Franco and Hitler: the myths of Hendaye 1940

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The idea that Franco, with astute caution (*hábil prudencia*), hoodwinked Hitler and kept Spain out of the Second World War is a central myth of Francoist propaganda. It was long to remain one of the notions most dear to the Caudillo's admirers.[1] More urgently, in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Third Reich, it was a crucial element in the operation mounted to prove the Caudillo's divinely inspired perspicacity and consequent indispensibility. When opposition to his dictatorship was gathering internally and externally, the success of that propaganda exercise contributed significantly to a consolidation of his domestic support. Most importantly, it provided a flimsy justification for the Western Powers, anxious to incorporate Franco into the anti-Communist front of the Cold War, to forget about his innumerable hostile acts of word and deed in the course of the Second World War. Those acts – the devotion of the Spanish press to the Axis cause, the refuelling and supplying of U-boats, the provision of radar, air reconnaissance and espionage facilities within Spain, the export of valuable raw materials to the Third Reich – although diminished by the spring of 1944, were never entirely halted until the end of the war.

In the final days of the Second World War, Franco was still nurturing secret hopes of Hitler's wonder weapons turning the tide in favour of the Third Reich, believing that Nazi scientists had harnessed the power of cosmic rays.[2] Indeed, as Allied forces stumbled across the horrendous sights of the extermination camps, the British at Belsen, the Americans at Buchenwald and the Russians at Auschwitz, the Francoist press played down the horrors of the Holocaust as the entirely unavoidable and comprehensible consequence of wartime disorganisation.[3] When Berlin fell, the press printed tributes to the inspirational presence of Hitler in the city's

[1] See, *inter alia*, José María Sánchez Silva and José Luis Saenz de Heredia, *Franco ... ese hombre* (Madrid: Difusión Librera, 1975), 139. Thereafter Sánchez Silva and Saenz de Heredia, *Franco*; José María de Areilza, *Embajadores sobre España* (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Políticos, 1947), *passim*; José María Doussinague, *España tenía razón* (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1949), *passim*; Brian Crozier, *Franco: A Biographical History* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1967), 313–75.

[2] Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Entre la propaganda y la historia: la Historia como fue, Memorias* (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1977), 358. Thereafter Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*. In an earlier interview, Serrano Suñer himself admitted to having been impressed by what he had heard about the V-1 and V-2 and the work of German nuclear scientists, interview with Charles Favrel, PRO FO371/49663 59802.

[3] *ABC*, 26 Apr. 1945; *Mundo*, 29 Apr. 1945.

defence and to the epoch-making fighting qualities of the Wehrmacht. *Informaciones* declared that Hitler had preferred to sacrifice himself for Europe rather than unleash his secret weapons. Allied victory was seen as the triumph of materialism over heroism.[4] Franco did not break off diplomatic relations with the Third Reich until 8 May, VE Day. Only at that time were the swastikas removed from the embassy building which was duly sealed.[5]

With agile footwork, Franco's controlled press quickly sidestepped any sadness at the passing of Hitler and greeted the end of the war in Europe with the most extreme eulogies to the Caudillo for the wisdom and firmness which had enabled him to bestow the gift of peace upon Spain. According to *Arriba*, the end of the war was 'Franco's Victory'. *ABC* carried a front-page picture of the Caudillo with the statement: 'he appears to have been chosen by the benevolence of God. When everything was obscure, he saw clearly ... and sustained and defended Spain's neutrality.'[6] Franco was now able to devote his entire effort to regularising his position with the victorious Allies. In the context of the Cold War, that process was to be much easier than even Franco, the eternal optimist, had anticipated. In fact, with barely disguised self-interest, politicians and publicists had been contributing to the myth of Franco the man of peace for the previous twelve months.

In a speech in the House of Commons on 24 May 1944, Winston Churchill had shocked many in both Britain and America with a lavish declaration of his gratitude to the Spanish government for keeping out of the war in 1940. He was even more fulsome in his praise for the fact that Spain had refrained from interference during the preparations for Operation Torch. The key to his intentions was in his comment that 'Internal political problems in Spain are a matter for the Spaniards themselves'.[7] It is very likely that Churchill's words were based on motives other than disinterested admiration for Franco. On the one hand, he was trying, in the short term, to neutralise Spain during the forthcoming Normandy landings. On the other, there was the longer term purpose of sanitising Franco in order to be able to use him as a future bulwark of Western Mediterranean policy. At the time, however, there was considerable furore in English and American political circles and dismay within the anti-Franco opposition as an immediate consequence of the speech, not least because of the reaction of the Spanish press. Churchill's words were presented by the Madrid propaganda machine as a full-scale endorsement both of Franco's foreign policy and of his regime.[8] Churchill's speech did Franco and his regime enormous good domestically and internationally. Churchill felt obliged to write, in justification, to Roosevelt, 'I do not care about Franco but I do not wish to have the Iberian Peninsula hostile to the British after the war ... I do not know whether there

[4] *Arriba*, 3, 5, 10 May 1945; *ABC*, 3, 11 May 1945; *Informaciones*, 3, 7 May 1945.

[5] *The Times*, 11 May 1945.

[6] *Arriba*, 8 May 1945; *ABC*, 8 May 1945.

[7] Winston S. Churchill, *Complete Speeches*, ed. Robert Rhodes James, Vol. vii, (London: Chelsea House Publishers, 1974), 6934–7; Sir Samuel Hoare, *Ambassador on Special Mission* (London: Collins, 1946), 267.

