

Fascist Italy and Spain, 1922–45

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A long and complex relationship developed between Fascist Italy and Spain. The first phase, from 1923 to 1930, produced friendly relations between two dictators, Mussolini and Primo de Rivera, but no decisive changes. The second phase, from 1930 to 1936, largely coincided with the years of the Second Republic. During this period the relationship was adversarial, but Mussolini was unable to intervene or significantly influence Spanish affairs, which had a comparatively low priority for Italian diplomacy. The third phase was that of the Spanish Civil War, from 1936 to 1939, in which Mussolini intervened, providing more support to the Spanish Nationalists, both absolutely and proportionately, than did Hitler. During the fourth phase, involving most of World War II, from 1939 to 1943, relations remained both close and very friendly and yet dwindled in importance compared with those between Spain and Nazi Germany. After the fall of Fascism, similarly close relations were not reestablished with the Italian Social Republic, and the Spanish regime then initiated its own slow process of 'defascization'.

The close relations between Spain and the Italian principalities which had characterized the early modern period did not continue into the nineteenth century. Early Spanish liberalism did, however, serve as a clear inspiration for Italian liberals, and when the Spanish throne became vacant after 1868, D. Amedeo, a younger son of the Italian house of Savoy, was eventually selected to become Spain's first 'democratic' monarch. His complete political frustration and abdication in 1873 were perhaps more accurately symbolic of the relations between the two countries. Because of its separation of church and state and occupation of papal territory, the Italian state formed in 1860 was generally viewed negatively by the more conservative constitutional monarchy which largely governed Spain until 1931.

Spain essentially withdrew from the main currents of European diplomacy during the nineteenth century. If France was perceived as the main rival, this did not have the effect of aligning Spain very directly with the opposing Triple Alliance of which Italy was a part. During World War I

Spain became the most important neutral state. Though the war did bring increasingly close economic involvement with France, greatly benefiting the Spanish economy, relations with Italy remained secondary.

The point of inflexion in the rather distant Italian–Spanish relationship was the March on Rome in October 1922. Like Italy, Spain was undergoing considerable internal social and political conflict, and the formation of a strong government under Mussolini in Rome was hailed by Alfonso XIII, the Spanish Foreign Minister, and a number of other figures in Madrid. This had no immediate consequences, however, for Mussolini gave little priority to foreign affairs during his first months in office, and some months later the Liberals returned to power in Madrid. Mussolini nonetheless had at least one eye on Spain from the beginning. He knew full well that tensions remained between Spain and France and early indicated to the Spanish Ambassador that he sought closer relations between Rome and Madrid as the real leaders of the Latin world (including Portugal and Latin America) in opposition to France.

Within Spain, the immediate impact of Fascism was far greater in Barcelona than anywhere else, for the Catalan capital was the peninsula's most sophisticated city and the one with the highest level of political consciousness. Some of the more radical sectors of Catalan nationalism were fascinated by Fascism, though they made little effort to imitate it.¹ Their chief opponents, the *españolista* minority in Barcelona, in some cases sought to embrace Fascism more directly. In December 1922, two months after the March on Rome, a publication called *La Camisa Negra* appeared in Barcelona in direct imitation of Fascism, but it was unable to print a second number. Subsequently, during the spring of 1923 a few officers in the local garrison formed a small circle called *La Traza* (The Project). They adopted a blue shirt as their uniform and hoped to extend their tiny group throughout Spain. Though it would be an exaggeration to call *La Traza* a Fascist organization, it was clearly inspired by Italian Fascism and was the first radical new nationalist group to be formed in Spain through such inspiration.²

The *pronunciamento* of Miguel Primo de Rivera in September 1923, creating the first formal dictatorship in Spanish history,³ drastically changed the political equation and offered the possibility of a new political convergence between Rome and Madrid.⁴ At the time of the takeover, Primo de Rivera emphatically denied that he had been inspired by Mussolini, more discreetly invoking the authors of liberal military *pronunciamentos* in nineteenth-century Spain,⁵ but in fact he was greatly impressed by Fascism. Within two months, Alfonso XIII and the new dictator made a formal visit to Rome, marking the first official visit abroad by any Spanish chief of state in the twentieth century (and, aside from Franco's meetings with Mussolini and Salazar, the last until the reign of Juan Carlos). Don Alfonso

is supposed to have remarked to King Vittorio Emanuele of Primo, 'This is my Mussolini'. Mussolini hailed his Spanish counterpart as 'the chief of Spanish Fascism', while Primo called Mussolini his inspiration and teacher.⁶ He was even more fulsome in an interview with the Fascist journal *Impero*, expressing his desire that 'Spain would follow in the footsteps of Italian Fascism', and that 'Spanish Fascism' (which he otherwise failed to identify or define) would help to 'liberate the country from harmful elements'. 'Fascism is a universal phenomenon that ought to conquer all nations ... Fascism is a living gospel.'⁷ Primo de Rivera extolled Mussolini in Rome as a 'world figure' and an 'apostle of the campaign against revolution and anarchy' who had achieved 'order, work, and justice'.⁸

Every indication at that time pointed towards very close relations and a special *entente* between the two regimes. A new economic agreement was signed by which Spain and Italy would grant each other most-favoured-nation status, but no further treaty resulted. The two regimes shared the themes of nationalism and authoritarianism, but had little in common in concrete terms, given the lack of new political development and institutionalization in Madrid. Nor was it so easy to join forces against France. Though Primo de Rivera sought to improve the status of Spain in Tangier and Mussolini also had further ambitions in the area, neither was in a position at that time to force any major alteration in the *status quo*, while Primo de Rivera came to realize that it was undesirable to permit too much Italian influence on Spanish policy. During 1925, in fact, the two regimes tended to drift apart, and when a broader agreement was made in August 1926 it took the form not of a grand treaty but simply of a pact of conciliation and arbitration.

