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German Propaganda in Francoist Spain: Diplomatic Information Bulletins as a Primary Tool of Nazi Propaganda

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It is very well known that the nazi regime carried out an extensive campaign of propaganda within and outside Germany. We also know that nazi leaders thought that they could achieve the same level of conviction in enemy and neutral countries by using the same tactics they had used for their compatriots. In Spain, this effort began during the Spanish Civil War. In fact, the first edition of a fortnightly Spanish language news sheet, *Informaciones Antibolcheviques*, was published in October 1936, as part of the nazi anti-Bolshevik propaganda.¹ Later on, the press office of Salamanca, commanded by Willi Köhn, carried out an effective campaign focused on National Socialist ideology through nationalist Spain.² By early 1938 this office had disappeared³ and its anti-Bolshevik propaganda role had been absorbed by the Spanish Ministry of the Interior.⁴ However, by that time, another German organisation was about to take over propaganda duties in Spain; the German embassy, with Eberhard von Stohrer as ambassador since September 1937. The new ambassador was about to transform propaganda activities into an organized branch of German diplomacy, thanks to the support and experience

¹ Lorna L. Waddington, "The Anti-Komintern and Nazi Anti-Bolshevik Propaganda in the 1930s," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 42, 4 (2007): 573-94, 583.

² Alejandro Pizarroso Quintero, "Intervención extranjera y propaganda. La propaganda exterior de las dos Españas," *Historia y Comunicación Social*, 6 (2001): 63-96, 69.

³ Emilio Sáenz-Francés San Baldomero, *Entre la antorcha y la esvástica Franco en la encrucijada de la II Guerra Mundial* (Madrid: Actas, 2009), 157.

⁴ Waddington, *op. cit.*, 584.

of Hans Lazar, who arrived in Spain as correspondent for the German news agency Transocean a year later.⁵

The documentation analyzed in this paper is a collection of information bulletins issued by the embassy in Madrid, and distributed to the Spanish authorities only. In this case, although we can guess that these bulletins were the same for all Spanish authorities⁶ – at least they were in 1941 and we have no reason to think otherwise for previous years – we have to point out that the documentation was found while researching the papers of the *Falange's Servicio Exterior* in the Archives of the General Administration in Madrid. We have also to clarify that not every bulletin has been preserved, and the ones we could analyse covered a very specific period of time, the first half of 1940. Nevertheless their content and their relation with Goebbels' meetings in Berlin are interesting enough to draw a picture of the German propaganda in Spain during the nazi victorious phase of the Second World War.

Many monographs⁷ have been written about the power and appeal of nazi propaganda, but as these studies flourish, an underlying idea seems to be confirmed, that of effective propaganda in Germany versus inadequate and ineffective propaganda abroad. Although this seems to be certain, specific studies need to be written in order to confirm it for each country. In theory, nazi propaganda was structured and planned in order to provide a distinct discourse for every country and collective. But was this really true? While we know now that Goebbels was not all powerful and that he had to fight his opponents within the Reich, especially the Foreign Affairs minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, we do not yet know if that specialized and nationalized plan for propaganda was put into action, or how the internal struggles between the two ministries affected the propaganda directives abroad.

In the Spanish case, it seemed pretty obvious from the start that the diplomatic character and origin of the bulletins pointed to Ribbentrop's ministry as the source of propaganda directives. This appears to be confirmed by the fact that Hans Lazar offered to help von Stohrer fight the Ministry of Propaganda, or Promi, in order to create an independent press office within the

⁵ Pizarroso Quintero, *op. cit.*, 67-68; Sáenz-Francés San Baldomero, *op. cit.*, 151.

⁶ Sáenz-Francés San Baldomero, *op. cit.*, 162.

