

Probing the Enigma of Franco

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By

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In Gratitude to my wife Carol

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	xi
Introduction	1
Historical Bias.....	1
Historians and Franco	3
Biographies	8
Germans and Italian Diarists.....	9
Journalists and Writers.....	12
The Question of Taboo	12
The Politics of Francoism	14
The Plan	16

Part One: Spanish Background History

Chapter One.....	20
The Nineteenth Century	
Turn of the Nineteenth Century	20
The First Spanish Republic 1873-74.....	22
The Restoration 1874-1930.....	23
Spanish American War 1898	24
The Political Alternatives	25
Chapter Two.....	28
1900-1936	
1914-18 Spain Remains Neutral	28
Rif War in Morocco 1920-26.....	29
Primo de Rivera 1923-30	30
1931 Elections.....	33
Second Spanish Republic.....	35
Towards Civil War.....	39

Chapter Three	44
Civil Strife	
The Civil War	44
Year by Year Survey.....	46
Overview.....	50
The Barbarity of the Civil War	55

Part Two: Franco

Chapter One.....	60
His Early Life	
His Family and Youth.....	61
Morocco.....	64
The Spanish Legion	67
The Academy General	73
Chapter Two	80
Franco and the Political Scene	
Franco in Limbo.....	80
Balearics to Chief of General Staff.....	83
Chapter Three	90
The Caudillo	
Franco and the Civil War 1936.....	90
Generalísimo.....	98
Franco's Struggles 1937	108
Towards Final Victory 1938	119
1939 and Victory	123

Part Three: The Second World War

Chapter One.....	132
Power Play	
1939 General Observations.....	132
Spain's Economy	133
Franco	135

Chapter Two	138
1940 The Ideological Fascist International Spain	138
Political Spain	153
Chapter Three	156
1941 At War Against Russia	
Chapter Four	165
1942 Franco's Two-War Thesis	
Chapter Five	172
1943 Doubts	
Chapter Six	178
1944 Holding the Balance	
Chapter Seven.....	182
1945 Franco the Pariah End of War Comments.....	184

Part Four: Spain under Franco

Chapter One.....	188
Postwar Problems	
Immediate Post War Years 1945-1946	188
1947-50	193
Chapter Two	200
The Way Forward 1950-1955	
Introduction.....	200
The USA and Spain	203
Britain and France.....	209
Spanish Economics	209
The Monarchists	211
The Church	213

Chapter Three	216
Need for Change 1956-39	
Introduction.....	216
Morocco.....	217
Political and Economic Problems	220
 Chapter Four.....	 232
The Last Years 1960-1975	
Introduction.....	232
Economics.....	234
America.....	239
The Vatican.....	241
Monarchy and the Succession Issue.....	243
Franco 1960-1975	248
Final Reflections	259
 Bibliography	 266
 Endnotes	 268
 Index.....	 283

PREFACE

This exploration started in a Spanish bar on a sunny beach with a mixture of some Spanish, British and American history students talking about Spain's past, especially the Civil War, the man Franco, and Spain's allegiances during the Second World War. The young Spanish did most of the talking until the wine and tapas took away some of the hitherto guarded caution of the Anglo-Saxons. Perhaps the most pleasant aspect was that at no time, despite contrary opinions, did anything but goodwill prevail, although one elderly Spanish visitor listening in from the other side of the bar reminded us that fifty or sixty years ago such a conversation and debate would have been dangerous, and would have led to outright hostility. He then joined us and shared his carafe of wine which was a relief.

No voting took place, no apparent camps developed, and there was no consensus of opinion. The discussion ranged from why the Civil War had started, with some opinions that it could be traced back over the previous century. There was considerable humour over Franco's myth that he was the "Sentinel of the West," his love of soccer and doing the pools. There was less humour over his early economic policies and a sense of sadness and bitterness over the conduct of the Civil War, and more so over the subsequent repression which some argued lasted his entire lifetime.

These were history students and they often quoted various authorities, national and international historians, biographers and journalists who, as with the students, all seemed to have a kaleidoscopic range of opinions. By the end of the evening there was one area of total agreement that Franco was still an enigma; thus this study's title.

INTRODUCTION

Historical Bias

It is not the task of an historian to pass moral judgements on the past, but there is an inevitability this will happen for a variety of reasons; national, religious or political beliefs can influence the most objective of historians. Some writers have argued that particular attitudes or actions happened at a point in history because that was the nature of the times. Sometimes the events of the past are so despicable or extreme that merely writing about a subject such as the Holocaust leaves moral judgement as self-evident and demanding little comment. It must also be apparent that later generations have their own foibles, weaknesses and bigotry, and passing judgement from the safety of a warm study is all too easy.