As the Italian Fascist Party expanded its network of party groups abroad, the *Fasci all'Estero*,⁹ these became especially numerous in the United States, but also included sections of Italians resident in Madrid, Barcelona, and at least four other Spanish cities.¹⁰ Though the goal of the *Fasci all'Estero* was not primarily to create Fascist political movements in other countries, the sections in Spain maintained contacts with supporters of Primo de Rivera and did diffuse some degree of knowledge and enthusiasm about Fascism.

More important from the viewpoint of the Italian regime, however, was the general extension of Italian cultural influence, particularly in Barcelona but also in Madrid and several other larger cities.¹¹ It subsidized the publication of Italian works in Spain, and the Istituto Cristoforo Colombo, a new agency designed to expand Italian influence in Latin America, also sought to make use of Spanish facilities.¹²

Though there was never any plan in Madrid merely to copy Italian practice, given the differences between the two countries, the Fascist regime

always remained the nearest thing to a model for Primo de Rivera. His Labour Minister, Eduardo Aunós, was charged with developing a new labour arbitration system and thus made a personal visit to Italy in April 1926 to learn about the Fascist system, being personally received by Mussolini and also by Giuseppe Bottai, the Italian Minister of Corporations.¹³ Mussolini was, of course, interested in seeing the Primo de Rivera regime develop into a permanent system, whether or not it directly copied Italian Fascism, and through Aunós urged the Spanish dictator to create some sort of political forum or parliament with which to legitimate his regime.¹⁴

If Mussolini had been slow to move towards an institutionalized authoritarian system, Primo de Rivera was slower yet and much more confused. The National Assembly which he eventually created in 1928 was too little and too late and failed to develop a viable new blueprint; by this point the political and economic situation was rapidly degenerating. Particularly noticeable was the lack of support for the dictatorship among Spanish youth, contrasting, as Bottai's journal *Critica Fascista* pointed out, with Italian Fascism's notable dimension as a youth movement. Italian diplomatic correspondence from Madrid in the last days of 1929 reported that Primo de Rivera was finally indicating that he would soon begin a fundamental reorganization of his amorphous Unión Patriótica more along the lines of the Italian Fascist Party, but this reorganization, like other plans of the dictator, was never initiated. Javier Tusell and Ismael Saz have concluded:¹⁵

What the Spanish dictator felt for Mussolini was considerably more than platonic admiration. He was pathetically incapable of transferring Italian institutions to Spain and often childish in his effusive expressions of admiration for Mussolini. But, at the same time, the degree of political and ideological enthusiasm for the neighbouring peninsula produced actions which frequently have not been sufficiently taken into account, such as creation of the Assembly partly as a consequence of Mussolini's recommendation, the request for the latter's advice about the new Spanish constitution project of 1929, the close collaboration in the persecution of their respective oppositions, and the final telegram of farewell to Mussolini. In the last phase of the regime there existed the real historical possibility of the 'fascistization' of Primorriverism, even if always much more in the personal wishes of the dictator than in the actual Spanish context.

Though it would be a considerable exaggeration to blame the first Spanish dictatorship on Italian Fascism, the latter served as one source of inspiration for an authoritarian assault which destroyed the traditional terms

of political coexistence in Spain, opening the door for the collapse of the monarchy and the drastic new polarization of the Second Republic. Nor was the example of the downfall of the Spanish dictatorship lost on Mussolini. Italian commentary had always pointed out the differences between the two regimes and the weak political and cultural development of the new Spanish state compared with Italy, but it had been the south European system most similar to Fascism and most congenial to the Duce. Seeing the Spanish King and much of the possessing class turn against the dictatorship seems to have strengthened Mussolini's growing conviction that his own regime could not rest forever on the existing semipluralist compromise, but must become more totalitarian and revolutionary. To that extent, the Spanish experience was at least a minor factor in the Duce's turn towards a more radical policy in 1932.¹⁶

The advent of the Second Republic was a blow to Mussolini's policy, for if Fascist Italy had been something of a model for Primo de Rivera, the French Third Republic – which the Duce considered perhaps his number-one enemy – was clearly the model for the Spanish Republicans. Spanish diplomacy eventually became more active under the Republic than in previous years, but it was oriented towards the League of Nations (where the Spanish representative, Salvador de Madariaga, played a leading role) and towards a close relationship with France, while Italy was regarded with disfavour.