⁷ Z. A. B. Zeman, *Nazi Propaganda* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965); Ernest Kohn Bramsted, *Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda, 1925–1945* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1965); Willi A. Boelcke, *Propaganda bélica alemana 1939-1941: Conferencias ministeriales secretas en el Ministerio de Propaganda del Reich*, 2 vols (Barcelona: Luis de Caralt, 1969); Jay W. Baird, *The Mythical World of Nazi War Propaganda, 1939–1945* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974); Robert Edwin Herzstein, *The War that Hitler Won: The Most Infamous Propaganda Campaign in History* (London: Hamilton, 1978); Aristotle A. Kallis, *Nazi Propaganda and the Second World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

embassy.⁸ As Lazar says in his memoirs, what was really at stake was Spain's position in the conflict that was approaching and the need to prop up a military alliance with Germany.⁹ Lazar, as well as Stohrer, thought that this should be done cautiously, not by assuring Spain's military participation in the conflict at any cost, regardless of circumstances and sensitivities, as Köhn's Press Office, whose members appeared to be the apostles of the Promi in Spain, had been trying to do.¹⁰ He recalls also the small margin of action the ambassador had because of the struggle between the ministries for the control of propaganda.¹¹ If we are to believe Lazar's testimony, the ambassador was not completely satisfied with the directives issued from Germany, either by the Promi or by the Foreign Ministry.

Despite Lazar's explanations, however, when we compare the content of the embassy's bulletins with the directives issued by Goebbels at his Promi meetings, there appears to be a clear connection between them. This should not be surprising if we take into account that both ministries were supposed to coordinate their campaigns and to work within the same line of thought. Promi's machinery was supposed to support Ribbentrop's orders. Boelcke has pointed out that Goebbels' meetings began after the Poland campaign, as an instrument to adapt his directives to the war needs, as well as to force all political propaganda to submit to his authority, something he seems to have achieved by the spring of 1940.¹² This victory was confirmed in May by a ministerial order that assigned Goebbels' ministry the core orientation of propaganda abroad.¹³ Nevertheless, it appears that the Goebbels–Ribbentrop struggle was for power and Hitler's favour and thus it did not necessarily imply a difference of direction on propaganda content. They shared more or less the same ideas and subjects of hatred, for example, Germany's superiority, and a common animosity towards Britain. This consonance also existed within the embassy in Spain. The main lines of propaganda were implemented in the embassy's bulletins, although, as we are about to see, there were some details and a selection of topics that suggest a specialized orientation toward the Spanish authorities.

What were the main lines of argumentation within the embassy's bulletins? We can identify three key arguments that shape their content: first, German martyrdom; second, neutrals in danger; and third, Germany's superiority. By German martyrdom, we mean the underlying, and sometimes not too subtle, idea of Germany being assaulted and mistreated by other

⁸ Sáenz-Francés San Baldomero, *op. cit.*, 151.

⁹ *ibid.*, 152.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 152–3.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 157.

¹² Boelcke, *op. cit.*, 30–1.

¹³ *ibid.*, 64; Paul Seabury, "Ribbentrop and the German Foreign Office," *Political Science Quarterly*, 66, 4 (1951): 532–55, 542.

nations, who were also those responsible for the Versailles Treaty. But the argument of the offence of Versailles was well known and in the context of a society aware of propaganda's lies since first world war some other story line had to be provided. The nazis were quick to find new proof of their argument, in this case the alleged martyrdom of Germans in Poland. After Versailles, Poland's policy over its German minority seems to have been focused on making it easier for Germans to return to their "fatherland"¹⁴ in order to achieve national unity within the country.¹⁵ At that time, Germany could not afford the repatriation of large numbers of people, so the German authorities did not encourage their return, although they offered Germans residing in Poland financial assistance.¹⁶ This complex situation became more dangerous as National Socialism grew and the war hysteria increased. The financial assistance to Germans was soon transformed, in the eyes of the Polish government, into a payment for Fifth Column activities, and tension grew.¹⁷ When the nazi campaign against Poland began, Polish Germans were subjected to mass arrests and interned in concentration camps, consequently over 5000 lost their lives.¹⁸ This is not the place for a debate on Polish policy or the Bromberg killings that took place on 3 September 1939, shortly after the beginning of the nazi invasion. But it is right to point out that while the evidence available to historians puts the numbers of these killings and subsequent events at about 5000, the nazis were talking of 58,000 in one month,¹⁹ which is at least suspicious. Probably they boosted the numbers with victims and casualties who died as result of the war, and not because of the alleged systematic persecution. It is important to notice that this campaign focused on Polish cruelty against Germans had gained momentum since May 1939,²⁰ but what is really significant is the amount of space that the German embassy bulletin devoted to this issue. The ambassador and his team must have been receptive to the bad press that the invasion of a Catholic state could cause in Spain, so they counterattacked strongly by transforming Poland into the aggressor. They presented the victims as the "horrifying result of the acts of homicide, systematically organized by the Polish authorities". With