[8] *ABC*, 25, 26 May 1944; *Ya*, 26, 30 May 1944; *Arriba*, 31 May 1944. See Hugh Dalton, *The Second World War Diary of Hugh Dalton 1940–45*, ed. Ben Pimlott, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1986), 755–6.

is more freedom in Stalin's Russia than in Franco's Spain. I have no intention to seek a quarrel with either.'[9]

Second only to Churchill's contribution to Franco's efforts to rewrite history was that made by the United Press in the winter of 1944. Massive world-wide publicity was given in November 1944 to the Caudillo's claim to have been the Allies' secret friend throughout the war. Franco was permitted to make a virtuoso display of the most hard-faced cynicism in an interview with the Director of the United Press Foreign Service, A. L. Bradford. The sympathy with which Franco's declarations were treated was not unconnected with the fact that, at the same time, the official Spanish news agency EFE negotiated a contract with the United Press for its services in Spain.[10] The interview was published on 7 November 1944 and widely reproduced. His declarations were a disingenuous, not to say entirely mendacious, account of his policy during the previous five years. Forgetting his seizure of Tangier and his appeals to Hitler for the dismemberment of French Morocco at the time of the defeat of France in 1940, he described his attitude to France as one of friendship and *hidalguía* (nobility). His most outlandish statement was that the sending of the Spanish División Azul to fight in Russia 'implied no idea of conquest or passion against any country'. A delirious Spanish press responded with reports of the 'universal expectation' and awed admiration with which the world had perceived the 'transcendental importance' of Franco's remarks. According to *Ya*. these 'important declarations have been universally considered as one of the most important events of recent times'.[11]

Thereafter, Franco's services to Spain and the Allies as the man who held back the Nazi hordes became a constant refrain of his propaganda. The central plank in the construction of that image was his one direct confrontation with the Führer, at Hendaye on the Spanish–French border, on 23 October 1940. At that meeting, he was alleged brilliantly to have kept a threatening Hitler at arm's length. In fact, an examination of the encounter does nothing to suggest inordinate pressure for Spanish belligerence on the part of Hitler. Nor does it diminish the conclusion that Franco remained as anxious in the autumn of 1940 as he had been in the early summer, to be part of a future Axis world order. Hitler went to the south of France in order to weigh up the respective costs of securing the collaboration in his European block of Vichy France and of Franco's Spain. He saw Laval at Montoire-sur-Loire, a remote village railway station near Tours, on Tuesday 22 October, Franco on the Wednesday at Hendaye and Pétain on the Thursday again at Montoire. Franco went to Hendaye in order to derive profit from what he saw as the demise of the Anglo–French hegemony which had kept Spain in a subordinate position for over two centuries. The Hendaye meeting failed because Hitler believed that Vichy offered the better deal.

[9] Churchill to Roosevelt, 4 June 1944, *Churchill and Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence*, ed. Warren F. Kimball, 3 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), iii, 162–3.

[10] Ramón Garriga, *La España de Franco: de la división azul al pacto con los Estados Unidos* (Puebla, Mexico: Editorial Cajica, 1970), 249–50.

[11] *ABC*, 7, 8 Nov. 1944; *Ya*, 7 Nov. 1944; *Arriba*, 8 Nov. 1944; *Franco ha dicho...* (Madrid: Ediciones Voz, 1947), 239–45.

Later rewriting of history to create the myth of the brilliantly perspicacious Caudillo who foresaw the eventual outcome and set about resisting German threats has derived plausibility from the indisputable fact that Franco did not go to war. The rewriters of Hendaye have also been able to give a favourable slant to innumerable examples at other moments in late 1940 and during 1941 of what were cautious hesitations about launching Spain into belligerence. Franco aspired to take part in the war but, aware of Spain's economic weakness, only after the worst of the fighting was over, albeit before the division of the spoils. In the consequent hesitations, there was therefore both prudence and caution. What cannot be discerned is the perspicacity on the part of the Caudillo to act as the 'secret ally' of the democracies.[12] That is not to say that he was not starting to hedge his bets in October 1940. Nevertheless, until near the end of the war, Franco hardly ever wavered in his conviction that the ultimate victor would be the Third Reich. Prior to Churchill's speech of May 1944, the Caudillo believed that the future survival of his regime would be seriously endangered by an Allied victory. Rather than any divinely inspired foresight, two other factors imposed inaction on Franco. On the one hand, the economic and military weakness of Spain, and the power of the Allies to control her food and fuel supplies, prevented anything but a war effort lasting a few days. On the other, the Hendaye–Montoire window-shopping expedition would convince Hitler that he could not pay Franco's price.

When the defeat of France was imminent, Franco had made his most blatant effort to gain access to what he imagined would be the peace conference to divide up the French empire. This took the form of a letter to Hitler written in early June and given to Hitler by General Juan Vigón on 16 June.[13] That was brushed aside ungraciously by the Germans. By September 1940, Franco's position had changed little. Confident of an early German victory over Britain, he had sent his brother-in-law and Minister of the Interior, Ramón Serrano Suñer, to Berlin to clinch the conditions for Spain to be represented at the final conference table. As the winter wore on, the situation was to change slowly as a consequence of three factors. In the first place, Franco would be taken aback by the fact that, far from placing a high value on Spanish participation, the Germans were off-hand and dismissive of his territorial aspirations, made demands on Spain for military bases, and continually failed to meet any of his requests for supplies. More importantly, the Caudillo's slowly dawning cognizance of the strength of British resistance would gradually reactivate his deep-seated fears of a retaliatory strike against Spain or her overseas territories. Resentment of the Germans and fear of the British would take their toll of the Caudillo's warlike fervour. Finally, the decisive obstacle to precipitate warlike action was the rapid deterioration of Spain's economic position, which would bring

[12] See Willard L. Beaulac, *Franco: Silent Ally in World War II* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), *passim*. Beaulac was a senior US embassy official in Madrid during the war. His views at the time, expressed through his many despatches and in his memoirs, *Career Diplomat* (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 153–99, were rather less complaisant.

[13] Franco to Hitler, 3 June 1940, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Ser. D. Vol. ix (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1956), 509–10. Thereafter *DGFP*.

with it an ever greater vulnerability to Anglo–American pressures and blandishments.