In the various debates that have raged around the figure of Franco there are now fewer elements that are prepared to see him as a national saint, but there have been a few critics who have seen Paul Preston's biography for example as too critical, with a need to have a more balanced view.*

The well-known biographer Paul Preston often intimates that in the months preceding the Civil War the cunning Franco was playing a cat and mouse game waiting for the most viable chance to join a military coup which might work. On the other hand the 2014 biographers Payne and Palacios wrote that "the apolitical general understood his country's political dynamics much better than the highly political president," and although their study is perceptive in places, and they rightly emphasise the barbarity of the Left-wing, they paint a slightly kinder picture of Franco during the Civil War.¹

This complex question of interpretation of events is difficult to resolve, and to a certain extent depends on both the reader's and the writer's personal political stance. To put the reader of this book on warning this writer has his own inbuilt bias. As an historian with a doctorate in modern

* "The most extensive biographies are strongly polarised between extreme positive and negative portraits...the chief expression of the latter is the thousand-page work by Paul Preston" See Payne Stanley & Jesús Palacios, *Franco, A Personal and Political Biography* (London: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014) p.xi; though this writer hold serious doubts about this sentiment concerning Preston.

European history and four degrees in this subject he has also been a priest for nearly fifty years and a tendency to be at home in the Socialist ambit. Nevertheless, an attempt has been made to be as objective as possible bearing in mind the importance of past events touching upon life today.

Frederic Nietzsche wrote “the knowledge of the past is only desirable if it is useful for the future and the present not if it weakens the present or destroys a vital future.” This attitude finds little favour with most historians but may explain why there is sometimes a corporate amnesia in some national histories, and may also explain why myths are constructed intentionally, or more often through rose-tinted oral tradition. A classic example was that for many years after the Second World War as West Germany recovered and became of importance in the Cold War, the Nazi regime was placed on a remote shelf and the notion of the Wehrmacht fighting a “clean war” was constructed. In order to cope with a crushing guilt many Germans developed a version of history which enabled them to move forward. They became the victims of an aberration in their history of the daemonic monster Hitler; they were the victims of insufferable and unnecessary terror bombing, and the very few who committed such crimes were only the SS. Modern German historians such as Wette *et al* have had the courage to challenge much of this, pointing out amongst other things that the SS, small in numbers and as fanatical as they were, had become the national scapegoat. The Wehrmacht had always denied any involvement in the Jewish problem for nearly fifty years until an exposé was produced in Germany by means of a photographic exhibition. This initiated some considerable debate about the role of the Wehrmacht in crimes against humanity. This photographic exhibition in the late 1990s “entitled *War of Extermination: The Crimes of the Wehrmacht, 1941-1944* opened up a difficult yet productive debate on the role of ordinary Germans in the murder of innocent civilians,” and the German historian Wette demolished any argument that the Wehrmacht always fought a clean war.²

Walter Ulbricht, as early as 31st December 1945 had said “what unspeakable suffering has been brought upon our German homeland by Nazism.”* This idea developed rapidly, and “Germans now perceived themselves as victims of the Nazis,” now stylized as a fanatical minority.³ After the German photographic exhibition was shown in 1995 there were

* Ulbricht was a leading figure in the Weimar era as a communist leader, and later a prominent leader in East Germany. His views were not just those of East Germany, but were widely held throughout that country. Quoted text is: Ulbricht Walter, *Whither Germany, Speeches and Essays* (Dresden: Zeit im Bild, 1960) p.127.

near riots. It could be argued that German historians of any integrity have the painful task of facing facts head on; perhaps a lesson for all historians.

Every country tries to reconstruct its history one way or the other. In France de Gaulle built the myth that the French freed themselves, in Britain it tended to be that they won the war, as in America when in reality it was a Russian victory which may not have worked without American aid and Royal Navy support in convoys. In postwar Spain Franco built the myth that he cunningly kept the Germans at bay and by so doing helped the Allied victory.

When Nietzsche wrote “the knowledge of the past is only desirable if it is useful for the future” there was an element of truth because after Franco’s death a corporate silence descended on Spain as it became democratic. All political parties and the vast majority recognised the need to heal the past divisions by not emphasising the sheer brutality of the Civil War and the subsequent retribution.

When Lord Acton wrote “if the past has been an obstacle and a burden, knowledge of the past is the safest and surest emancipation” he was closer to the historian’s task. However unpalatable a past may have been, however disastrous the consequences, it is only if the truth is known and understood that it can serve humanity’s future. The historian’s task is to seek the truth as accurately as possible and without becoming overly judgmental allowing the reader to adjudicate. It took decades for the Holocaust to be explored adequately, but despite this since 1945 there have been many examples of genocide and crimes against humanity. The Second World War revealed the dangers of nationalism, racism, extreme political bigotry, military blunder, and myriad other forms of appalling human behaviour. Historians have written libraries on these lessons, and the tragedy is that we do not learn from the past. Nevertheless, the job of the historian remains one of exploring the past however delicate the issues, and perhaps more than many others the study of Franco reveals the delicate nature of a political and economic past which still dominates today’s perceptions.

Historians and Franco

Many general histories of World War Two which dominated the twentieth century give little time to Spain or Franco, because Spain was not totally involved in the military aspect of 1939-45 which dominated world global history. This war experienced a death rate of catastrophic proportions somewhere in the region of fifty million people plus killed; populations shifted; and a refugee problem of millions. The expression

crimes against humanity took on greater meaning, and the word *genocide* was devised for legal clarification. This war gave birth to the Cold War which dominated the world for another forty years with its proxy wars and nuclear tensions. Spain's apparent inactivity did not seem to warrant more than a few pages which explains the near absence of Spain from many text books.