¹⁴ In the first seven years of Polish rule, 65 per cent of the Germans in Poznan and West Prussia headed back to Germany: Richard Blanke, "The German Minority in Inter-War Poland and German Foreign Policy – Some Reconsiderations," *Journal of Contemporary History* 25, 1 (1990): 87-102, 88.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 90.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 92-3.

¹⁷ We will not enter into a debate on the existence of the Fifth Column, but as Richard Blanke has discovered it is significant that Hitler was the one to reduce the financial aid and to postpone any solution for Polish Germans (*ibid.*, 96). Of course this could be because Hitler was already planning a war in which he would not need the aid of any Fifth Column. It is also understandable in the context of war hysteria that the Polish government was suspicious about Germans in their territory.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 98.

¹⁹ Archivo General de la Administración (AGA) 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

²⁰ Kallis, *op. cit.*, 96-7; Baird, *op. cit.*, 42.

sentences like: “The world will realize in what criminal hands had been confided the destiny of so many Germans”; “Many places in Poland were the scene of bloody terror and thousands of killings”; “The Poles attacked defenceless villages and roads, burning, sacking and destroying everything they find on their way”²¹ -in reference to the Polish Silesian Uprisings in Germany’s Upper Silesia of 1921-; and the constant use of the word martyr, they succeeded in transforming Poland from a Catholic state to an oppressive one. Of course these arguments were supported by other tactics: numbers, figures and alleged documentation were used as proof of the systematic persecution against the German minority; quotes from English and American papers that supposedly recognized the facts;²² and the extension of Polish cruelty over other minorities. In this sense, the bulletin talked of 250,000 Ukrainians sent to concentration camps in Poland.²³ This discourse was completed by accusing France and Britain of putting Germans and other minorities in harm’s way to diminish Germany’s power; by the publishing of the German White Book regarding German-Polish crisis;²⁴ and by recalling the grace and indulgence of the Führer, who had tried to find a peaceful solution to the problem so many times, being utterly ignored.

Nevertheless, sometimes this campaign showed cracks, as we can see throughout its development. In February 1940, the bulletin stated: “There were no witnesses, but the pictures taken of the corpses prove the brutal methods that were employed”. For a critical reader a hint of doubt could arise, although for a friendly one this could also be seen as a display of nazi sincerity.

Along with this line of discourse, nazi propagandists did not waste the opportunity to make some references to Upper Silesia’s plebiscite in 1921 -in which the inhabitants of the region should decide to remain as part of Germany or to integrate Poland-, which could be seen as a new proof of Polish systematic oppression.²⁵ In this case the objective was double, first to reinforce the negative image of Poland, and secondly to praise the bravery of the Germans who had voted despite the violence that was being inflicted upon them. We know that the Upper Silesia plebiscite gave the majority to the Germans, and that its application did not favour them at all, but we also know that Poles and Germans alike were responsible for intimidation and violence

²¹ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

²² Journals such as *Foreign Affairs* and the *Manchester Guardian*. AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

²³ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

²⁴ The German White Books were collections of official documents, used by the nazi regime to explain and justify the reasons that had provoked the war.

²⁵ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

against voters. In fact, research has shown that this violence did not determine the result of the vote.²⁶

Finally, careful and measured references to the Versailles Treaty rounded off the martyrdom argument. As Aristotle Kallis has clearly explained, the purpose of these references was to “bestow upon the reawakened German ambition an aura of moral authority, as a necessary corrective to a fundamental historic injustice perpetrated by arrogant and voracious powers”.²⁷ This use of the martyr concept is not strange to nazi propaganda, but Goebbels’ indications about Poland were more focused on making Poland, alongside Britain, the main culprit for the German invasion, and not on creating an image of German martyrdom. That is why we think that this obsession over presenting Germans as victims of assault and martyrdom could have been a way of establishing a psychological connection between Germans and Spaniards, taking advantage of the underlying remembrance of the civil war conceived as crusade. The Madrid embassy propaganda team seems to have intended to create a sort of brotherhood through martyrdom, oppression and a victim mentality.