For three years, Italian policy towards the new Republic was essentially correct, even though the new regime in Madrid was seen as tipping the balance of power in the Mediterranean away from Italy. This came to an end at the close of March 1934, when Italo Balbo, a leading Fascist Party *gerarca* and also Italian Air Force Minister, received in Rome a small delegation from the two Spanish monarchist parties, the Alfonsian *Renovación Española* and the Carlist *Comunión Tradicionalista*. The next day, on behalf of the Italian government, Balbo signed a secret agreement with the monarchists pledging Italian arms, financial support, and training facilities for a monarchist-engineered military overthrow of the Republican government. Nonetheless, only a limited amount of this assistance was ever provided, and a year later, in March 1935, the agreement was cancelled by Mussolini, partly because the Spanish monarchists had shown scant initiative, but primarily because the Duce preferred not to complicate his now accelerating plans for the invasion of Ethiopia, which gave preference to a quiet and neutral Spain.¹⁷

Fascist propaganda remained active in Spain, and Italian representatives regularly surveyed the country's political landscape for signs of an emerging Spanish Fascist movement. The first clear-cut Spanish Fascist intellectual was Ernesto Giménez Caballero, editor of the country's leading

avant-garde literary journal, *La Gaceta Literaria*, who was married to an Italian woman and came out vigorously on behalf of Fascism for Spain in 1928. Giménez Caballero, however, was an aesthete rather than an activist, a half-D'Annunzio minus the physical heroics. As a pro-Fascist organ, the *Gaceta* soon collapsed, and after a while the political identity of Giménez Caballero also began to blur.¹⁸ A tiny organization formed separately in 1930, the Partido Nacionalista Español (PNE) adopted certain trappings of Fascism, its new militia, the Legionarios de España, becoming the first of the many Fascist/Communist-type shirt movements to be created in Spain. Yet the PNE was small and basically monarchist and right-wing.

The first genuine Fascist organization to appear was made up of the dozen followers of the young intellectual and philosophical essayist Ramiro Ledesma Ramos, who began to publish a small paper in Madrid in March 1931. Its title, *La Conquista del Estado*, was obviously derived from the well-known Italian Fascist weekly of the same name, *La Conquista dello Stato*, edited by the Fascist writer Curzio Malaparte. Its doctrine, that of revolutionary 'national syndicalism', also reflected the terminology of the left wing of the Italian Fascist Party. In October 1931 Ledesma joined forces with another small Fascistic group in Valladolid to create a movement called the Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional-Sindicalista (JONS) – again a sort of verbal analogue, in this case of 'Fasci Italiani di Combattimento', the original name of the movement in Italy in 1919. There was, however, no direct Italian support for any of these initiatives, and the JONS stagnated.

The most significant initiative to build a Spanish Fascist movement was undertaken two years later by José Antonio Primo de Rivera, eldest son of the late dictator (who had died only three months after losing power). José Antonio, as he later became known to friend or foe alike (the only figure in twentieth-century Spanish politics prior to Felipe González to be known by his first name), had only entered politics in a limited manner after his father's downfall. A very successful attorney, elegant and attractive in personal manner, and a *grande de España* after the inheritance of his father's title, José Antonio was not cut out to be a Mussolini- or Hitler-type figure. By 1933, however, he had become obsessed by the need to vindicate his father's name and complete the latter's work by helping to build a new nationalist and authoritarian political force that could save Spain from chaos and revolution by constructing a powerful new nationalist state.¹⁹ The formula, he believed, had largely been provided by Italian Fascism, and a genuine revolutionary nationalist movement on the Italian model would generate the strength and support and the clear-cut doctrine and programme that his father's regime had lacked. José Antonio was not an intellectual like the grim and taciturn Ledesma, and it is not clear exactly how much he knew about Italian Fascism in mid-1933; certainly his own ideas were much

less fully developed than those of the latter, even though Ledesma was two years younger.

However that may be, José Antonio declared in a newspaper interview that it was a matter of adapting 'the magnificent Italian effort' to the needs of Spain.²⁰ Only two weeks before the founding of the new movement, he felt the need for a personal meeting with his new role model and asked the Italian Embassy to facilitate a quick trip to Rome in order to obtain 'advice about the organization of an analogous movement in Spain'.²¹ The interview with Mussolini took place on 19 October 1933 and lasted about 30 minutes, though he also met briefly with the Vice Secretary of the party, Arturo Marpicati, and was given a brief tour of several Fascist organizations.²² The new movement was founded in Madrid on 29 October, and its leaders were determined to use the initials 'FE' for it; originally to be called 'Fascismo Español,' to avoid excessive imitation it was introduced on 2 November as 'Falange Española' (Spanish Phalanx).

In February 1934 the new movement was merged with the exiguous JONS, resulting in the bizarre official title of Falange Española de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista (FE de las JONS). During the first months of the Falange José Antonio often referred to his new movement as Fascism, but the politically more experienced and intellectually more sophisticated Ledesma warned vehemently of the political danger involved in appearing merely to be copying a foreign movement. In March José Antonio publicly warned his followers not to try merely to imitate the Italian formula of the corporate state and by the latter part of the year he began publicly to deny that the Falange was a Fascist movement. There was increasing criticism of the semipluralism of the Italian regime as merely too conservative or rightist, and Falangist National Syndicalism adopted the formula of 'el sindicato vertical', in which capital and labour were to be combined in a single union.