When Spain is mentioned it is usually a passing reference which tends in earlier studies to favour Franco as the person who valiantly held the Nazi war-machine at bay, or pictured Franco as a man whose sole purpose was to preserve Spain. The fact that Franco was a pro-Nazi whose only interest was the retention of retaining his personal power, and who was prepared to kill thousands of his own countrymen to this purpose is rarely mentioned.

When the military historian Liddell Hart wrote his major history of the war in 1970 he made only four passing references to Franco.⁴ He regarded the victory of Franco in the Civil War as a potential threat to Europe because of the Franco-Spanish border, and also the sea-communication lanes as "the spectre of an additional menace."⁵ Liddell Hart had been a well-known military expert before World War Two and had often spoken on this danger after 1938 when a nationalist victory appeared imminent. As will be noted later the Germans were always reluctant about sending troops through Spain with its poor roads and lack of food, but Liddell Hart was more inclined to interpret it as Franco's decision. He noted that doubts entered the situation writing "General Franco was more disinclined to welcome the entry of German forces into Spain" after Torch.⁶ In his third and final reference to Franco Liddell Hart wrote that fortunately Franco was content to stay quiet as a non-belligerent ally of the Axis, and the more contentedly because the Americans were buying Spanish products and allowing him to obtain oil from the Caribbean. Although Liddell Hart is accurate in his three references to Franco it is easy to gain the impression he was not fully cognisant of Franco and his policies. In reality, and unpopular with some, it could be argued that Franco's neutrality was self-centred in so far that he stayed "out of the war out of concern over his future."⁷

Martin Gilbert wrote a highly detailed and factually based history of the Second World War in 1989 some twenty years after Liddell Hart, and followed a similar route and regarded Franco as making a bold stand, noting that "Mussolini had been equally unsuccessful in persuading General Franco to reconsider his neutral stance" in 1941.⁸ In his reference to the Hitler-Franco meeting at Hendaye Gilbert portrayed Franco as avoiding any allegiance to Germany despite "Hitler's urgings."⁹ The

implications of the nuances in this interpretation of events would have been music to the ears of postwar Franco who later tried to construct the myth that his neutrality arose as a matter of principle, rather than the disabling economic circumstances and his desire to cling to power. The fact is that Hitler initially needed Spain to be quiescent supplying possible economic support, but Spain could only offer limited natural resources. For Hitler a neutral Spain was desirable at this juncture because “a belligerent Spain would raise more problems than it would solve.”¹⁰

Despite the fact that some Americans at the time, and some historians since have believed Churchill to have been somewhat soft on his approach to Franco, this was mainly because he was looking to the political future. When Churchill wrote his famous history on the War in 1949, Franco was seemingly entrenched as the dictator for the foreseeable future, and by the end of the 1940s and early 1950s he remained a matter of geopolitical caution. Churchill was perceptive through his sources and innate political ability to read international situations, writing that despite Franco’s adulation of Hitler in reality Franco “disliked and feared Hitler but liked and did not fear Mussolini” and that Franco’s “policy throughout the war was entirely selfish and cold-blooded. He thought only of Spain and Spanish interests.”¹¹ Later research into Franco might have persuaded Churchill that Franco was more interested in holding his own position in power; Churchill also recognised that Franco “used every device of exasperating delay and exorbitant demands” to foil Hitler and “thus by subtlety and trickery and blandishments of all kind Franco succeed in tiding things over and keeping Spain out of the war.”¹² Later research indicated that Franco wanted to join the Axis powers but his economic plight and fear for his own position always made him move with extreme caution.

At the end part of the war Churchill’s personal political stance in his history emerges with greater clarity. His Foreign Secretary Eden had written a long letter to Franco outlining British grievances about Franco’s behaviour during the war years, and in a note to his Foreign Secretary Churchill agreed with him in principle but wrote: “therefore I should like to see the passages reduced...a little alteration in the wording would be compatible with justice and consistency” and that he would like Stalin to see a copy “to clear away any doubts that may have been engendered by de Gaulle during his visit that we have desired to build up a Western *bloc* against Russia.”¹³

Churchill had met with criticism in the House of Commons for being too complacent concerning his opinions about Franco, and when the American press picked this criticism up Churchill felt obliged to explain to

Roosevelt that “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 I can depend on a de Gaullist France,” (4th June 1944).¹⁴ Churchill was a very readable historian and his insights at times are backed by inside knowledge and contacts, but he was always primarily a dedicated politician.