As we stated above, the second main argument in the bulletins was the idea of the neutral countries being in danger. In nazi Germany’s mentality, Britain had become the number one enemy, but to extend this “reality” beyond the borders of the Reich into neutral countries, it needed to transform Britain into Europe’s enemy. In this sense, throughout the period of time analysed in this paper, the idea was always present of Britain trying to extend the war over neutral countries to set the battlefield far away from its territory, a directive that had been issued by Goebbels himself.²⁸ Germany argued that it was being forced into war, having to implement preemptive attacks in order to protect itself and other nations from Britain’s selfishness and voracity.

Neutrals should not place their confidence in Britain, an island that was not a part of Europe and that only wanted to secure its financial interests over the world.²⁹ The acceptance of any guarantee offered by Britain would be seen by Germany as a sign of friendship towards it and consequently as a breach of neutrality. This was the Polish case: the agreement signed between Poland and Germany on 26 January 1934 obliged both countries to renounce violence and

²⁶ T. Hunt Tooley, "German Political Violence and the Border Plebiscite in Upper Silesia, 1919–1921", *Central European History*, 21, 1 (1988): 56-98, 98. See also F. Gregory Campbell, "The Struggle for Upper Silesia, 1919–1922," *The Journal of Modern History*, 42, 3 (1970): 361–85.

²⁷ Kallis, *op. cit.*, 97.

²⁸ Boelcke, *op. cit.*, 339-40; Baird, *op. cit.*, 86.

²⁹ Boelcke, *op. cit.*, 340. AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

to foster understanding in any bilateral issue.³⁰ The nazi propaganda argued that the acceptance of the British guarantee by Poland was a violation of this agreement.

Underlying this line of thought is the idea of a Germany always respectful of neutrality: “Germany has done everything on her hand to save neutrals any loss of vessels, by constantly warning them about the dangers of English coasts, [...] It is unfair that neutrals held Germany responsible for their losses, when the only culprit is England”.³¹ Britain, as we have seen, was, in the universe of nazi propaganda, the entire opposite: disrespectful, selfish and careless over the fate of other countries. Although this line of argumentation appears constantly, there is a specific case that was exploited to prove Britain’s disrespect for neutral land and sea.

In February 1940, the Royal Navy boarded a German auxiliary ship, the *Altmark*, in the waters of Norway. Although the ship was transporting British prisoners of war, the boarding was indeed a violation of neutrality, and the Promi did not waste the chance to exploit it.³² While Britain argued that it had been a meaningless and technical violation of neutrality and accused Norway’s authorities of not inspecting the vessel properly, Germany insisted on Norway’s freedom to do whatever it wished in its own waters and on the cruelty of the British forces, whose illegal boarding of the boat had ended the lives of eight German sailors.

Nazi propagandists had been trying to deny the auxiliary character of the *Altmark*, but as this tactic was not having the desired results, they twisted the argumentation: “Even if the *Altmark* had been a fully equipped warship, under no circumstances would this be an excuse for a British attack on territorial waters”.³³ The conclusion was clear; Britain had committed an act of piracy.³⁴ The problem was that at the very beginning of the conflict a German U-boat had sunk a British ship, the *Athenia* – carrying North American passengers – without prior warning or opportunity for evacuation.³⁵ Germany’s reaction was very typical of Goebbels’ propaganda: to deny the facts and accuse the enemy. Furthermore he accused Churchill of ordering the sinking of the *Athenia* on purpose to force the USA into entering the war, and the matter was consigned to oblivion, at least in the embassy’s bulletins.³⁶

³⁰Karl Dietrich Bracher, *La dictadura alemana: génesis, estructura y consecuencias del nacionalsocialismo*, 2 vols. (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1973), 16.

³¹ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898. As we can see, in the bulletins, nazi propaganda used England and Great Britain as synonyms.

³² Boelcke, *op. cit.*, 281.

³³ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

³⁴ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

³⁵ Baird, *op. cit.*, 45-6.