Nevertheless, had Hitler been sufficiently determined to secure Spanish belligerence, he might well have pulled Franco into the war on his side. It would have required massive deliveries of food and military equipment and extravagant promises of imperial spoils at the expense of France. As things were to turn out, the Führer would be inhibited from making the necessary promises to Franco for fear of the French finding out. Overwhelming evidence that Spain would be an economic and military liability convinced Hitler that it was simply not worth the risk of alienating Vichy to gain Spanish belligerence. Accordingly, Serrano Suñer's mission in September 1940 was not a success. Presenting the list of items which Spain required, he informed Ribbentrop of her determination to acquire all of French Morocco which 'belonged to Spain's Lebensraum' and the area around Oran inhabited by Spaniards. Perhaps in an attempt to establish Spain's credentials as a ruthless member of the Axis club, he also blatantly stated Spain's ambitions with regard to Portugal. 'Geographically speaking', he said, 'Portugal really had no right to exist.'[14] Ribbentrop not only did not agree but astonished Serrano Suñer with his own set of counter demands.

Serrano Suñer and Ribbentrop quickly developed an intense mutual dislike, and this was to have great significance in terms of Spain's ultimate neutrality. The relentless harshness and affectation of the German minister helped to curtail the Spaniard's natural impetuosity and fervour for the Axis cause. In his meeting with Serrano Suñer on 16 September, Ribbentrop quibbled over the amounts of material requested by Spain but finally agreed that she would receive what was absolutely necessary to her. What Germany wanted in return was stated quite brutally. Ribbentrop's revelation of the abyss which separated Franco and Hitler in their valuation of Spanish belligerence was startling for Serrano Suñer. What he learned on his trip, when it sank in, was significantly to alter his attitude to the Third Reich and the whole question of Spain entering the war. Aware that the British would respond to the seizure of Gibraltar by taking the Canary Islands, the Azores or the Cape Verde Islands, the Führer wanted one of the Canary Islands for a German base, and further bases at Agadir and Mogador with 'appropriate hinterland'. He also demanded substantial economic concessions in terms of Civil War debt repayment and participation in mining interests in Morocco. Serrano Suñer had come expecting to be treated as a valued ally and instead he was being treated as the representative of a satellite state.[15]

The idea that it was Serrano Suñer who was the pro-Axis warmonger and Franco the careful pacifist is demolished by the letters which the Caudillo sent to his brother-in-law during his stay in Berlin. There could be no doubt that, at the time,

[14] Record of conversation between Ribbentrop and Serrano Suñer, *Entre Hendaya y Gibraltar* (Madrid: Ediciones y Publicaciones Españolas, 1947), 165–71. Thereafter Serrano Suñer, *Entre Hendaya y Gibraltar*.

[15] Record of conversation between Ribbentrop and Serrano Suñer, 16 Sept. 1940, *DGFP*, Ser. D. xi, 87–91.

Franco not only believed blindly in the victory of the Axis but he was fully decided to join in the war at its side. Any doubts concerned only the material conditions for Spanish preparation and future prizes. In the letter sent on 21 September, for instance, the Caudillo oozes confidence that Hitler would see Spain's point of view. Franco was clearly delighted with Serrano Suñer's meetings so far, 'in every respect, a beneficial contact'. The Caudillo's tone was of wide-eyed adulation of Hitler. 'One appreciates as always the lofty vision and the good sense of the Führer'. The disagreeable demands made on Serrano were put down to 'the selfishness and inflated self-regard of the Führer's underlings' and to the fact that Ribbentrop and Hitler's economic advisers failed to see how the Spanish Civil War had facilitated Germany's victory over France.[16]

While Serrano Suñer was still in Germany, Franco's enthusiasm dimmed somewhat. It is not entirely clear if this was as consequence of the full scale of Germany's economic demands which had been carried to him by Colonel Tomás García Figueras, or if he had finally heard about the German decision to postpone the attack on England. He certainly seems to have had evidence that it was now going to be a long war.[17] The result of his thoughts was a further letter to Serrano Suñer whose tone, while in no way suggesting a change in the underlying commitment to the Axis, was altogether less sanguine than Franco had been in the immediately preceding days. 'There is no doubt about the alliance. It is fully expressed in my answer to the Führer and in the whole direction of our policy since our Civil War' (underlined by Franco in the original). However, Franco now showed real concern about the prospect of a protracted war. Moreover, he was adamant in a way he had not been before about the need for adequate economic and military preparation. The scale of assistance required by Spain meant that 'it is necessary to enshrine the future in a protocol and, although there are no doubts about our decision, we must think about the specific details of the agreement and the obligations to be undertaken by both parties'. The Pact with the Axis should remain secret until Madrid felt it was ready for war.[18]

Franco's policy had always been based on a determination to enter the war as near as possible to the end. However, British resistance was making that moment even more difficult to predict. In addition to evidence about German doubts, opposition was building up within the higher reaches of the Spanish army to entry into the war. The General Staff reported that the navy had no fuel, that there was no air force worthy of the name and no effective mechanised units, and that after the Civil War, the population would not tolerate more sacrifices. With tensions brewing between monarchists and Falangists, as a compromise solution, Franco latched onto the idea of the secret protocol with the Axis, which he hoped would guarantee his territorial ambitions yet still leave the precise date of Spanish entry to him.

[16] Franco to Serrano Suñer, 21 Sept. 1940, Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 331–40; Serrano Suñer *Entre Hendaya y Gibraltar*, 183.

[17] Ramón Serrano Suñer, *De anteayer y de hoy* (Barcelona: Plaza y Janés, 1981), 214. Thereafter Serrano Suñer, *De anteayer*.

[18] Franco to Serrano Suñer, 24 Sept. 1940, Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 342–8.