A close study of the man Franco through his more objective biographers tends to paint a picture of the man which is at slight variance with some even highly respected historians. This exploration is not suggesting such historians have misread the situation, or that they are relying on general themes, and sometimes the differences of view are minimal, but they serve to illustrate the enigmatic and perplexing figure Franco presented on the stage of recent history. Norman Davies, in his reference to Hitler’s desire to take Gibraltar wrote of Franco that “to his credit Franco said ‘No;’” he appeared to overlook the reason why Franco said no: it is clear from those who studied Franco as a person that it was self-interest and a fear of British retaliation.¹⁵ He did not want to hazard losing the Canary Islands; he did not think the Spanish could risk it alone; he had internal problems revolving around his personal grip on power which had become more unsettled, and it did not take the German logistical experts long to realise that passing through geographical Spain in its state of economic decline and ruin would be hazardous. His stalling of Hitler was at the best safe-guarding, but probably had more to do with personal self-preservation. Later in his text Davies confirmed that Franco was a fascist, a member of the Anti-Comintern Pact, was financially and politically in debt to Hitler and Mussolini, “yet his ideology owed more to the conservative Catholic nationalism than to the rabble-rousing radicalism in Berlin and Rome.”¹⁶ Of course Davies is correct but he omits to note that at heart Franco was pro-Axis, an admirer of Mussolini and initially held Hitler in high respect, and disliked the power of the British and their Royal Navy, and the French for their colonial hold in Morocco. When Franco sent his *Blue Division* to fight Russia it was initially to show Hitler he was in support, and he concocted his two-war theory mentioned later to explain his actions to the outraged Allies, not as Davies suggested that this was his belief from the start.¹⁷ These are slight but curious divergences from scholars such as Paul Preston and Enrique Moradiellos. When in his major scholarly work on the history of Europe Norman Davies refers to Franco holding off Hitler as the “wily Franco” the current writer would have preferred the word “devious” which may well reflect that simmering through historical observations persist deep rumblings of the historian’s own political leanings and attitudes towards Franco the man.

There are occasions when the detailed biographers of Franco clash directly with the views of historians. There is no doubt from the various biographers that in the early part of the global war Franco was not only pro-Axis, but was utterly convinced that Hitler would win. Even as the tide turned against the Nazi regime Franco still retained a belief to the virtual end that the Germans would “pull something out of the bag,” if only wonder-weapons, and that Hitler would not be defeated. His habitual attacks on the failing democracies were not always done just to please his Axis partners; he genuinely opposed democracy. This aspect clashes with the well-known historian Richard Evans who wrote that Franco had thanked Hitler for his help in the Civil War and claimed “he would come into the war on Germany’s side when it suited him. In his view the war was still undecided, and he poured scorn upon the German belief that Britain would soon be defeated:” according to all academic biographers Franco was convinced both publicly and privately that Britain would be defeated.¹⁸

All these historians are scholars and the best historians, and even the most recent, give only passing reference to Franco when writing on World War Two because Spain was not a major issue in this conflict. Hastings offers in his book of some seven hundred pages three to four passages on Franco and is accurate in his observations, pointing out that “from 1939 onwards Spain was no neutral and belligerent in waiting: Spanish foreign minister Serrano Suñer, in particular, was whole heartedly committed to joining the Axis cause.”¹⁹ From the point of view of understanding the man Franco, Hastings manages to highlight the critical features, pointing out Franco’s annoyance that Hitler would not let him interfere in French North African colonies, that the Germans would not provide weapons to Franco to take Gibraltar, and that Franco started to look to his own future after Allied success in North Africa.²⁰ The French historian Henri Michel writing in 1975 typifies this approach of keeping Franco and Spain to a bare mention, in a magnificent volume of some eight-hundred pages Franco is mentioned only seven times.²¹ It is similar in Weinberg’s massive one-thousand page volume written in 1994 where there are seven to eight passages devoted to Spain; this lack of space reflects quite rightly Franco’s diminutive importance in the world affairs despite his self-evaluation of his own importance.²² Overall it appears that Franco was of minimal importance on the international scene, especially during the World War, and attracts little attention and occasionally inaccurate observations.

Biographies

During Franco's lifetime there were published a considerable number of hagiographical works on Franco, all constructed around an adoration type of propaganda. The first biography by the journalist Joaquín Arrarás Iribarren was well received with no less than eight editions before the Second World War.²³ This particular version claims that Franco never suffered from ambition with the same brazenness that Franco himself frequently deployed. This was followed in 1956 by the work of another journalist which was a slightly less hagiographical, but omitted any reference to Franco's association with fascist Germany or Italy, and made no reference to his anti-democratic attacks and his anti-Semitism.* The title of the book in English is *Sentinel of the West* which encapsulated the type of history or myth that Franco tried to propagate. Franco was still alive and just before he died (1975) there appeared in 1972 another history written by Ricardo de la Cierva which contained a degree of objectivity, but the favourable version of Franco still shines forth. At his death other books were published but still they stood far from genuine historical objectivity, and tended to veer towards apologia more than reality. In the 1960s other books appeared, not least the work of Luis Ramirez which was more historical, but it was written from the Republican point of view. The author of this particular work was forced to hide behind a pseudonym and the book was published abroad. There followed a general tendency to write accounts of Franco and his times but clearly from the old divisive political viewpoints.