The Italian Embassy provided the Falangist leaders with propaganda literature and occasional advice, but no financial or other direct support. In 1928 Mussolini had publicly renounced earlier plans for the political expansion of Fascism into other countries, but this began to change when Italian foreign policy grew more aggressive. By 1930 the Italian regime was providing modest support to a number of Fascist or proto-Fascist movements in other lands, and the political export of Fascism became official policy once more in 1932. In the following year the regime organized the Comitati d'Azione per l'Universalità di Roma (Action Committees for the Universality of Rome – CAUR) to serve as the network for a sort of 'Fascist international'. One of the main problems encountered by its director, Eugenio Coselschi, and other leaders concerned the criteria by which to identify Fascist-type movements in other countries. There was

no complete and official codification of Italian Fascist doctrine to serve as a touchstone, so the proponents of the new 'universal Fascism' made up their own, however vaguely, and by April 1934 had identified 'Fascist' movements in 39 countries (including every European country except Yugoslavia, as well as the United States, Canada, Australia, South Africa, five countries in Asia, and six in Latin America). All manner of problems then ensued as many different groups tried to cadge subsidies and extreme disagreements developed on issues such as racism, anti-Semitism, corporatism, and state structure.²³

When a representative of the CAUR came to Madrid in May 1934, José Antonio signed a membership form and received a carnet (or membership card), but the eventual committee formed in Spain was headed by Giménez Caballero, by that time a member of the Falange. The latter was the Spanish representative to the first international meeting of the CAUR in Montreux, Switzerland, on 16–17 December, for which José Antonio declared his 'support'.²⁴ Nonetheless, the Falangist chief issued a press release in Madrid declaring that the Falange as an organization had refused to participate because it was not a 'Fascist movement'.²⁵

In the months that followed, the financial situation of the Falange (now abandoned by the Spanish right) grew desperate, and José Antonio therefore made his second and last visit to Rome in April 1935. He met with Coselschi, and, though on this occasion Mussolini refused to receive him, the Duce personally approved his request for financial support. Beginning in June, the Falange was promised 50,000 lire (about \$3,500) a month, to be paid through the press attaché of the Italian Embassy in Paris. This sum may be compared with the more modest subsidy of 10,000 lire per month being paid to the Francistes, then the only categorically Fascist movement in France. José Antonio personally travelled to Paris each month for the next eight months to obtain payment, the last of which was made at a reduced rate in January 1936.²⁶

There does not appear to have been a regular Falangist delegate to the second and last 'Fascist international' conference at Montreux in September 1935, but José Antonio himself made a brief appearance and delivered remarks which have been quoted as follows:²⁷

I feel moved by your reception and transmit very sincere greetings from Falange Española and myself. For the moment I am under the obligation of not participating in the labors of your conference. The reasons have already been explained by the president. Spain is not yet prepared to join, through my mediation, a movement whose character is not only international but supranational, universal. And that is not just because the Spanish character is too individualistic but also

because Spain has suffered a great deal from the leftist Internationals. We are in the hands of at least three Internationals: one Masonic, another capitalist and perhaps of other powers, of an extranational character, who intervene in Spanish affairs. If we appeared before Spanish opinion joined with another movement, and without slow, careful and profound preparation, the public conscience – and also the democratic conscience – of Spain would protest. Thus it is necessary to prepare public consciousness for these supranational labours.

This was a recognition of the Falange's identity with generic Fascism and of the reasons José Antonio pretended inside Spain that the movement was not generically Fascist. He had been more frank in a special report prepared in the preceding month for the Italian Embassy, in which he had affirmed decisively that 'Falange Española de las JONS has succeeded in becoming the sole Fascist movement of Spain, though this has been difficult, in view of the individualistic character of the Spanish people'.²⁸

The Falange had indeed become the 'sole Fascist movement of Spain', but it remained a weak and largely insignificant one, failing to elect a single deputy in the final Republican elections of February 1936 and then being outlawed as a political organization by the government a month later. By that point the Italian Embassy saw no way of influencing the political situation in Spain, though the latter's steady deterioration was cause for mounting concern. Later, during the Civil War that broke out in mid-July, Republicans would charge with increasing vehemence that the military revolt had in fact been engineered by German Nazis and Italian Fascists, though there was in fact no basis for such allegations.²⁹ Hitler and Mussolini were more surprised by the outbreak of the Spanish conflict than were Manuel Azaña and Casares Quiroga, the Republican leaders, though within little more than a week they had quickly decided – independently of each other – to provide the rebels with a limited amount of military assistance. Parallel intervention on the same side in the Spanish Civil War was a significant factor in facilitating the formation of the Rome–Berlin Axis in October 1936, the first major agreement between the two dictators. From that point their intervention escalated, more on the part of Italy than of Germany. Faithful to the scheme first outlined in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler reiterated that he regarded the Mediterranean as primarily an Italian sphere and later declared to his generals that the Spanish struggle was of primary use to Germany not as a decisive strategic contest but as a diversion of attention from German rearmament and expansion in central Europe.