However, the question of the date was never resolved because Hitler was neither able nor inclined to pay the Caudillo's double price of the prior German financing of Spanish military and economic preparation and the transfer to Spain of French North Africa. The harsh demands made by Hitler and Ribbentrop in their meetings with Serrano Suñer in Berlin on 16, 17, 24 and 25 September triggered Franco's inclination to enter the war only if he was paid in advance. It was, nevertheless, not until the postponment of Operation Sealion that the Caudillo realised that the war was going to be a long one.

After reading a letter from Franco dated 22 September, Hitler and Serrano Suñer agreed that the various outstanding points of the negotiations should now be left until the Führer's forthcoming meeting with the Caudillo. Before that happened, the Führer saw Mussolini at the Brenner on 4 October. Hitler made clear his fears that, if the French discovered that he was talking to Franco about handing their African territories to Spain, then they would simply abandon defence of their possessions or else French local forces in Africa would break away from Vichy. In the wake of their successful defence of Dakar, he was determined to do nothing to persuade the Vichy French to abandon the defence of their empire against the British. He was inclining to resolve the contradictions between Spanish ambitions and French sensibilities by offering the French British territory in Nigeria in return for their granting part of Morocco to Spain. If that were not possible, Hitler believed that an attack on Gibraltar was feasible without Spanish agreement. In any case, the seizure of Gibraltar was considered by the Germans to be secondary to the capture of Suez. If it took place before Suez was safely in Axis hands, it would merely provoke an English assault on the Canary Islands.[19]

When Franco realised that Ribbentrop's views merely aped those of Hitler, he was taken aback by what he saw as the Führer's rapaciousness, albeit not quite so much as his brother-in-law who deeply resented the attitude and ill manners of Ribbentrop. In fact, the Caudillo remained excited about the prospect of securing French Morocco for Spain. The hopes nurtured by the Caudillo explain why it was that he was so slow to draw the logical conclusion that he should be extremely careful with Hitler. He preferred to cling to the consoling idea that the Führer's vision, understanding and generosity were being undermined by the meanness of his subordinates. What is most striking about his views on the war and his attitude to Hitler in the autumn and winter of 1940 is their remarkable combination of provincial mediocrity and a complacency bordering on megalomania.

Franco's continued fervour for the Third Reich was revealed dramatically in the removal of the two most pro-Allied ministers in his cabinet re-organisation of 16 October 1940. Luis Alarcón de la Lastra was replaced as Minister of Industry and Commerce by the wily and unscrupulous Falangist businessman Demetrio Carceller Segura. Colonel Juan Beigbeder was replaced as Minister of Foreign Affairs by Serrano Suñer. Beigbeder learned of his dismissal from the morning newspapers. Mussolini wrote to Hitler on 19 October 1940 that Franco's cabinet re-organisation

[19] Record of conversation between Hitler and Mussolini at the Brenner, 4 Oct. 1940, *DGFP*, Ser. D, xi, 245–59.

affords us assurance that the tendencies hostile to the Axis are eliminated or at least neutralised. On the other hand I do not feel that the internal economic situation has improved. Again I express my conviction that Spanish non-belligerence is more advantageous to us than her intervention. We ought to keep intervention as a reserve: it is a card that we ought to play at the most opportune moment according to the given circumstances, such as prolongation of the war through 1941 or an overt intervention by the United States. Meanwhile, Spain will have the necessary time to prepare herself.[20]

As it turned out, earlier Spanish promises to join the Axis were reiterated but not converted into tightly binding contractual commitments at the historic meeting between Hitler and Franco at Hendaye on Wednesday 23 October 1940. That is not entirely surprising. Despite the creation of the myth of Franco gallantly holding out against the threats of the Führer, Hitler had not in fact come to demand of Franco that Spain go to war immediately. Indeed, there was more of an exploratory element to his journey. He was engaged in his 'grandiose fraud', seeing Laval on 22 October at Montoire-sur-Loire, a remote village railway station near Tours, en route to his meeting with Franco and then Pétain on 24 October again at Montoire on his way back. The Führer was preoccupied with the anxiety that Mussolini was about to get involved in a protracted and inconvenient Balkan war by attacking Greece. He was also coming round to the view that to hand French Morocco over to the Spaniards was to make them vulnerable to British attack. He inclined to the conclusion, which he was to confide to Mussolini in Florence on 28 October, that the best solution was for the French to be left to defend French Morocco. The Hendaye and Montoire trip was a reconnaissance to see if there was a way to make the aspirations of Franco and Pétain compatible and to help him decide his future strategy in south-western Europe.[21] The memory of the Vichy success against the Dakar expedition could be perceived in Hitler's remark to Franco at Hendaye that Spanish desires and French hopes were the obstacles to his aspiration of a great anti-British front consisting of Germany, Italy, Spain and Vichy France. At the same time, the Führer was no doubt aware of the views of his Commander-in-Chief Brauchitsch and his Chief of Staff Halder, that 'Spain's domestic situation is so rotten as to make her useless as a political partner. We shall have to achieve the objectives essential to us (Gibraltar) without her active participation.'[22]

Franco, who had to travel only a few kilometers, arrived shortly after 3.00 pm, eight minutes late and to the contempt of the assembled Germans, his train shuddered into the station. According to the German Foreign Ministry official Dr Paul Schmidt, the train was one hour late, although there is nothing to substantiate that assertion in reports at the time nor in the several accounts of Serrano Suñer. It has been claimed by Franco's hagiographers, without any foundation, that the

[20] Mussolini to Hitler, 19 Oct. 1940, *Documenti Diplomatici Italiani, 9a*, V (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1965), 720–2. Thereafter *DDI*.

[21] Norman Rich, *Hitler's War Aims: Ideology, the Nazi State, and the Course of Expansion*, 2 vols. (London: André Deutsch, 1973–4), i, 169–70. Thereafter Rich, *Hitler's War Aims*.