³⁶ “[Britain] tried, at first, to attract allies making use of the sacrifice of the North American citizens aboard the *Athenia* and today she pretends to force every neutral vessel to

The *Altmark* case then became the perfect excuse to warn neutrals about their endangered sovereignty. In its bulletins, the German embassy in Madrid stated that Britain would not hesitate to break international law as long as it suspected that the neutrality or even non-belligerence of other countries was beneficial to Germany. The reference to non-belligerent status was made in February and it was a clear reference to Italy. Anyway, it was a message for all neutrals alike and of course a clear and direct warning for the Spanish authorities – no matter what their status in the war they could be equally subjected to England’s menacing attitudes.³⁷ This same line of argumentation had been drawn in Goebbels’ meetings in Berlin. On 17 February 1940, the Promi resolved not to menace neutral countries “with a gun” but to lead them, step by step, towards a state of terror over a new concept of neutrality developed by the nazis themselves.³⁸ In fact, in the embassy’s bulletins we can find references to neutrality as a right that can be exercised in an active or a passive way.³⁹ The passive exercise of neutrality would be the one that Britain wanted to be predominant, and in contrast, the active would be the one desired by Germany. But this reasoning created confusion, which is arguably what they were trying to achieve. As we know, propagandists were instructed to appeal to instinct, not to reason;⁴⁰ and regarding this confusing concept of neutrality, deliberate confusion led neutrals to suspicion and fear of breaching neutrality over an ambiguous concept that was not defined as active or passive in international law. A passive or active exercise of neutrality could be used as a proof of breach of neutrality and as the excuse for German invasion. In fact, what Germany was defending in the *Altmark* case was Norway’s right to complain about Britain’s actions, exercising its active neutrality. But, as happens with almost any propaganda argument, this reasoning could be reversed, as Germany had taken advantage of the Norwegian authorities’ superficial search of the vessel to transport prisoners through neutral waters. In this sense, Lord Halifax, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, stated that although international law considered and protected innocent passage over neutral waters, regardless of the contents of the vessels, this could only apply if innocent passage was really innocent, meaning that the premeditated change of course of the ship had been to prevent the boat from being intercepted, and to assure the smuggling of prisoners through neutral waters.⁴¹ Actually

come through her control harbours or be submitted to the protection of English convoys”, AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

³⁷ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

³⁸ Boelcke, *op. cit.*, 280.

³⁹ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

⁴⁰ Boelcke, *op. cit.*, 307.

⁴¹ Martin A. Doherty, "The Attack on the *Altmark*: A Case Study in Wartime Propaganda," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38, 2 (2003): 187-200, 192. The relevant international treaty stated that “Art. 10. The neutrality of a Power is not affected by the mere passage through its territorial waters of war-ships or prizes belonging to belligerents”. At the same time Art. 21 provides: “A prize may only be brought into a neutral port on account of

Norway's authorities had stopped the boat and asked if the ship was carrying prisoners, it was only because they were told that no prisoners were aboard that they allowed the *Altmark* to continue its journey.⁴²

As Martin Doherty has pointed out, the very fact that there was an element of right on all sides is what made the *Altmark* incident such fertile ground for political propaganda.⁴³ But not even the allegedly perfect nazi propaganda could transform an international humiliation into a victory, even when they tried really hard. As we can read in the bulletins, nazi propagandists had to appeal to international outrage and humanitarian feelings⁴⁴ in order to bring shame upon Britain, and overlook a German defeat. If they could not transform the incident into a victory, however, they could take advantage of it to instill fear into the populations of the neutral countries. They implied that as Britain could not win the war without new allies it would do anything to draw other countries into the conflict – it was “trying to transform a war against Germany into a world-scale conflict”.⁴⁵ They asserted that with the *Altmark* affair “Churchill had declared war on neutral nations”.⁴⁶ In this sense, Germany was presented as the protector of weak nations and Britain as the oppressor. To reinforce this idea some occupied countries continued to be listed as neutrals in the embassy's bulletins weeks after they had been conquered.⁴⁷