Mussolini, in contrast, soon became fully committed to the Spanish conflict, primarily for geostrategic reasons. The spectacle of a leftist revolutionary Spanish Republic, oriented towards France and the Soviet

Union, would constitute an intolerable challenge to the Fascist concept of 'Mare Nostrum'. Compared with this fundamental concern, any interest in directly influencing political developments within the nationalist zone to create a Fascist Spain in imitation of Italy was altogether secondary. Thus it would be Italy more than Germany which would provide the greater quantitative bulk of *materiel* for Franco's army, together with a sizeable commitment of Italian military manpower, which, briefly, early in 1937, would total nearly 70,000 men. Moreover, the duration of the Spanish war and the slow, unimaginative strategy of Franco would anger Mussolini and occasionally drive him to momentary despair, though ultimately the entire enterprise would be crowned with total victory.³⁰

From 1 October 1936 onward the political destinies of nationalist Spain were controlled by the personal dictatorship of Francisco Franco. He was determined that his regime should not be a repetition of the amorphous, unstructured, 'hollow dictatorship' of Primo de Rivera, and thus it would require formal political organization and a coherent new programme. In his public statements he immediately identified his regime with the new nationalist dictatorships, specifying those of Italy, Germany, and Portugal, the three regimes which were providing varying degrees of military support. Of these, the one which came closest to providing a sort of political model was Italy, for it was more important than Portugal and politically more structured, while its Latin and Catholic identity made it much more congenial than Nazi Germany. This orientation was strongly reinforced by Franco's brother-in-law, Ramón Serrano Suñer, who arrived in the nationalist zone in February 1937 and quickly became the Generalissimo's chief political adviser. He had briefly studied law in Bologna at the beginning of Mussolini's government and had a very high opinion of the Fascist model.

In April 1937 Franco seized direct control of the Falange and of the Carlist *Comunión Tradicionalista* to create the official *partido único* of his regime, to be called Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las JONS (FET). In the months before the unification, Falangist leaders had publicly affirmed their solidarity with Italian Fascism and German Nazism, though insisting that they were developing a specifically Spanish form of movement. For his part, Franco had formally denied that the Falange was Fascist, though admitting that there were possibly Fascists among its members. Nonetheless, the official Fascistic programme of the original Falange, now called the Twenty-Six Points, was retained as the formal doctrine of the FET. At the same time, Franco announced that all other political forces were invited to join the new party and that its programme was not necessarily final but simply a beginning.³¹

Though the Italian and German representatives had urged Franco and the Falangists to join forces and create a unified state party, they figured

very little in the process. Neither Axis partner harboured any grand design to control the nascent Franco regime; both governments informed their diplomats that the basic policy would be to avoid political interference in internal nationalist affairs. The Falange had received propaganda and other materials from the Fascist and Nazi parties, but the leadership of the independent party prior to unification had made little effort to maximize contacts with Rome and Berlin. Italian and German officials, whether regular diplomats or occasional visiting party officials, were virtually unanimous in their low estimate of the Falangist leaders and usually of the party itself. While recognizing the essentially Fascist character of the party, German and Italian officials referred pointedly to the amorphous nature of a formerly tiny organization which had suddenly swelled enormously under conditions of civil war and lacked leadership and a firm direction. Similarly, Franco usually made a poor impression physically, personally, and politically. Throughout the Civil War Italian and German officials persistently made disparaging comments in their reports to Rome and Berlin about the 'clerical' and 'reactionary' atmosphere found in the nationalist zone, so different from the 'revolutionary' ethos of Fascism and Nazism. Nor were such remarks misleading, since a strong emphasis on neotraditionalist Catholicism constituted the other, essentially contradictory, ideological polarity on which the new Spanish regime was based.

Javier Tusell has argued that during the last year and a half of the Civil War, as his military forces grew more dominant and his government better established, the Fascist tonalities of Franco's public language, as well as his internal policies steadily increased.³² To some extent, at least, this seems correct and reflected a tendency to evolve more and more along a course parallel to the Italian regime's, while not imbibing the sinister peculiarities of German National Socialism. Thus the regime's only major institutional step so long as the war lasted was the development in March 1938 of the Spanish labour charter, to a considerable degree inspired by the Italian Carta del Lavoro of a decade earlier. In its final redaction, the charter adopted much of the language of social Catholicism, though – true to the peculiarly bipolar spirit of the Spanish regime – it retained the basic ideas and principles of the Italian model.³³

Italian and German assistance was fundamental in enabling Franco to win complete military victory, and, as already noted, total aid from Italy was quantitatively greater than that from Germany. Later, as Italian arms met disaster in World War II, Mussolini and other Italian leaders would lament the great cost of helping Franco to victory, which allegedly depleted Italian strength for the larger contest. In fact, there seems little validity to such an interpretation. The real sources of Italian weakness in World War II were

deficient leadership and organization, an inadequate industrial base, and the failure to develop advanced weaponry equivalent to that of the Allies. The arms sent to Spain would have been obsolete in the battles of World War II, while Italian combat dead in Spain did not exceed 3,000. The Italian military budget actually declined temporarily during 1937–38.³⁴ Exertions in Spain did not in themselves significantly handicap the Italian effort in World War II.

By the close of the Civil War the Spanish regime was fully identified with the Axis New Order, but its relationships with the two Axis partners differed. By mid-1940 relations with Berlin had become more important than those with Rome, and from the latter part of the Civil War onward the minority of genuine Fascist radicals in the FET looked more towards Nazism than towards Italian Fascism for inspiration, but nonetheless both diplomatic and personal relations of regime leaders with the Italians remained much more cordial than those with the Germans. It is true that by this point Mussolini hoped to make of Franco a junior ally or high-level Italian satellite, but his general policy towards Spain, compared with that of Germany, was always relatively generous and non-exploitive. Whereas Berlin badgered Franco for major economic concessions and early repayment of the entire war debt owed to Germany, Mussolini forgave approximately one-third of the amount owed Italy and offered lenient terms of repayment. Thus the Spanish government in 1941 initiated a 20-year repayment programme to Italy that was completed punctually, as Franco faithfully followed the payment schedule with the postwar democratic Republic in Italy until the remaining amount was paid in full. By contrast, all payments to Germany were cancelled with the downfall of the Third Reich.