[22] 11 Oct. 1940, Charles Burdick and Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, *The Halder War Diary 1939–1942* (London: Greenhill Books, 1988), 262. Thereafter Halder, *Diary*.

alleged lateness was a skilful device by Franco to throw Hitler off balance.[23] Franco had no reason to want to do so. In fact, Franco was infuriated by the small delay that his train suffered. Feeling that he was being diminished in the eyes of Hitler, he threatened to sack the lieutenant-colonel responsible for organising his travel arrangements.[24] Marshal Keitel noticed that the rifles of the Spanish guard of honour were so rusty as to be totally unusuable. After the meeting, when Franco's train finally drew off, it jolted so violently that only the intervention of General Moscardó prevented Franco tumbling head-first onto the platform. It rained on the way back to San Sebastián, and in the aged train once used by Alfonso XIII, known as the 'break de Obras Públicas', water leaked onto Franco and Serrano Suñer.[25]

Substantial photographic evidence suggests that Franco was thrilled to be meeting the Führer and to be able to thank him in person for German aid given during the Civil War. It was surely understandable that Franco's eyes should glisten with emotion since the meeting constituted an intensely historic moment. It does, however, belie the view that Franco was skilfully deceiving Hitler. In the words of his hagiographers, 'the skill of one man held back what all the armies of Europe, including the French, had been unable to do'.[26] The dewy-eyed look reflected in the photographs is not one which is easily simulated, particularly for as cold a fish as Franco. The meeting between Franco and Serrano Suñer, together with the Foreign Ministry interpreter the Barón de las Torres, and Hitler, Ribbentrop and the German interpreter Gross, took place in the parlour coach of the Führer's special train *Erika* from 3.30 pm to 6.05 pm. Between 6.30 and 7.00, Serrano Suñer and Ribbentrop met again separately. Around 8.00, the party had dinner in Hitler's coach.

An entirely accurate, minutely detailed, reconstruction of the Hendaye meeting is impossible despite the existence of several ostensibly eye-witness accounts. Six people were present; Hitler, Franco, Ribbentrop, Serrano Suñer and the two interpreters. A seventh, Paul Schmidt of Ribbentrop's staff, was hovering in the background. Four of the seven, Serrano Suñer, the Barón de las Torres, Luis Alvarez de Estrada y Luque (the Spanish interpreter), Ribbentrop and Schmidt, have left accounts of varying degrees of detail.[27] The fullest version is contained in the German Foreign Office record, which is inexplicably incomplete (just as other

[23] Paul Schmidt, *Hitler's Interpreter: The Secret History of German Diplomacy 1935–1945* (London: Heinemann, 1951), 193. Thereafter Schmidt, *Hitler's Interpreter*; Sánchez Silva and Saenz de Heredia, *Franco*, 139. *La Vanguardia Española*, 24 Oct. 1940; *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Keitel* (London: William Kimber, 1965), 125. Thereafter Keitel, *Memoirs*; Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 289–90; testimony of Serrano Suñer to the author, 21 Nov. 1990.

[24] Testimony of Serrano Suñer to the author, 21 Nov. 1990.

[25] *Hitler's Table-Talk 1941–1944* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1953), 569; testimony of Serrano Suñer to the author, 21 Nov. 1990; Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 299–300.

[26] Sánchez Silva and Saenz de Heredia, *Franco*, 139.

[27] For a valiant attempt to reconstruct in minute detail what was said, see Ignacio Espinosa de los Monteros y Bermejillo, *Hendaya y la segunda guerra mundial (vivencias y razones)*, undated, unpublished MS (Madrid, 72–108. Thereafter Espinosa de los Monteros, *Hendaya*. Ramón Garriga, Berlin representative of the official Spanish news agency EFE, produced a perceptive pro-Serrano Suñer account in his *España de Franco: las relaciones con Hitler*, 2nd ed. (Puebla, Mexico: Editorial Cajica, 1970), 209–17.

documents concerning the relations between Hitler and Franco are inexplicably missing). The account is plausibly attributed in the German documents to Paul Schmidt, who was certainly among the German party at Hendaye. According to both Serrano Suñer and the Spanish interpreter, the Barón de las Torres, Schmidt was not present in the railway carriage for the meeting, although he entered at the end. Schmidt's own tantalisingly brief account is compatible with the surviving fragment of the official German record, and it tallies closely with the slight references in Ribbentrop's memoirs. Even if he was not present, it may safely be assumed either that he was listening just outside or that he was briefed immediately afterwards by the German Foreign Minister.[28] Serrano Suñer asserted to the author that Schmidt distorted his account in favour of Franco in order to improve his own chances of survival after 1945 by ensuring asylum for himself in Spain.

Serrano Suñer gives an immensely revealing, albeit not entirely disinterested, account in his memoirs.[29] The Barón de las Torres wrote notes, which are dated 26 October 1940 and were printed in full in the Spanish press in 1989.[30] These and other notes by de las Torres were used by Serrano Suñer in his memoirs.[31] However, neither the tone nor the detailed content of de las Torres' account is convincing. References to the virility, patriotism and realism with which Franco resisted Hitler's pressure are more redolent of the post-1945 propaganda exercise in re-writing the Caudillo's role in the war. The document makes a number of contradictory claims. The Führer is alleged, in the course of surveying the military situation in Europe, to have made the following threat: 'I am the master of Europe, and, as I have 200 divisions at my orders, there is no alternative but to obey.' In the surviving section of the German record, Hitler's survey of the European situation is indeed printed, complete with a discussion of his available divisions, but there is nothing resembling the threat alleged in this account. According to de las Torres, Hitler left the meeting muttering either 'with these fellows [or this fellow], there is nothing to be done' ('mit diesem Kerl [or 'diesen Kerlen'] ist nichts zu machen').[32] Clearly, had Hitler seriously been threatening to use 200 divisions against Spain, he would hardly have made a remark so redolent of impotence. If the threat was never issued, then the annoyance becomes altogether comprehensible. Similarly, the Spanish interpreter's notes claim that Hitler, unprompted, offered Oran to a

[28] That record was printed incomplete as Document no. 8 in *The Spanish Government and the Axis: Official German Documents* (Washington DC, Department of State, 1946). Further sheets of the document seem to have been found subsequently, and a somewhat longer version exists in the PRO FO371/60332/59802. That version appears in *DGFP*, Ser. D, xi, 371–6. It is followed by a record of the later meeting between Serrano Suñer and Ribbentrop, signed by Schmidt, *DGFP*, Ser. D, xi, 376–9. Schmidt's own account in Schmidt, *Hitler's Interpreter*, 192–7.