Eventually in Britain Harper Collins published in 1993 the work of Paul Preston which was the result of years of study by a highly professional historian. It is a huge academic book and only a few have ever doubted its quality with its translations into many languages. Some of this current study is heavily dependent on Paul Preston's work, but reinforced by other objective historians such as Moradiellos the Professor of Modern Spanish and European History at the University of Extremadura, and a recent American publication by Payne and Palacios. Preston's work opened the gates for many others, some better than others, but these new accounts generally managed to destroy some of the myths from the past, especially that Franco was the crusader who freed Spain from communism, that he preserved Spanish neutrality during the 1939-1945 conflict, and he saved postwar Spain through his modernisation and

* Even a recent 2014 study plays down Franco's anti-Semitism, see Payne Stanley & Jesús Palacios, *Franco, A Personal and Political Biography* (London: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014) p.280

economic ability. Moradiellos states that Franco “was not as great as his apologists claimed, nor as little as detractors argue,” but trying to find a fair and well balanced account of Franco remains difficult; he remains something of an enigma.²⁴

German and Italian Diarists

Diarists in places of importance and near the seat of decision-making often gave instructive insight into matters happening overseas. They cannot be treated as utterly objective, but they frequently reflected the views of those in command. Göbbels and Ciano, for example, clearly indicated that behind all the diplomatic language, that very early on during the war years the two major Axis powers had become somewhat cynical and irritated with Franco.

Despite Göbbels’ self-belief that he was close to Hitler and at the centre of German affairs (this was far from the truth) his diaries give an interesting backdrop as to how Göbbels and others in the regime viewed the Spanish scene and Franco in particular. Göbbels wrote his diaries at first from personal self-love, but later continued them in a less personal way because he believed they would act as a foundation base for the history of a Nazi Europe. They were written in his usual acerbic style and the sarcasm is often caustic. His continuous vexation at the length of time Franco took to finish the Civil War reflected the frustration both of the Germans and Italians. Neither of these fascist powers ever understood Franco’s personal belief in a prolonged war for cleansing the country from its enemies. In his February 3rd entry he noted the “position is good. Franco hopes to bring the war to an end within a few weeks. I am not yet prepared to believe it will happen.”²⁵ He was quick to acknowledge that Franco’s radio broadcast which had been an attack on England and the Jews was good, noting that this was “something, at least, for our money, our aircraft, and our blood.”²⁶ This entry in early 1940 indicates the sense of growing frustration many were feeling about Franco’s lack of commitment. As far as Göbbels and Hitler were concerned Franco was just a potential tool to be utilised as and when necessary. When he heard the news that Franco was meeting Hitler, Göbbels noted that “these will not be a pleasant few days for Churchill” and reported the next day writing that “Spain is firmly ours. Churchill is in for a bad time.”²⁷ For Göbbels Franco was just a possible part of German propaganda.

It was fortunate that Franco was unaware of Göbbels’ diary because whereas Franco appeared to admire the Nazi regime (and especially Mussolini) it was abundantly clear the feelings were not mutual. Göbbels

wrote as early as November 1940 that: “the Führer’s opinion of Spain and Franco is not high. A lot of noise, but very little action. No substance. In any case, quite unprepared for war. Grandees of an empire that no longer exists.”²⁸ Göbbels was also reasonably astute and read the various reports on Spain from Germans working there and noted that “the country is restless, wracked by internal spasms. Symptoms of senility in a former world empire.”²⁹ The very next day Göbbels was remarking on the fact that Serrano Suñer was unpopular, Franco weak and the Falange was irrelevant, and the Clerical influence too strong.* On November the 5th Göbbels was back on the same theme commenting on the problems of the economy and that there was “a lot of grandiose posturing but nothing behind it.”³⁰ At this stage Göbbels noted that the Germans had not played the “Spanish card,” and the following month he was angry that Gibraltar remained in British control.

Throughout his early war diaries Göbbels becomes more and more acerbic about Franco personally, calling him a “jumped-up sergeant-major,” “a totally conceited loud-mouth,” an “empty headed peacock,” a “clown, conceited arrogant and stupid,” and thought Serrano Suñer was “a Jesuit” and the real “fly in the ointment.”³¹

Göbbels when informed of the near starvation of Spain was not surprised at the potential chaos, and that it was no wonder that “the people looked back nostalgically to the monarchy.”³² There was a certain historical irony in this statement because Göbbels’ propaganda and Himmler’s repression stopped any German popular reaction as to the current state of affairs, and it was the same in Spain where Franco was executing the opposition on a daily basis. Göbbels diaries are on the whole the meanderings of a warped but intelligent mind, at times totally mendacious other times informative and can be entertaining, but when he refers to Franco he appears to be disclosing the thinking of the inner sanctum of the Nazi regime.

Göbbels’ diaries are vastly different from Ulrich von Hassell who had his particular insights. Von Hassell was a diplomat, part of the resistance against Nazism, and his interest in Spain tended to be the question of Gibraltar.† Nevertheless even he picked up Hitler’s view that Franco had only become head of state “by accident” and Hitler called Suñer “the worse kind of business politician” and von Hassell thought for once Hitler was possibly correct.³³

* Falange in short was a fascist and national syndicalist party founded in 1934.