It was nonetheless inevitable that with the fall of France in 1940 relations with Nazi Germany become the Spanish government's uppermost concern. Even then, the change in Spanish policy from neutrality to non-belligerence in June 1940 was made at the behest of Rome, not Berlin, and adopted the same line that had been followed by Mussolini from the outbreak of the conflict until his attack on France that same month.³⁵ During the next three years, the Spanish leaders generally looked to Rome for understanding and support in their increasingly difficult relations with Germany. By the winter of 1941, with negotiations between Madrid and Berlin at an *impasse* over the exact terms of Spanish entry into the war, Hitler momentarily turned the task over to Mussolini, and this led to the only direct personal encounter between the Spanish and Italian dictators, which took place at Bordighera in February 1941. The issue was awkward for the Duce in two respects. On the one hand lay a latent rivalry between Madrid and Rome for the potential succession to French imperial territory

in North Africa, since parts of Algeria were coveted by both. On the other was the unavoidable fact that the war was going very badly for Italy and demoralization had begun to spread even within the Duce's personal entourage. Though he made an effort to persuade Franco to join the Axis partners, his heart was not entirely in this endeavour, and he did not place very heavy pressure on the Generalissimo.³⁶

There were occasional notes of humour in the increasingly sombre relations between the two Latin dictatorships. In April 1941, for example, Franco's Foreign Minister and brother-in-law, Serrano Suñer, received a personal telephone call from his Italian counterpart, Mussolini's Foreign Minister and son-in-law, Count Galeazzo Ciano, demanding the immediate recall of the First Secretary of the Spanish Embassy in Rome, the Falangist writer and noted wit Agustín de Foxá, on charges of being a subversive and a spy. Foxá's mordant sarcasm, already legendary in Madrid, had found easy targets in the pretensions, pomposity, and failures of Italian Fascism, which he liked to refer to in private conversation as 'comparsa de los nazis' (a masquerade of the Nazis). Mussolini, routinely hailed as 'Fondatore dell'Impero' (Founder of the Empire), was termed by Foxá 'Affondatore dell'Impero' (Sinkers of the Empire). The Spanish government withdrew Foxá for his wicked tongue but rejected the insinuation of sabotage.³⁷

Much more than was the case either with Nazi Germany or the Estado Novo of Salazar in neighbouring Portugal, Franco and his collaborators continued to view Fascist Italy as their principal kindred regime. When Franco belatedly followed the advice which Mussolini had first given Primo de Rivera in 1926 and took the step in February 1943 of introducing a corporative-style Cortes to add a screen of pseudo-representative legitimacy to his regime, the new parliament was modelled not on institutions in Lisbon or Berlin but to a considerable measure on the Chamber of Fasces and Corporations in Rome.

Though a partial distancing from political Fascism began at certain levels of the Spanish regime in mid-1942, this was limited and far from categorical. As late as July 1943, Franco continued to endorse the Falange without qualification, and the Spanish press expressed its customary identity with the Axis position in foreign affairs. The overthrow of Mussolini on 25 July therefore came as a shock. Many Falangists were stunned, and the impact in Madrid was compounded by a lengthy letter from the personal secretary of Raimundo Fernández Cuesta, past Secretary General of the FET, who was currently Ambassador in Rome, to friends in Spain describing scenes of disorder in the Italian capital, including attacks on Fascists and on party headquarters, and concluding with an analogy to potentially similar consequences in Madrid. This missive was widely copied and circulated throughout the capital among Falangists and government

personnel. The reaction was summarized by a police report of 17 August to Franco:³⁸

This produced great disillusionment in the party, and in the first moments there was no energetic response but an impulse to avoid the problem. In the general secretariat of the Movement some were frankly frightened; some did not want to leave their papers there, while others wanted to destroy them. Others lamented the impossibility of finding refuge in neutral countries, and so on, all this in an atmosphere of fear and alarm as though something similar might happen in Spain ...

After the first moments passed, in order to be prepared for any contingency it was agreed to prepare a sort of special guard of groups of twenty men each of Falangists in every district of the capital organized as neighbourhood blocs under the political leaders of the district organization in each area, with all ready for action at the appropriate signal.

The covert neutralist, General Francisco Gómez Jordana, who had succeeded Serrano Suñer as Foreign Minister in September 1942, was convinced that the moment was propitious for the Spanish regime to abandon altogether its pro-Axis orientation and was at first exasperated to find Falangist leaders still publicly voicing their support for the fallen Mussolini.³⁹ Franco was, as usual, slow to respond, but did draw the logical conclusion. The following month of August 1943 was the time in which he and some of the top FET leaders decided that they must initiate a basic redefinition to differentiate the regime and the party from general Fascism. The formal defascistization of the FET began, on orders from the top, though it was a manoeuvre which would require considerable time to make relatively effective.

Once policy changed, some aspects were altered drastically. When Mussolini's post-Fascist successors under Marshal Pietro Badoglio sought to make use of Spain's good offices and diplomatic contacts to expedite negotiations with the Allies, Franco and Gómez-Jordana largely refused assistance, fearing to have Spain involved in any way in the Italian debacle. Mussolini's subsequent Italian Social Republic (ISR), organized as a German puppet in occupied northern Italy, was denied official recognition. Franco only dispatched a personal representative similar in status to the one attached to De Gaulle's Free French government in London, and major Italian Fascist figures who sought Spanish passports and the opportunity to flee to Spain were almost always denied assistance.