[29] Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 283–305.

[30] *ABC*, *La guerra mundial* (Madrid: *ABC*, 1989), 146–51.

[31] De las Torres to Serrano Suñer, 21 Nov. 1972, in Serrano Suñer, *De anteayer*, 203–12.

[32] The relevant section of de las Torres' letter to Serrano Suñer is reproduced in facsimile, Serrano Suñer, *De antaeyer*, 203. It is clear from the MS corrections that he originally wrote what he heard Hitler say – 'mit diesem Kerle' – and, in trying to make sense of the grammatical error, altered it first to 'mit diesem Kerl' and later to 'mit diesen Kerlen'. For an analysis of de las Torres' error, see Espinosa de los Monteros, *Hendaya*, 82–4.

flabbergasted Franco who then refused on a point of honour. This is totally untenable given what is known about Spanish ambitions in the area and Franco's pressure on Vichy in precisely that direction during the preceding months.[33] The production of this document, when taken together with the mysterious disappearance of other relevant documents from the Auswärtiges Amt, makes most sense in the context of a propaganda exercise.[34]

To Franco's gushing greeting 'I am happy to see you, Führer', Hitler replied coolly, 'Finally, an old wish of mine is fulfilled, Caudillo.' However, rather than the conversation which Hitler might have expected to dominate, there were obliquely opposing monologues. Curiously, in the light of the unprepossessing image presented by Franco, Hitler seems to have been on the defensive, rambling around the point and indulging in a frantic justification of Germany's present difficulties in the war, with particular emphasis on the role of the weather in the Battle of Britain. He also explained laboriously and rather obscurely why the fulfilment of Spain's Moroccan ambitions was problematic given the need for the co-operation of the Vichy French. In this regard, he referred to his conversation on the day before with Laval and his forthcoming encounter with Pétain, in which his theme was that, if France came in with Germany, then her territorial losses could be compensated with British colonies. The bitter pill for Franco was Hitler's statement that, 'If co-operation with France proved possible, then the territorial results of the war might perhaps not be so great. Yet the risk was smaller and success more readily obtainable. In his personal view it was better in so severe a struggle to aim at a quick success in a short time, even if the gain would be smaller than to wage long drawn-out wars. If with France's aid Germany could win faster, she was ready to give France easier peace terms in return.'

Franco can hardly have failed to notice that his hopes of massive territorial gain at virtually no cost were being slashed before his eyes. He had gone into the meeting naively convinced that Hitler, his friend, would be generous. Accordingly, he tried to overwhelm him, in a monotonous sing-song voice, with a recital of the history of Spanish claims in Morocco, the current appalling conditions in Spain, a list of supplies required to facilitate her military preparations and a pompous assertion that Spain could take Gibraltar alone. Hitler was driven to distraction by Franco's insistent, droning voice and his relentless imperturbability. He was especially infuriated when Franco repeated an opinion which he acquired from his naval attaché in Rome, Captain Alvaro Espinosa de los Monteros, to the effect that, even if England were conquered, the British government and fleet would continue to fight the war from Canada with American support. The Führer jumped nervously to his feet, barking that there was no point in further discussion. Despite his

[33] *ABC*, 30 July 1940; *Arriba*, 1 Aug. 1940; Dionisio Ridruejo, *Casi unas memorias* (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1976), 214; François Charles-Roux, *Cinq mois tragiques aux affaires étrangères 21 Mai–1er Novembre 1940* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1949), 194, 222–42; Lequio to Ciano, 8 Sept. 1940, *DDI*, 9*a*, 557–8.

[34] On the post-1945 destruction of documents, see Heleno Saño, *El Franquismo sin mitos: conversaciones con Ramón Serrano Suñer* (Barcelona: Grijalbo, 1982), 200–1. Thereafter Saña, *Franquismo*. See also Carlos Rojas, 'En torno a la entrevista de Hendaya', *ABC*, 28 Feb. 1976.

frustration with what he saw as Franco's incorrigible small-mindedness, he evidently thought better of breaking off the meeting and sat down again.[35] The interview ended at 6.05 pm, and, after a short interval during which Serrano Suñer and Ribbentrop met, the party took dinner in Hitler's coach. The two foreign ministers were then left to draw up a protocol.[36] It was significant that, in the conversation between Serrano Suñer and Ribbentrop which followed, the Cuñadísimo 'noted at the outset that the Caudillo had not exactly understood the concrete questions dealt with in the conversations with the Führer'. In particular, he could not bring himself to accept that Hitler wished to collaborate with Pétain whom the Caudillo saw as finished.[37] He was not entirely bewildered, however. When Hitler pushed for the early publication of the Tripartite Pact, Franco had countered that to do so would be to provoke an English landing in Portugal. Serrano Suñer expressed to Ribbentrop his surprise at Hitler's new line with regard to French Africa and his regret that 'this would render void Spain's maximum demands'. None the less, consistent with the earlier proposals of Franco himself, he agreed to a secret protocol. Another Spanish aspiration which was not to be satisfied in the written agreement was a claim for a rectification of the Pyrenean frontier to give French Catalonia to Spain.[38] The document had not been completed when the talks broke up. Franco's parting words to the Führer revealed his emotional commitment to the Axis: 'Despite what I've said, if the day ever arrived when Germany really needed me, she would have me unconditionally at her side without any demands on my part.' To the relief of Serrano Suñer, the German interpreter did not translate what he took to be merely a formal courtesy.[39]