† Von Hassell was executed later for his involvement in the July 20th plot.

There was a warmer but cautious approach between the Italians and Franco, and this comes through in the diary of Ciano (son-in-law of Mussolini and his Foreign Minister) who was less acerbic than Göbbels, but in places just as cynical and at times almost amusing. He refers, for example to the young Germans who accompanied Ribbentrop on a visit as “not the usual wooden and somewhat boring Germans; they are likable young men, who speak foreign languages well, and who in a drawing room are able to forget all their heel-clicking when addressing a lady.”³⁴ However, from the very first Franco reference in Ciano’s diary, it revealed the way Mussolini viewed Franco: “the Duce was very appreciative of the message [from Franco] and also praised it for the manner in which it was conveyed, defining it as the report of a subordinate.”³⁵ This was the way Mussolini regarded his relationship with Franco, always proffering advice for his foreign policy, concerns about the monarchy and especially the conduct of the Civil War. From Mussolini’s point of view he had spent considerable valuable national resources supporting Franco and believed this placed him in the role of the guiding mentor. It was Mussolini who warned Franco against restoring the monarchy and had suggested the Serrano Suñer became the Foreign Secretary.³⁶ Franco sometimes listened when it suited him, and as with his attitude towards Hitler he always held Mussolini in high esteem. However, as will be noted, in his relationship with Ribbentrop and Hitler, Serrano Suñer could quickly become hostile as he did when Mussolini suggested that better relationships with France could be useful.³⁷ As the Second World War started to take shape relationships remained good, but the Italians as with the Germans were becoming more sceptical about Franco, Ciano noting in 1940 that “Franco sends a colourless message to the Duce, in which he confirms the absolute and unavoidable neutrality of a Spain preparing to bind up her wounds.”³⁸

Later the Germans when they needed Spain, if only in terms of Gibraltar, asked Italy to be persuasive which Ciano referred to as “bringing back the Spanish Prodigal Son,” but he also blamed the Germans for not understanding the Latin temperament.³⁹ By 1942 Mussolini wanted to dominate the Mediterranean, and receiving a realistic appraisal of the Spanish situation decided not to try and motivate Spain, and according to Ciano did “not intend to move a finger to accelerate Spain’s intervention in the war, because it would be more a hindrance than a help.”⁴⁰ Mussolini may have reflected that this was the way Hitler felt about him after his failure in the Balkans. In 1943 Mussolini provided Göring with a gold sword for his fiftieth birthday, a present originally meant for Franco, but as Ciano noted “times have changed.”⁴¹

Journalists and Writers

Many references are made to Henry Buckley in the first part of this study because he “saw more of the Civil War than any foreign correspondent of any country and reported it with a scrupulous adherence to the truth that won the respect even of those who sometimes might have preferred the truth to remain uncovered.”⁴² However, in understanding any national history it is also essential to look at histories and biographies mentioned above which have had due time to look at what happened from a distance of decades, and with as much scrupulous objectivity as possible. There are plenty of personal records referred to, not least George Orwell and Hemingway, and a plethora of individual accounts from those who travelled to Spain to fight for one side or the other. Franco almost expunged from his history his reliance on overseas support, and the many thousands who died on both sides of the divide, but these personal histories are imbued with their own ideology and bias and must be treated with a degree of care as with this writer’s point of view.

The Question of Taboo

As Hitler was known as the Führer and Mussolini as the Duce, the memory of Franco for many is the Caudillo. It is the word Caudillo which dominated Spanish thinking throughout this period. The question of the name Caudillo started as the need to concentrate everything in a single power in order to win the Civil War. The “decisive occasion that verified the judicial and political status of Franco as Caudillo came with the proclamation of the *Ley de Sucesión en la Jefatura del Estado* of 26th July 1936, approved by the *Cortes* and put to a national referendum” purporting to give Franco 82 per cent.⁴³ The word Caudillo was in circulation from October 1936 mainly by press and propaganda machinations. The biographers Payne and Palacios arrived at eight conclusions as to why the term Caudillo was applied to Franco. His reputation as a young officer in Morocco; his rise to pre-eminence in 1936; the Nationalistic propaganda machine; his self-assurance; his consolidation of the new culture of nationalist Spain; his continued victories; and finally his bringing together the old traditional Spain with the demands and advances of the twentieth century.⁴⁴ Perhaps the most important element was the propaganda.

Franco held many titles ranging from generalissimo to *homo missus a Deo* (the man sent by God). His head appeared on coins and stamps and as the English coins carried the monarchical title “Defender of the Faith”

Franco's carried the inscription "By the Grace of God;" the Divine Right of the ruler acknowledged on the coins of the realm. His image appeared in classrooms to the right of the crucifix and in all government agencies, and on October 1st there was a national holiday for the *Exaltation of the Caudillo*.