Diehards in the FET organization nonetheless held out as long as they could, and as late as the winter of 1944 some Falangist leaders were still

publicly expressing support for Mussolini's neo-Fascist regime. They participated in minor ISR propaganda ceremonies and permitted ISR propaganda to be printed on FET presses. The Falangist journalist Ismael Herraiz enjoyed great success with his account of Mussolini's original downfall, *Italia fuera de combate*, published in Madrid in 1944. He praised the Duce but criticized his regime for having been insufficiently Fascist and forceful, holding up revolutionary and totalitarian Germany as the superior model. At least a few Falangists managed to find their way to northern Italy to fight for the dying Fascist regime in its final year.

The political metamorphosis of the Spanish regime, from a semi-Fascist pro-Axis dictatorship into a corporative, Catholic monarchist state, was carried out between 1945 and 1947. Though never fully convincing, it achieved its basic goal of helping the regime to survive. One characteristic, however, which some of the regime leaders did not relinquish was their personal regard for the fallen Duce, who would still be praised from time to time in the Spanish press.

There is no doubt of the importance of Fascist Italy to the rise of the Franco regime, even though that importance was never quite so great as some enemies of the regime would insist. The Spanish government came close to succumbing fully to the Fascist temptation in 1940–41 but was saved by geographical distance, Spanish weakness, and the stubborn, demanding diplomacy of Franco and his colleagues. The return to official neutrality in November 1943 made it possible for the regime to develop the political possibilities of its other ideological polarity, Catholic neotraditionalism, to create a surrogate post-Fascist identity for itself. In the process, the political sequencing and periodization of the Spanish dictatorship tended to reverse those of its Italian counterpart. The second half of the Mussolini regime was a time of increasing Fascistization and bellicosity, while the later phases of the Franco regime were analogous to the semipluralism of Mussolini's early years. Franco learned a good deal from Mussolini's example, including how to avoid the fatal mistakes of the latter's last years.

NOTES

1. This has been little studied. The best approach is through the work of E. Ucelay da Cal, 'Vanguardia, fascismo y la interacción entre nacionalismo español y catalán', in J. Beramendi and R. Maiz (eds.), *Los nacionalismos en la España de la II República* (Madrid, 1991), pp.39–95, and his unpublished 'Estat Català: The Strategies of Separation and Revolution of Catalan Radical Nationalism' (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1979), pp.1–473. See also V. Panyella, *J. V. Foix: 1918 i la idea catalana* (Barcelona, 1989), pp.108–9.
2. See S. Bengoechea and F. del Rey Reguillo, 'En vísperas de un golpe de estado: Radicalización patronal e imagen del fascismo en España', in J. Tusell *et al.* (eds.), *Estudios*

- sobre la derecha española contemporánea* (Madrid, 1993), pp.301–26, and J. del Castillo and S. Alvarez, *Barcelona: Objetivo cubierto* (Barcelona, 1958), pp.115–22.
3. The best general account of the first Spanish dictatorship is S. Ben Ami, *Fascism from Above: The Dictatorship of Primo de Rivera in Spain* (Oxford, 1983), while the most detailed political narrative is J. Tusell, 'La dictadura regeneracionista', in J.M. Jover (ed.), *Historia de España* (Madrid, 1995), 38, 2, pp.131–623. J.L. Gómez Navarro, *El régimen de Primo de Rivera* (Madrid, 1991), presents a useful political, institutional, and comparative analysis.
 4. The most detailed account of the relations between the two is G. Palomares Lerma, *Mussolini y Primo de Rivera: Política exterior de dos dictadores* (Madrid, 1989), though J. Tusell and I. Saz, 'Mussolini y Primo de Rivera: Las relaciones políticas y diplomáticas de dos dictaduras mediterráneas', *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia*, 179 (1982), pp.413–83, is a carefully focused briefer treatment.
 5. Quoted in Marquis de Cáceres (ed.), *Dos años de directorio militar* (Madrid, 1926), pp.2–5.
 6. G. Maura Gamazo, *Bosquejo histórico de la Dictadura* (Madrid, 1930), pp.51–2.
 7. Quoted in F. Duarte, *España: Miguel Primo de Rivera* (Madrid, 1923), pp.197–8, in Ben Ami, *Fascism from Above*, p.132.
 8. Quoted in J. Capella, *La verdad de Primo de Rivera* (Madrid, 1933), p.19.
 9. The fullest treatment of the founding of the Fasci all'Estero will be found in Luca de Caprariis, 'Fascism and Italian Foreign Policy, 1924–1928' (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1998).
 10. Palomares Lerma, *Mussolini y Primo de Rivera*, pp.251–53.
 11. See V. Peña Sanchez, *Intelectuales y fascismo: La cultura italiana del 'Ventennio Fascista' y su repercusión en España* (Granada, 1995).
 12. Palomares Lerma, *Mussolini y Primo de Rivera*, pp.262–78.
 13. E. Aunós, *La política social de la Dictadura* (Madrid, 1944), pp.58–9.
 14. J. Calvo Sotelo, *Mis servicios al Estado* (Madrid, 1932), p.336.
 15. Tusell and Saz, 'Mussolini y Primo de Rivera', pp.482–3. The differences between the two regimes are apparent in the only near-contemporary study that I have found, Wolfgang Scholz's *Die Lage des spanischen Staates vor der Revolution (unter Berücksichtigung ihres Verhältnisses zum italienischen Fascismus)* (Dresden, 1932). Scholz correctly noted that although both countries were underdeveloped, Spain was distinctly more so and had a specific tradition of military praetorianism to which Primo de Rivera could be related. He further observed that the 'idea world' of Fascism was lacking in Spain. Italy had a much broader Fascist culture that enjoyed considerable support from the intelligentsia. In Spain, most of the intelligentsia had turned against the dictatorship by the late 1920s. Probably the only sophisticated commentary on Italian Fascism written in Spain under the dictatorship is in two works by the Catalan statesman Francesc Cambó: *Entorn del feixisme italià* (Barcelona, 1925), originally a series of newspaper articles published in *La Veu de Catalunya* in mid-1924, and the broader and more comparative book-length essay *Las dictaduras* (Barcelona, 1929).
 16. Cf. R. de Felice, *Mussolini il Duce* (Turin, 1974), Vol.1, p.131
 17. The best account is Ismael Saz, *Mussolini contra la II República* (Valencia, 1986), pp.66–85.
 18. See D.W. Foad, *The Revolt of the Aesthetes: Ernesto Giménez Caballero and the Origins of Spanish Fascism* (New York, 1989).
 19. A mountain of literature, most of it superficial and hagiographic, has appeared about José Antonio Primo de Rivera, and new titles by his dwindling circle of admirers continue to appear. The only scholarly and objective biography is J. Gil Pecharrmán, *José Antonio Primo de Rivera: Retrato de un visionario* (Madrid, 1996), which is highly recommended.
 20. *La Nación* (Madrid), 26 Aug. 1933.
 21. Quoted in Saz, *Mussolini contra la II República*, p.115.
 22. The visit has best been reconstructed in *ibid.*, pp.114–16.
 23. The principal study is M.A. Ledeen, *Universal Fascism: The Theory and Practice of the Fascist International. 1928–1936* (New York, 1972).
 24. Saz, *Mussolini contra la II República*, pp.127–31.
 25. A. del Río Cisneros (ed.), *Obras completas de José Antonio Primo de Rivera* (Madrid, 1956),