Of course what would be the really effective warning was Hitler's military reply to the incident, the invasion of Norway and Denmark.⁴⁸ On 8 April 1940 British vessels began to mine the coast of Norway and the next day Germany attacked on the grounds of a pacific invasion and preemptive strike

un-seaworthiness, stress of weather, or want of fuel or provisions. It must leave as soon as the circumstances, which justified its entry, are at an end. If it does not, the neutral Power must order it to leave at once; should it fail to obey, the neutral Power must employ the means at its disposal to release it with its officers and crew and to intern the prize crew”. “Art. 22. A neutral Power must, similarly, release a prize brought into one of its ports under circumstances other than those referred to in Article 21. [...] Art. 25. A neutral Power is bound to exercise such surveillance as the means at its disposal allow to prevent any violation of the provisions of the above Articles occurring in its ports or roadsteads or in its waters.” *Convention (XIII) concerning the Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers in Naval War*, The Hague, 18 October 1907. In this sense the British accusation was understandable, if we identify British prisoners as a war prize, although it would be necessary to prove malice in the design of the *Altmark*'s course.

⁴² *ibid.*, 189.

⁴³ *ibid.*, 192.

⁴⁴ “Against Chamberlain's statement of having achieved a victory, the world's outrage rose over this action against international law and humanitarian feelings”, AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898. They also exploited Norway's complaints about Britain's actions, using quotes from the Norwegian, Sweden, Italian, Japanese and Argentinian press.

⁴⁵ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

⁴⁶ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

⁴⁷ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

⁴⁸ Doherty, *op. cit.*, 200; Baird, *op. cit.*, 76.

in order to protect its neighbour's neutrality.⁴⁹ On this occasion nazi propaganda took advantage of history to prove that England's attitude had always been the same. They recalled the 1807 English attack on Norway and stated that "Germany's cause to act on Denmark and Norway rested on the very foundation of International Law, after the allies had already violated Norway's territorial waters [...] We should present and emphasize England's argumentation over her 1807 and 1808 actions just to force her into silence".⁵⁰ Once again, England's desire to extend the war over neutral countries had forced Germany's hand: "As we all know they keep quiet about the fact that Germany never intended to extend the war either on this occasion or on any other".⁵¹

Nazi propagandists presented the invasion not only as a bold and preemptive strike, but also as a protective and even gracious measure towards Germany's neighbors. Similar arguments were used to explain the subsequent occupation of Belgium and the Netherlands. In those cases, however, Goebbels issued an order to focus primarily on convincing the public that both nations had really broken their neutrality, and secondly on a measured defence of the Belgian king, who had ordered the surrender.⁵² Both directives were followed in the embassy's bulletins. As Goebbels had told his subordinates they could not afford to be presented as the aggressors again, Britain had to become the only one to blame for everything that was now befalling the neutral countries.⁵³

The French case was also similar, though this time they focused their propaganda on depicting an exhausted and disheartened France,⁵⁴ which had failed in its attempt to annihilate Germany,⁵⁵ and whose youth's blood was being shed only for Britain's benefit.⁵⁶ Goebbels was very careful not to attack France too strenuously in order to avoid a boost to morale. He also instructed his subordinates to separate the government from the country and to keep the hatred of France alive at home.⁵⁷ Abroad, at least in the bulletins studied in this paper, the campaign was not so violent, it was more focused on portraying Britain as a traitor – they insisted that the British Army had not yet faced Germans on French territory – and France as an already defeated nation.⁵⁸

⁴⁹ Baird, *op. cit.*, 77; Bramsted, *op. cit.*, 233-5.

⁵⁰ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

⁵¹ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

⁵² Boelcke, *op. cit.*, 346, 373, 375; Bramsted, *op. cit.*, 237.

⁵³ Boelcke, *op. cit.*, 347, 351.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 362.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 403.

⁵⁶ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898; Bramsted, *op. cit.*, 238; Baird, *op. cit.*, 44.

⁵⁷ Boelcke, *op. cit.*, 198, 380; Bramsted, *op. cit.*, 238-9.

