have exerted pressure on the Fascists within the League of Nations as the Spanish requested. Instead, Eden called the Spanish delegation hypocrites and conspired with others beginning in November 1936 to disrupt the League's influence and mediation role. Even the League's eventual move to ban foreign volunteers in Spain only echoed efforts within the Non-Intervention Committee. Whatever initiative had existed among the British on League reform and membership had effectively been ceded.

In early December 1937, German Foreign Minister Freiherr v. Neurath declared of the long-stalled Brussels Conference (which as may be recalled represented multilateral negotiations over both the League of Nations and Second Locarno Treaty), "as long as the Spanish sore was still running it would not be easy to achieve agreement between the various Powers; not . . . on Germany's account so much as on Italy's and the mistrust of others as regards her intentions in Spain."⁴⁶⁶ On December 11, Italy left the League; Germany followed that up the next day by proclaiming,

It is only from Moscow that an unqualified testimonial to the Geneva ideals is heard today . . . Whether the Powers remaining at Geneva still desire to make the League a serious factor is their affair . . . The Reich Government, in any case, in full agreement with the Italian Government, will not let themselves be moved from the conviction that the political system of Geneva is not only a failure but pernicious. A return of Germany to the League will accordingly never come into consideration again.⁴⁶⁷

The last vestiges of League policy in British planning soon followed. Eden's reaction is particularly telling, as in his memorandum to the Cabinet to open 1938 put it,

⁴⁶⁶ Sir Nevile Henderson, "Sir N. Henderson (Berlin) to Mr. Eden," December 1, 1937, Document no. 362: C 8315/270/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XIX, 636.

⁴⁶⁷ "German 'Never'—Return to Geneva Excluded," *Times* (London), December 12, 1937.

it is, to say the least of it, somewhat surprising that the German Government should have gone out of their way to announce that Germany will never return to the League, when Herr Hitler had so recently been reminded by Lord Halifax that His Majesty's Government put Germany's return to the League in the forefront of British demands . . . Although it may be difficult to devise any other pledge which Germany could be asked to give in proof of her intention of being a good European, it is for consideration whether in any future exchange of views with Germany we should do well, if we want to make any progress, to avoid using such expressions as "the League" and "Geneva."⁴⁶⁸

Eden's bias towards this policy still would not let him move beyond it as a functioning diplomatic tool until a suggestion a month later by Lord Hailsham, the Lord Chancellor, that "in the forthcoming negotiations it would be valuable for us to have some desiderata which we could, if necessary, abandon. From this point of view it would be desirable to include Germany's return to the League among the contributions which we expected Germany to make."⁴⁶⁹ Apart from some sporadic support in the Foreign Office for the League of Nations as a matter of principle—itsself a result of cognitive dissonance on the League's viability—it would fade from British policy with Eden's resignation. At the same time, the other major multilateral forum which he had pursued, the Second Locarno Treaty, was also on life support.

Until Germany repudiated the Locarno Treaty, it had remained as one of the more sacrosanct pacts in Europe. Limited in scope but equally weighed to provide protections and guarantees on both banks of the Rhine, even Hitler had admitted that Locarno held a

⁴⁶⁸ Eden, "The next steps towards a general settlement with Germany," January 1, 1938, Enclosure to Document no. 409: C 74/42/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XIX, 708-709.

⁴⁶⁹ "Draft conclusions of the 22nd meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy," February 3, 1938, Document no. 488: C 800/42/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XIX, 842.

separate status as a “freely negotiated” agreement. To a similar degree as the League of Nations, German anti-Communist sentiments undermined the Treaty to the point that Hitler would continually cite the existence of the Franco-Soviet Pact as his primary logic for: a) violating Locarno and remilitarizing the Rhineland, and b) resisting Second Locarno on the grounds that it provided no guarantee from France’s agreement with the Soviets. V. Neurath cited this as his principal reason for rejecting British overtures on the subject in March 1937, but the fact remains that the Germans had left Second Locarno in stasis throughout its intervention in Spain.