- pp.391–2.
26. Saz, *Mussolini contra la II República*, pp.138–43.
 27. Quoted in *ibid.*, p.137.
 28. The full text may be found in A. Viñas, 'José Antonio analiza las fuerzas políticas', *Actualidad Económica*, 23 Nov. 1974, pp.69–73, and in Viñas, *La Alemania nazi v el 18 de Julio* (Madrid, 1977), pp.420–25.
 29. See Saz, *Mussolini contra la II República*, pp.147–93, and, concerning German policy, Viñas, *La Alemania nazi*.
 30. The basic study is J.F. Coverdale, *Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War* (Princeton, 1975). See also the collective volume *Italia y la Guerra Civil española* (Madrid, 1986); I. Saz and J. Tusell (eds.), *Fascistas en España* (Madrid, 1981); and J.L. de Mesa, *El regreso de las legiones (La ayuda militar italiana a la España nacional 1936–1939)* (Granada, 1994).
 31. For the details of this process, see J. Tusell, *Franco en la guerra civil* (Madrid, 1992), pp.79–171; P. Preston, *Franco* (London, 1993), pp.248–74; and my *The Franco Regime 1936–1975* (Madison, 1987), pp.163–78.
 32. In *Franco en la guerra civil*.
 33. The contest between social Catholic, rightist, and secular Fascist principles in the drafting of the charter is revealed in *ibid.*, pp.257–61; D. Ridruejo, *Casi unas memorias* (Barcelona, 1976), p.195; R. Fernández Cuesta, *Testimonio. recuerdos y reflexiones* (Madrid, 1985), pp.194–95; L. Suárez Fernández, *Francisco Franco y su tiempo* (Madrid, 1984), Vol.2, pp.288–9; and, to some extent, J.J. Azpiazu, *Orientaciones cristianas del Fuero del Trabajo* (Burgos, 1939).
 34. V. Zamagni, *The Economic History of Italy 1860–1990* (Oxford, 1993), p.246.
 35. *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani*, 9 serie (Rome, 1960), Vol.4, pp.620–30.
 36. The chief study of Italo-Spanish relations during these years is J. Tusell and G. García Queipo de Llano, *Franco y Mussolini* (Barcelona, 1985). For a comparison of Franco's relations with the two dictators, see R. García Pérez, 'España en el Eje: La beligerancia y la opinión de los historiadores', and G. García Queipo de Llano, 'Franco y Mussolini entrevistados: La política exterior hispanoitaliana durante la guerra mundial', in S. Payne and D. Contreras (eds.), *España y la Segunda Guerra Mundial* (Madrid, 1997), pp.11–35, 89–102.
 37. This is according to the recollections of Serrano Suñer as recounted in I. Merino, *Serrano Suñer: Historia de una conducta* (Barcelona, 1996), pp.267–8.
 38. Fundación Nacional Francisco Franco, *Documentos inéditos para la historia del Generalísimo Franco* (Madrid, 1994), Vol.4, pp.366–70.
 39. *Ibid.*, p.41.