⁵⁸ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

Another argument used to provoke the neutrals against Britain was the concept of an economic war. Nazi propaganda argued that what was really at stake was the voracious desire of Great Britain to maintain its economic dominion over the world, by damaging neutral countries' commercial relations. In this sense, the bulletins were used to focus this argument on Latin America, which is not surprising since as we know that Germany used Spain as a channel to influence Latin American countries.⁵⁹ The bulletins were used to argue that British control of the sea was damaging commercial relations between Germany and Latin America, and in consequence seriously harming Central and South American economies.⁶⁰ Likewise, they accused Britain of making the economic crisis worse by using these hostile methods, when within the last few years it appeared that the crisis had gone into remission.⁶¹ Once again general directives were followed by the embassy, but within what seem to be the specific directives of the mission's press office, they devoted a long article to arguing that the existence of autarchic nations, which was the Spanish case, would not be tolerated by Britain, as this economic system was very damaging to its financial interests.⁶²

Within the economic war argument, the key issue was the navy certificates "demanded" –according to German documentation– or offered –according to Britain– by the British authorities to navigate open sea, and to prevent strategic goods from reaching Germany. Actually, navy certificates or permits were one of the primary instruments used to ensure the blockade of Germany as well as to breach Germany's blockade on Britain, by offering neutral vessels to integrate British convoys, being protected from Germany's policy to search and sink any ship suspected of smuggling. Nazi propaganda argued that these permissions were not only illegal in the framework of international law, but also an exhibition of tyranny as well as an instrument of economic espionage and smuggling for the benefit of Britain.⁶³ The message was clear; Britain had declared war on German civilians.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, we have to point out that the Hague Convention of 1907 was not clear on the matter,⁶⁵ so belligerent nations decided which products should be considered

⁵⁹ Pizarroso Quintero, *op. cit.*, 69.

⁶⁰ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

⁶¹ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

⁶² AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

⁶³ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

⁶⁴ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

⁶⁵ As we can see, the international law was at least contradictory on the matter: "Art. 2. Belligerents are forbidden to move troops or convoys of either munitions of war or supplies across the territory of a neutral Power [...] Art. 7. A neutral Power is not called upon to prevent the export or transport, on behalf of one or other of the belligerents, of arms, munitions of war, or, in general, of anything which can be of use to an army or a fleet." *Convention (V) respecting the Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers and Persons in Case of War on Land*, The Hague, 18 October 1907. "Art. 6. The supply, in any manner, directly or indirectly, by a neutral Power to a belligerent Power, of war-ships, ammunition, or war

as smuggled goods. However, if these arguments were not enough, there was always the everlasting recourse to Germany's superiority, asserting it could not be defeated by starvation through economic blockade.⁶⁶ Nazi propaganda bragged about the Reich being able to survive more than ten years despite isolation.⁶⁷

The final argument used to influence neutral audiences was a counterattack on English propaganda that throughout 1940 had been talking of the existence of a German Fifth Column in every neutral country. The irony was that the Promi had created the phantom of the Fifth Column in order to instill fear abroad and confidence at home.⁶⁸ The real twist was that in Spain the embassy's bulletins devoted a considerable amount of energy to counterattacking false British propaganda. Moreover they argued that Britain and the USA's real intention by promoting the idea of the Fifth Column was double: in some countries they used it as a weapon to defame pro-Nazi pressure groups; in others, especially in Latin America, they used it as an instrument to prevent uprisings and to wrest power from the political opposition by tagging these movements as agents in the service of National Socialism.⁶⁹

The final line of argumentation we identified in the embassy's bulletins is the affirmation of Germany's superiority. Many of the arguments used to support this idea were implicit and interlaced into the story lines already commented on above, so we will not dig deeper into them and we will proceed just to name them. First, Germany was no conqueror of nations, but a protector; second, it was the only contender respectful of international law, including laws that were damaging to itself such as the Versailles Treaty; and third, in contrast to other nations, Germany was a nation respectful of national minorities.

Aside from these usual story lines, there is one topic that surfaces above the others, the idea of a Germany gracious towards occupied territories. As we have seen, at the beginning of the war, Poland was presented as the attacker, but some weeks later Germany painted a very different picture, in which the Reich was saving a poor backward Poland from misery and despair. In this way, they intended to counterattack the Allies' propaganda as well as to demonstrate the moral and social superiority of National Socialist Germany.

material of any kind whatever, is forbidden. Art. 7. A neutral Power is not bound to prevent the export or transit, for the use of either belligerent, of arms, ammunition, or, in general, of anything which could be of use to an army or fleet" *Convention (XIII) concerning the Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers in Naval War*, The Hague, 18 October 1907.