In May of that year Field Marshal v. Blomberg met with members of the Cabinet just before Baldwin’s retirement. During his discussion with Eden, as the previous chapter noted, Eden’s failure to keep v. Blomberg on the topic of Second Locarno led them to talk of Spain instead. Here, Eden mentioned that he “had something in mind which he had not yet told any other Power about,” which ended up being the *démarche* pursuing an armistice. To solicit v. Blomberg’s support to take the topic back to Hitler, Eden caveated his aims by admitting that “Britain had not the slightest wish to see a Communist government in Spain . . . His only desire was to end the Spanish conflict as soon as possible.” V. Blomberg hinted at Germany’s senior status in the Axis, replying that “Germany would be very ready to convince Italy of Britain’s true intentions.” This scenario paints a picture of a British policymaker beginning to lose faith in the diplomatic channels which had guided his collective security initiatives. Such tactics belonged more to Chamberlain, and evinced the uncoupling of multilateral processes from policy. What Eden failed to realize at this juncture was that with the Nationalists a month from

conquering Bilbao, the Fascists had little reason to want to bring the war to a close; their man in Franco was winning but they played along for the sake of appearances.⁴⁷⁰

The progress made towards the *démarche* would be followed over the next months by attacks (real and otherwise) on German cruisers and the Italian piracy campaign. Through these ploys, the Germans persisted in their use of “timing” to put off the Second Locarno talks. Eden cabled to Sir Nevile Henderson, the British Ambassador to Germany, “I still consider it important that this [negative] attitude on the part of Germans should not be allowed to pass unchallenged: the longer they continue to nurse what I believe to be imaginary grievances, the deeper will their resentment become.”⁴⁷¹ Though such grievances by July 1937 could span from the recent *Leipzig* incident off Spain to a long-gestating debate on colonial concessions, Eden clearly tied German ire to the failure of the Second Locarno talks, as well. He would follow up the very next day to all the Locarno Powers with a summary of the present state of those negotiations, on the premise that “to continue the correspondence on the same lines as in the past might well result in the detailed exploration of points of difference than in the establishment of points of agreement.”⁴⁷² In other words, he reminded the other Powers of what had not

⁴⁷⁰ v. Blomberg, “Memorandum on the Conversation between Field Marshal von Blomberg and Mr. Eden in London, on May 13,” May 13, 1937, Enclosure 2 to Document no. 371: 1465/367357-69, *German Documents on Foreign Policy*, Series C, VI, 761-762.

⁴⁷¹ Eden, “Mr. Eden to Sir N. Henderson (Berlin),” July 15, 1937, Document no. 41: C 4185/270/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XIX, 67.

⁴⁷² “Memorandum by His Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom regarding the Agenda of the Fiver-Power Conference,” July 16, 1937, Enclosure to Document no. 46: C 4167/1/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XIX, 81.

worked, and requested new ideas. Tired of the continued silence, Eden wired to Henderson in September to politely remind v. Neurath that United Kingdom was “still waiting” for a substantive counter-proposal.⁴⁷³ It never came.

In the days before the Austrian crisis dominated the Cabinet, Eden issued a memorandum throughout the Cabinet Ministries on what he believed to be the top British priorities for a general settlement with Europe. He based these on a prior meeting in which Henderson had remarked that “the Western Pact was intensely disliked in Germany.”⁴⁷⁴ While he focused on German contributions to appeasement, he noted of the Five Power Pact how “as the prospect . . . to replace the Treaty of Locarno is so remote, I would not propose that we should make the conclusion of such a Treaty an indispensable part of the general settlement which we have in mind.”⁴⁷⁵ Instead he took the stance that bilateral assurances may be an appropriate alternative, to which Chamberlain admitted to being “relieved to hear that [Mr. Eden] favoured the substitution of some simple machinery for the cumbrous procedure of the proposed Western Pact.”⁴⁷⁶ Before ink on Eden’s memo had dried, on February 12, 1938, Hitler browbeat and threatened Austrian

⁴⁷³ Eden, “Mr. Eden to Sir N. Henderson (Berlin),” September 8, 1937, Document no. 141: C 5314/270/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XIX, 251.