With an astonishing mixture of naivety and greed, Franco said to Serrano Suñer after the interview, 'These people are intolerable. They want us to come into the war in exchange for nothing. We cannot trust them if they do not undertake, in whatever we sign, a binding, formal contract to grant to us now those territories which I have explained to them are ours by right. Otherwise, we will not enter the war now. This new sacrifice of ours would only be justified if they reciprocated with what would become the basis of our empire. After the victory, despite what they say, if they do not make a formal commitment now, they will give us nothing.'[40] What is perhaps most noteworthy about Franco's remarks was their implicit belief that 'a formal commitment' from Hitler would have been worth anything. This statement, and indeed the entire tenor of the meeting, make a nonsense of the later claim by both Franco and Serrano Suñer that they were skilfully holding off Hitler. Their determination was not to hold on to neutrality but to get the basis of a colonial empire. It was their good fortune that Hitler had other commitments. Accordingly, neutrality became a kind of consolation prize.

After Franco's accident as the train pulled off, the Spanish party returned to San

[35] Schmidt, *Hitler's Interpreter*, 196; *The Ribbentrop Memoirs* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1954), 30; Saña, *Franquismo*, 190–3.

[36] *Arriba*, 24 Oct. 1940; *La Vanguardia Española*, 24 Oct. 1940. [37] Saña, *Franquismo*, 191.

[38] *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, edited by Malcolm Muggeridge (London: Odhams, 1948), 401–2. Thereafter Ciano, *Papers*.

[39] Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 298. [40] Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 299.

Sebastián. Serrano Suñer and Franco returned to the Palacio de Ayete and worked on a text of the protocol between 2.00 and 3.00 am. The text prepared in advance by the Germans called upon Spain to join the war when the Reich considered it necessary. They sought in their text to find a less rigid formula which would still give them bargaining room. Before dawn, General Eugenio Espinosa de los Monteros, the Spanish Ambassador to Germany, appeared. In view of his account of German impatience, the text was sent back to Hendaye in his hands. Ribbentrop refused to accept small amendments to the protocol, although Serrano Suñer kept the news from Franco.[41] For all its vagueness, the protocol constituted a formal undertaking by Spain to join the war on the Axis side.[42]

Goebbels noted in his diary of the Hendaye talks: 'The Führer has now had his projected meeting with Franco. I am informed by telephone that everything went smoothly. According to the information, Spain is firmly ours. Churchill is in for a bad time.'[43] Goebbels was not alone in receiving such a call. Ribbentrop also telephoned Ciano and expressed satisfaction with the meeting.[44] Both of these comments are entirely consistent with the fact that Hitler had been on something of a reconnaissance trip to compare the stances of Franco and Pétain. It was only later that he would come to regard the meeting as an outright failure. However, that is not to say that he had enjoyed the encounter. After spending nine hours intermittently in Franco's company, Hitler told Mussolini later that 'Rather than go through that again, I would prefer to have three or four teeth taken out'.[45] Clearly both Hitler and Ribbentrop were irritated that Franco and Serrano Suñer seemed incapable of appreciating that German interests required that Spanish demands be restrained. According to Field-Marshal Keitel, who spoke briefly to Hitler during the dinner break, 'he was very dissatisfied with the Spaniards' attitude and was all for breaking off the talks there and then. He was very irritated with Franco, and particularly annoyed about the role played by Suñer, his Foreign Secretary; Suñer, claimed Hitler, had Franco in his pocket. In any event, the final result was very poor.'[46] Similarly, on the drive away from Hendaye, Ribbentrop allegedly cursed Serrano Suñer as a 'Jesuit' and Franco as an 'ungrateful coward'.[47] Ribbentrop also wrote with some exasperation on 25 October to the German Ambassador in Rome, Mackensen, about the difficulties encountered at Hendaye. He summed them up succinctly when he said, 'The Spanish Foreign Minister nevertheless frequently revealed a lack of sufficient understanding for the fact that the realization of the Spanish aspirations depends exclusively on the military successes of the Axis Powers and that therefore these aspirations must be subordinated to the Axis policy of attaining final victory'. He complained of the Spaniards' failure to see that they

[41] Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 300–1; Saña, *Franquismo*, 195–8; Espadas, *Franquismo*, pp. 117–18. For the text of the protocol, see *DGFP*, Ser. D, xi, 466–7.

[42] Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 284.

[43] *The Goebbels Diaries*, ed. Louis P. Lochner (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1948), 25 Oct. 1940, 153.

[44] *Ciano's Diary 1939–43*, ed. Malcolm Muggeridge (London: Heinemann, 1947), 300.

[45] Ciano, *Papers*, 402.

[46] Keitel, *Memoirs*, 126.

[47] Schmidt, *Hitler's Interpreter*, 197.

would have great difficulty fighting off a combination of the British and de Gaulle in Africa.[48] Colonel Gerhard Engel, Hitler's Army Adjutant, reported to Halder that the Führer was dissatisfied with the Hendaye meeting, ranting about 'Jesuit swine' and 'misplaced Spanish pride'.[49]

Meanwhile, Serrano Suñer was informing the German Ambassador to Spain, Eberhard von Stohrer, of 'the bitter feeling produced in both the Caudillo and myself' by Germany's refusal to accept minor Spanish amendments to the proposed protocol.[50] In fact, Hitler may have hoped to deceive the Spaniards over French Morocco by the seemingly frank admission that he could not give what was not yet his. He was, of course, confident of being able to dispose of the French colonial empire as he wished but had no intention of giving it to Franco. That was his 'grandiose fraud'. Serrano Suñer suggested years later that Hitler had not told a sufficiently big lie. According to the cuñadísimo, Franco's *Africanista* obsession with Morocco was such that, if Hitler had offered it, he would have entered the war.[51] Franco himself has been quoted as telling the Civil Governor of León, Antonio Martínez Cattaneo, that 'it was Hitler who did not accept my conditions'.[52] Hitler himself revealed the reasons why, for once, he was incapable of dabbling in full-scale untruth while awaiting the arrival of Franco's train. Chatting with Ribbentrop on the platform at Hendaye, he remarked that no firm promises of French territory could be given because, 'with these chattering Latins, the French are sure to hear something about it sooner or later. I want to try, in talking to Pétain, to induce the French to start active hostilities against England, so I cannot now suggest to them such cessions of territory. Quite apart from that if such an agreement with the Spaniards became known, the French colonial empire would probably go over bodily to de Gaulle'.[53]