During the postwar period the Civil War was a dangerous subject and "during the years of dictatorship, the defeated in Spain had no public right to historical memory, living as they did in a kind of internal exile."⁴⁵

Today the Caudillo, the "former head of state seems to be missing, unknown, silenced or forgotten by general public opinion in the country, especially among the younger generations born after his death and after the restoration of democracy."⁴⁶ In his recent study the Spanish historian Enrique Moradiellos refers to many surveys conducted about the current memory of the past regarding Franco and the Civil War.⁴⁷ They tend to show a great deal of indifference, (especially among the young) and a suggestion that many have developed a dedicated amnesia to the problems in Spain during the first half of the twentieth century. A journalist in the British Sunday Times recently produced an article on Franco's wayward grandchildren and in writing of the past noted that "until now a taboo on the subject has existed and although a Jose Luis Rodriguez brought in a historic memory law in 2007 which resulted in the removal of Franco Statues from public squares, and one Spanish historian wrote I think that Spain might be able to come to terms with Franco's inglorious times, but perhaps in the 22nd Century."⁴⁸ Given the circumstances of that history none of this is surprising, and the recent resurgence of Catalonia's demand for regional government with Catalan leaders seeking refuge in Belgium may for many be an unpleasant memory of the Civil War. The threat of twenty to thirty years' imprisonment for such politicians is reflective of the brutality of the past. On the whole since 1975 (the death of Franco) "Spanish citizens have maintained a predominantly negative view of Franco and his regime, albeit with many nuances and significant divisions of opinion."⁴⁹ Most democratic countries have a Right to Left-wing difference, sometimes sharply polarised, but in Spain this traditional conflict led to such a grotesque war and its aftermath that there is almost a restrained and self-imposed corporate silence on the past. It could be argued that the Spanish reticence is not so much a matter of political expediency but a necessary reality. However ghastly a past, the reality is that it nevertheless pays for a current society to understand and learn from the pitfalls of its history. As previously mentioned it took a few decades in Europe before the Holocaust was studied, and the implications of *crimes against humanity* and *genocide* became terms of total revulsion. Since

1945 there had been many reoccurrences of mass ethnic murder and man's failure to learn from the past should not preclude the necessity of trying to understand what precisely happened, if only to avoid a repetition. However, from the Spanish point of view by forgetting the divided and vicious past it helped Spain make the transition from Dictatorship to democracy possible. As noted earlier Franco's statues are disappearing, and his well-known horse statues some weighing up to six tons started to disappear from prominent places as early as 1986. Such was the sensitivity of the past, the immense suffering and powerful divisions nothing could be done at speed in case it resurrected past conflict. The slightest friction could cause dissent which Spain's past indicates could result in violence. It was noted that many street names had been changed to Franco and his supporters, but very few to prominent Republicans; such sensitivities have to be monitored with care even to this day.

Generally Franco is now considered as some sort of ghostly spectre belonging to the forgotten past, but as mentioned Lord Acton wrote "if the past has been an obstacle and a burden, knowledge of the past is the safest and surest emancipation." This is true of all history, but it is understandable that in Spain even today with Catalonia's demands in the background that a high degree of sensitivity is needed to safeguard the future. Only in this century are the ramifications of the Civil War and its subsequent brutality being openly exposed. The writer Jeremy Treglown in his book refers to his viewing the opening of old mass graves: "For several years, all Spain has been searching for its disappeared. They are everywhere, in every region, in every kind of terrain. Families who stayed silent for decades have been urged, often by the victims' grandchildren or great-grandchildren, to say what they suspect, or know, or saw."⁵⁰

The Politics of Francoism

Franco's regime was a complex dictatorship; it had some affinities with other dictatorships in Germany, Italy, Hungary and Poland; Franco's regime had something in common with all of them but no absolute identity with any single blueprint. There are emerging patterns of the type of regime Franco led, but not long-lasting configurations and not always easily identifiable. The phrase Francoism clearly identifies a particular system linked to one historical figure and one, who unlike all other European examples, survived four decades of rule.

This is not a study of the science of politics but it is worth noting that in understanding Franco the need to understand the length of his reign demands attention, as does the man himself, and the status of his political

regime. Some have argued that it was a typical conservative military dictatorship such as Piłsudski in Poland and Horthy in Hungary, others argue that Franco's regime was a new if not uniquely Spanish form of fascism somewhat like the early Mussolini period. During the Civil War there were distinctive signs of German and Italian fascism enough to warrant concern by British observers who had hitherto had a degree of sympathy for the Franco cause. It soon became popular to regard Francoism as a Spanish form of fascism. Much of the current historiography understandably classes the regime simply as a military dictatorship, but it never remained a simple praetorian dictatorship although its roots were in the military. It originated as a collegiate military dictatorship until September 1936 when Franco became the Generalissimo and Head of the Spanish State, a matter of total personal authority.

During the Civil War and the World War Franco appeared to accept the fascist style of leadership, and copied many of their policies, not least the formation of a single-party system, or better known as a "state party." This form of dictatorship exceeded that of Primo de Rivera and many started to describe Franco's regime as more like that of Bonaparte; Franco had become the central feature of the political system. Again this was a difficult thesis to maintain and it was argued that the regime was simply totalitarian with all the hallmarks of such a system, namely: a central charismatic leader (although Franco was not charismatic in personality), a single party system, total control, control of the population, systematic police repression of opposition, and a centralised economic system as in autarky.