⁴⁷⁴ “Draft conclusions of the 22nd meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy,” February 3, 1938, Document no. 488: C 800/42/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XIX, 841.

⁴⁷⁵ Orme Sargent and William Strang, “Memorandum by Mr. Eden on German contribution to a general settlement,” February 10, 1938, Document no. 504: C 1057/42/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XIX, 875.

⁴⁷⁶ “Draft conclusions of the 22nd meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy,” February 3, 1938, Document no. 488: C 800/42/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XIX, 841.

Chancellor Dr. Kurt von Schuschnigg into accepting the Nazification of his government. All eyes were now fixed on Austria. The attempts at securing the Second Locarno Treaty were dead, leaving Non-Intervention as the only British collective security policy.

Though neither the policy nor its mechanisms were their idea, by request of the other European nations the British took the lead for Non-Intervention in Spain. Both the Cabinet and the Non-Intervention Committee (led by Lord Plymouth) considered all such actions under that effort as being either in support of the Russian-assisted Republican Government or the Fascist-aided Nationalists. The Cabinet also concluded that by 1937, Italian policy in Spain was inexorably linked to its Axis ties with Germany such that the latter could provide influence over its partner, and Eden hinted as much to his peers in other governments.⁴⁷⁷ Furthermore, German contributions to Franco's forces were considered the greater benefit even though the Italians had thousands more personnel in the country at any one time. To that end, the sum of Germany's actions in Spain—from ferrying Franco's forces, the Battle of Madrid, the deployment of the *Legion Condor*, the bombing of Basque towns, and the varying cruiser attacks—severely impeded Britain's ability to administer the Non-Intervention policy.

Just days after the *Anschluss*, Chamberlain concluded that “there would be no settlement of the Spanish problem until the termination of the civil war in Spain. In spite of the infinite patience and perseverance shown by Lord Plymouth, the Non-Intervention

⁴⁷⁷ Eden, “Mr. Eden to Mr. Lloyd Thomas (Paris),” September 22, 1937, Document no. 189: W 17810/7/41, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XIX, 321.

Committee was making slow progress, and new obstacles were constantly arising.”⁴⁷⁸ For the greater umbrella policy itself, he also wrote how “it is perfectly evident surely now that force is the only argument Germany understands and that ‘collective security’ cannot offer any prospect of preventing such events [as the *Anschluss*] until it can show a visible force of overwhelming strength backed by determination to use it.”⁴⁷⁹ As Chamberlain’s Ministry would come to place less emphasis on the multilateral underpinnings of collective security, the defeated status of those policies lent itself to a similar attitude within the Foreign Office. Alexander Cadogan, who had replaced Sir Robert Vansittart as the Permanent Under-Secretary just weeks prior to the *Anschluss*, commented on a memorandum from Berlin that Hitler “may make it virtually impossible to proceed on our lines.”⁴⁸⁰ That footnote coming just as Eden resigned, the other British appeasement policies, rearmament and bilateralism, would now be put to the test.

A Prelude to Rearmament

Among the British collective security failures was an accurate reading of German intentions, as evidenced by their statements, diplomatic maneuvers, and actions—many of which either directly or indirectly concerned the Spanish Civil War. German language with regard to many of those policies had remained positive at the start of the Phony

⁴⁷⁸ “Conclusions of the twenty-fifth meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy,” March 15, 1938, Document no. 630: R 2711/23/22, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XIX, 1047.

⁴⁷⁹ Chamberlain, Letter to Hilda Chamberlain, March 13, 1938, *The Downing Street Years*, 304-305.

⁴⁸⁰ Note by Alexander Cadogan, February 19, 1938, Document no. 555: C 1168/42/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XIX, 923.