It was fortunate for Franco that Hitler remained unwilling and indeed unable to pay his price. After all, one of the Führer's reasons for wanting Spain's participation was to be able to control North Africa and so preclude a build-up of French resistance there. Yet Franco's price of French colonies would almost certainly precipitate an anti-German movement under de Gaulle that would pave the way to Allied landings. The Hendaye meeting came to a stalemate precisely on this problem. The protocol was signed, committing Spain to join the Axis cause at a date to be decided by 'common agreement of the three Powers' but after military preparations were complete. This effectively left the decision with Franco. Nevertheless, the Führer could have pushed him by beginning deliveries of food and military supplies. Hitler made firm promises concerning only Gibraltar and was imprecise about future Spanish control of French colonies in Africa. Curiously, Hitler, who thought of himself as perpetrating a great fraud by not telling Franco that he had no intention of giving him the French Empire, failed precisely because his lie was not big enough. The vague promises which were made were not enough for the Caudillo. At

[48] *DGFP*, Ser. D, xi, 392–3.
[49] Halder, *Diary*, 1 Nov. 1940, 272.
[50] *DGFP*, Ser. D, xi, 402.
[51] Saña, *Franquismo*, 192–3.
[52] David Jato, *Gibraltar decidió la guerra* (Barcelona: Ediciones Acervo, 1977), 53.
[53] Schmidt, *Hitler's Interpreter*, 193–4.

Hendaye, the emotional admiration that he had shown for Hitler since 1936 began to give way to his natural Gallego acquisitiveness. The Caudillo's remarks to Serrano Suñer reflected his outrage that the Germans were not offering a colonial empire in return for Spanish belligerence. Ironcially, that constituted the mirror image of the German view that Franco's indignation over their demand for a Canary Island base proved that 'the Spaniards are out only to gain their own ends without making any sacrifices'.[54] As fortunate for Franco as Hitler's insensitive demands was the fact that Ribbentrop's overbearing manner had rubbed up the highly touchy Serrano Suñer the wrong way.

There was an element of truth, as well as duplicity, when Serrano Suñer informed the American Ambassador on 31 October 1940, and repeated it three times, that 'there had been no pressure, not even an insinuation on the part of either Hitler or Mussolini that Spain should enter the war'.[55] Hitler met the Duce in Florence on 28 October, both to recount his conversations with Laval, Franco and Pétain and to hear the full extent of Mussolini's adventure in Greece. The Führer expressed his fear that if French Morocco broke from Vichy and there was an English landing, the Spaniards might not be able to hold on to their existing North African possessions. In such a case, the drain on Axis forces would be intolerable and it was therefore more sensible to leave the Vichy French to defend Morocco. As he became more involved in the problem of trying to tempt Laval and Pétain into some kind of subordinate alliance with the Axis, Hitler became more critical of Franco. With regard to Spanish demands, the Führer told Mussolini that Spain 'could not get any more than a substantial enlargement of Spanish Morocco' and that the timing of Spanish entry into the war depended on the completion of her military preparations. Getting Spain into the war, despite the fantasies of Francoist propagandists, was still not an urgent priority for the Führer. In any case, before long the Führer's mind would be turning to Russia.[56]

What was to change his attitude to Spain was the difficulties that he faced on the Balkans as a result of Mussolini's precipitate attack on Greece on 28 October. Hitler was shaken by the British naval victory over the Italians at Taranto and by the turn of events in Greece which opened the way to a British offensive in the Balkans. Only after that, and to diminish the risk to Germany's Romanian oil supplies, did Hitler now decide that he must close the Mediterranean.[57] For the first time, he was sufficiently keen on Spanish belligerence to force the pace and to put pressure on Franco. On 11 November, Ribbentrop invited Serrano Suñer to a meeting with himself and Ciano at the Berghof on 18 November. The invitation was accepted

[54] Halder, *Diary*, 1 Nov. 1940, 273.

[55] *Foreign Relations of the United States 1940* (Washington DC, United States Government Printing Office, 1957), ii, 824.

[56] Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order 1940–1944* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1972), 74–5; Macgregor Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed 1939–1941 Politics and Strategy in Fascist Italy's Last War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 226–30; *DGFP*, Ser. D, xi, 411–22; Ciano, *Papers*, 401–4; Ulrich Von Hassell, *The Von Hassell Diaries 1938–1944* (New York: Doubleday, 1947), 147.

[57] Rich, *Hitler's War Aims*, i, 171.

once Serrano Suñer had discussed it with his brother-in-law.[58] In fact, since writing an enthusiastic letter to Hitler on 30 October, the Caudillo had himself become more cautious. The Spanish economic situation was worsening by the day, and he too had noted the signs of a resurgence of the British position. With Hitler showing little sign of coming up with the specific undertakings of imperial profits that Franco sought, the Caudillo was about to retreat into a more realistic line than hitherto, that of postponing Spanish belligerence until British defeat was unmistakably imminent. It is only therefore from mid-November 1940 that it is at all possible to speak accurately of Franco 'holding off' Hitler's demands. Even then, his belief in, and commitment to, Axis victory were to remain unshaken for another three years.

[58] Ribbentrop to Stohrer, 11 Nov. 1940, *DGFP*, Ser. D, xi, 513–14; Saña, *Franquismo*, 203.