In the mid-1960s when economic progress was being made and there was a slight degree of opening up an alternative definition surfaced called "authoritarianism." Its critics saw this argument more as a form of acquittal almost viewing the regime as benevolent. Following this another suggestion was proposed that the regime was more like a form of modern despotism which in modern thinking is not that different from totalitarianism or fascism even if it appears benevolent.

It could be argued that fascism was a necessary asset for Franco to win the Civil War and survive the following global conflict with his fascist neighbours, but it was not the ideological central feature, and postwar was watered down as the regime transformed to an authoritarian base. Certainly during the Civil War it was a military dictatorship and which became dependent on fascist support. The debate over the nature of the Francoist regime has not finished, and the only adequate defining feature is Franco himself, the lifetime ruler "under God" and to the bitter end. He was the single common denominator from 1936 to 1975 and it was he who

dictated the way Spain would be governed and the nature of that government. His political machinations, his intentions and motives, and his acts and decisions need to be studied as a person in the context of his world; this was all part of the enigma of Franco's dictatorship.

The Plan

Franco had a long life and his system dubbed Francoism lasted longer than any other form of dictatorship, and had more changes than most of the non-Marxist dictatorships. In the study of history it is critical to establish a chronology to understand the evolutionary changes in human behaviour and conduct. It is a matter of "periodisation," of understanding the stages of development in order to understand the nature of the changes, and the influences that helped these changes and their consequences.

In terms of Francoism some historians divide this history in two clear periods, the first up to 1959; a binary division with 1959 marking the period when the economic recovery was seen as a significant milestone. A few argue for 1957 with the new government which started the process, and a few for 1960 when the tangible efforts came to some fruition. Prior to 1959 it was a period of economic stagnation and slow recovery making a sharp contrast with the mid-1960s onwards.

From the political point of view it could be divided into four sections; 1936-1945 the new state with a semi-fascist phase; 1945-57 the period of Catholic hegemony and the subjugation of the fascist element; 1957-69 the authoritarian state of technocrats with social change, and 1969-75 the final period of crisis. Francoist experts would perhaps phrase this differently or may change some of the dates slightly or want more refinement, but this seems a fair overview of the regime dubbed Francoism.

In terms of the man Franco this study intends to look at the Spanish hinterland of Spanish history first, and then study Franco phase by phase. In trying to understand what happened in Spain and the nature of Franco it is essential to try and understand what exactly led to the longest dictatorship in Europe at a time when Dictators were becoming common place, but in Spain exceptionally coming to an end in 1975.

Part One will study, albeit briefly, the Spanish political background, the form of so-called constitutional monarchy, its collapse and restoration, its politics and the powers of the military, the Church and the landowners, and the many who demanded change. Franco was not the first dictator in Spain, but he was the first who ruled without a monarchy and almost as a self-ordained usurping monarch in the medieval style. This part will also explore the Rif War with Spain's desperate bid to hold substantial colonies

in North Africa following the loss of Cuba and the Philippines, and will examine the collapse of the Second Republic which gave rise to the Civil War.

The reason for Part One's brief recent history of Spain is because it clearly indicated that the lack of constancy and economic progress made Spain one of the less advanced European countries and unstable. Spain was also a deeply fragmented society which rapidly polarised into two distinctive groups which gave rise to the Civil War. This is not a book about the Civil War, but it is critical that an overview of the war is given by a brief year by year basis.

Part Two is a biographical sketch of the man Franco from his early life to and through the Civil War. This involves his background, family, Church affiliation and his love of the military. It will illustrate his meteoric rise through the ranks in Morocco as a young officer, and the vast publicity he received which brought him close to the throne and ignited his political ambitions. This is followed by his ascendancy as a young general, and the embryo of "caudillo" to "The Caudillo" can be traced through the protracted Civil War ending just before the outbreak of World War II. He was a man of his particular Spanish military class, and it is possible to perceive the nature of Franco the dictator emerging in his youth with his desire for promotion, and his obsessional observation of rules to be obeyed or punished, as well as his exploitation of the Church.

Part Three is the critical time relating to the World War years; it is also a perplexing time for understanding this enigmatic dictator. The question of whether he was pro-Axis, pro-Allies, genuinely neutral, or playing for time will be explored. Although Franco the man would have denied it the fact is that during the World War and its aftermath he had to respond to the vast variety of international pressures, over which he made many prognostications in which few were correct, until the postwar period when he foresaw the Cold War. During this time Franco had to ensure he stayed in power, and his clever manipulation of people and his cunning exploitation of situations are explored.

Part Four studies in brief the postwar years as Franco solidified his personal grasp on total power, faced a hostile world, and used his traditional wily or perhaps devious machinations to become moderately acceptable to the West. He foresaw the Cold War and the benefits Spain could reap from this situation, and then sat back as his new appointees changed Spain from one of the poorest countries in Europe to a place of rapid economic growth. This period ends with the problems of change anticipating Franco's slow descent to the grave. Part Four will conclude with an appraisal of the man and his legacy.