Peace only to devolve into tentativeness, obstructionism, and finally rejection. A warning of this change towards the latter arrived in early July 1937 via the British Consul-General in Munich, Sir Donald Gainer. He warned of “more and more talk in Germany of the need for some striking success in foreign policy, and unless Germany could win a diplomatic victory in Spain, circumstances might well force Herr Hitler to make a ‘coup’ somewhere else.”⁴⁸¹ Still, even in October that year the Embassy in Berlin reported that “information at present at [our] disposal indicates that Herr Hitler does not contemplate violent action against Austria. It nevertheless seems clear here that Germans are determined sooner or later to take Austria . . . and that German Government is counting on Great Britain not to march.”⁴⁸² Germany’s systematic, comparatively clandestine aid to the Nationalists in Spain should have been evidence that the Nazis would use force just as they had (supposedly, even according to Mussolini)⁴⁸³ done in assassinating Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss in 1934. The more visible demonstrations of German force in Spain, such as the use of incendiary bombs on Madrid, Guernica, and other towns

⁴⁸¹ Strang, “Record by Mr. Strang of a conversation with Mr. D. St. C. Gainer,” July 6, 1937, Document no. 21: C 4968/3/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XIX, 41.

⁴⁸² Ogilvie-Forbes, “Sir G. Ogilvie-Forbes (Berlin) to Mr. Eden,” October 13, 1937, Document no. 243: C 7083/3/18, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Second Series, XIX, 397-398.

⁴⁸³ In addition to other remarks in private, Mussolini sent a telegram to Prince von Starhemberg on July 26, 1934, the day after Dollfuss’ assassination, stating, “[Dollfuss’] memory will be honoured not only in Austria but everywhere in the civilised world, which has already visited in moral condemnation upon the guilty, both those directly responsible and those involved from afar.” The full text of the telegram is available in “Duce’s Vigorous Telegram,” *Times* (London), July 26, 1934. A few days later, *The Times* reported in “Restoring Normal Relations” that the German press had conveniently redacted that line when it reprinted the telegram.

should have been sufficient evidence to Great Britain that its normal diplomacy may not apply to a regime which perfected the art of bombing civilian population centers.⁴⁸⁴

Many British Cabinet Ministers and their associated support staff suffered from cognitive dissonance during the period of the Phony Peace. Even an anti-appeaser such as Anthony Eden *wanted* to believe that Communism in Spain was a bigger issue than Fascist involvement despite all hard evidence to the contrary. Hindsight on his failures seemed to escape him, as in his resignation speech he remarked, “I think it likely that the House [of Commons] may wonder . . . why I speak so much of the Spanish problem. It is only because it happens to be in this instance an example. We cannot consider this problem except in relation to the international situation as a whole.”⁴⁸⁵ He was of course correct, but what the British missed throughout the Phony Peace is that German ambitions, intentions, and capabilities were on display through their intervention in Spain. The Cabinet could not identify these signals at least partially as a result of their images of, and desires towards, their policies with respect to Germany. They were obsessed with finding an avenue for peace where none existed.

British reactions to the *Anschluss* itself signal a Cabinet finally resigned to a hostile Germany but without any overt mechanisms to effect a change in German ambitions. Chamberlain wrote in his diary the next day, “those wretched Germans . . . I wished them at the bottom of the sea; instead of which they are on top of the land, drat

⁴⁸⁴ The Condor Legion dropped more bombs on Basque Spain between March 30—May 10, 1937, than the entire of German forces dropped on Great Britain in World War I. Proctor, *Hitler’s Luftwaffe in the Spanish Civil War*, 136.

⁴⁸⁵ Eden, “Resignation,” Speech in the House of Commons, February 20, 1938, *Foreign Affairs*, 272.

‘em!’”⁴⁸⁶ Nevile Henderson later wrote that what should have been obvious to the British was that “after the reoccupation of the Rhineland in 1936 the policy of hostile words which could not be implemented by hostile action was out of date and ineffective.”⁴⁸⁷ Halifax, now the Foreign Secretary following Eden’s departure, decried “the ruthless application of power politics that has so profoundly shocked the world and is responsible for the grave apprehension that exists in so many quarters today.”⁴⁸⁸ After two months of silence following his resignation, Eden emerged and warned that “it is utterly futile to imagine that we are involved in a European crisis that may pass as it has come. We are involved in a crisis of humanity all the world over.”⁴⁸⁹

The very last words are Chamberlain’s, now fully in control of British foreign policy. A week after the *Anschluss* he wrote to his sister, “the real source of my trouble . . . was the state of Europe . . . with Franco winning in Spain by the aid of German guns and Italian planes . . . and finally with a Germany flushed with triumph and all too conscious of her power.”⁴⁹⁰ Four days later, he announced in a speech that for Great Britain, “the full and rapid equipment of the nation for self-defence must be its primary

⁴⁸⁶ Chamberlain, Letter to Hilda Chamberlain, March 13, 1938, *The Downing Street Years*, 304.

⁴⁸⁷ Nevile Henderson, *Failure of a Mission* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1940), 124.

⁴⁸⁸ Halifax, “The Austrian Anschluss—II,” Debate in the House of Lords, March 16, 1938, *Speeches on Foreign Policy*, 126.

⁴⁸⁹ Eden, “England,” Speech at the Festival Banquet of the Royal Society of St. George, April 26, 1938, *Foreign Affairs*, 286.

⁴⁹⁰ Chamberlain, Letter to Ida Chamberlain, March 20, 1938, *The Downing Street Years*, 306-307.

aim.”⁴⁹¹ While the *Anschluss* ended the Phony Peace and accelerated British plans for war, the failure of British policy towards German intervention in the Spanish Civil War set the stage for Chamberlain’s total domination of both the Cabinet and the appeasement of Germany. Even those who had been cautious and hesitant towards Germany’s revisionist and expansionist goals downplayed the warning signs or refused to believe their preferred policies could not work. This left a British politician in charge who, regardless of every contravening fact, believed that he alone could secure peace in his time.

⁴⁹¹ Chamberlain, “The Vital Interests of Britain,” Speech in the House of Commons, March 20, 1938, *In Search of Peace* (New York: Van Rees Press, 1939), 88.

GLOSSARY

- Appeasement.** The overarching strategy underpinning British foreign policy in the interwar period. The strategy was designed to prevent war on the European continent by ensuring that countries' legitimate claims and grievances were fulfilled. After World War II, the core appeasement policies were retroactively identified as collective security, rearmament, and bilateral negotiations.
- Collective Security.** The series of multilateral policies seeking to ensure that no nation should need to arm itself in fear of its neighbors. The collective might of the alliance should prove sufficient to keeping any possible belligerents in line. The British pursued multilateralism through non-geographic fora such as the League of Nations and regionally as in the Treaty of Locarno.
- Ministry.** Refers to British government ministers appointed by the Head of Government (e.g., the Prime Minister). For this thesis, refers to Cabinet-level ministers only.
- Nationalists.** The forces in Spain aligned (eventually) under General Francisco Franco and supported by the Fascist powers. Frequently termed “rebels.”
- Non-Intervention.** A policy proposed by the French in which European nations would not contribute materially to the opposing factions in the Spanish Civil War.
- Phony Peace.** A term introduced in this thesis covering the period March 7, 1936 to March 12, 1938. These dates bookend overt acts of German aggression (the Remilitarization of the Rhineland and the *Anschluss*, respectively) while other sources of tension between German and Europe persisted. Though the European states did not directly confront each other—Spanish proxies aside—they mostly assumed at the time of the Rhineland crisis that war was inevitable.
- Phony War.** The period at the start of World War II—ending with the Battle of France—in which no fighting occurred on the Western Front. US Senator William Borah mocked the Allies on September 18, 1939, remarking that “there is something phoney about this war. You would think that Britain and France would do what they are going to do now while Germany and Russia are still busy in the East.” Also called “Phoney War” and *Sitzkrieg* in the British media (or “sitting war”).
- Rearmament.** A reference to military spending both as a deterrent and a policy tool in the interwar period. For instance, the British Cabinet believed the country must appear strong in order to lend weight to its collective security commitments—both to prevent aggression and retaliate against belligerents.
- Republicans.** The forces in Spain loosely aligned under the elected Popular Front government of 1936. Their primary benefactors were Mexico and the Soviet Union. Also identified as “Loyalists.”

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