⁶⁶ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898; Boelcke, *op. cit.*, 407.

⁶⁷ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/208989.

⁶⁸ Boelcke, *op. cit.*, 169, 329, 355–6.

⁶⁹ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

Not only had it conquered a state and avenged an affront, but once it had occupied the territory, it could be gracious and show mercy by improving Polish life and working conditions.⁷⁰ Nazi propaganda asserted that Germany had decreased illiteracy rates, given jobs to thousands of workers, initiated the reconstruction of cities and industries, improved production and enhanced hygienic conditions in Poland.⁷¹ This kind of strategy links directly to two of the usual tactics of Nazi propaganda everywhere; to distinguish government from people and to remind the audience constantly how much more politically, socially and militarily advanced Germany was.

Another way of reminding the world of Nazi Germany's superiority was to state that while the Allies invested great efforts in the creation of propaganda, Nazi leaders and journalists did not need to lie, because they had all the facts that were necessary to support their argumentation.⁷² This was typical of scientific propaganda and had a lot to do with the fact that during First World War exaggeration had diminished propaganda's credibility. The key to effective propaganda in the press and radio was in providing information, not rumors.⁷³ That is why numbers, expert witnesses and different sources were constantly used to support the Nazi story lines. Although this kind of argument was very common, it was especially implemented to counterattack the Allies' accusations. Besides, if the enemy tried to counterattack Nazi propaganda, this was exhibited as a sign of weakness. For example, as the Allies were slow to refute their accusations over Poland's atrocities, when they did, Nazi propagandists argued, "a legend constantly repeated doesn't gain a hint of truth".⁷⁴ Ironically the Promi was so worried about this so-called legend that Goebbels ordered it to take the offensive.⁷⁵

The culminating moment of this line of argumentation based on Germany's superiority came in the climax of the France campaign. At the end of July 1940, the embassy's bulletins presented a long article devoted to the real aims of the war: the construction of a New Order in which a unified and harmonious Europe would arise under the command of the young nations. The key for success would then be to "loyally participate in the new order and Europe's destiny while recognizing the need for clear guidelines".⁷⁶ The reference to the *Falange's* foundation rhetoric was pretty obvious. Of course, all this meant that Germany and Italy were the only "young nations" prepared to run an order. It also meant that in this utopian new Europe, small states

⁷⁰ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

⁷¹ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

⁷² Boelcke, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, 51.

⁷³ *ibid.*, 315.

⁷⁴ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

⁷⁵ Boelcke, *op. cit.*, 264.

⁷⁶ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

could exist as long as they submitted themselves to Germany's guidance and economic specialization. This kind of discourse had also been part of Goebbels' directives.⁷⁷

So far, all these story lines were in keeping with Promi instructions, but there were two specific arguments which had not been ordered by Goebbels and which appear to have been constructed to satisfy Spanish sensitivities. The first was based on the regular insertion of news that may show the Allies disrespect for and even destruction of religious sites, or Germany's protection of religion and its representatives. This kind of story was clearly provided to calm those Spanish authorities that might be suspicious of the Nazi intentions towards the Catholic Church. In fact, during the Spanish Civil War Franco himself had stopped the publication of the encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge*, as the document aroused some suspicions over Nazism.⁷⁸ The second was that the strong anti-Semitic campaign ordered by Goebbels was not reflected in the embassy's bulletins.⁷⁹ Hans Lazar explained in his memoirs that the embassy's official bulletin was the only publication that did not promote anti-Semitic propaganda in Spain. The reason was, in his own words, that "Spaniards would not be interested at all in this matter and that maybe it could indirectly bother them, because approximately five hundred years ago they had solved the Jewish problem in their own manner".⁸⁰ Lazar also says that although Stohrer and his successors had no problem with this argumentation, the Nazi party kept pressuring the embassy on this matter. What we can say is that we did not find anti-Semitic propaganda in the bulletins; moreover the only occasion in which the issue was mentioned was to affirm that Jews were returning voluntarily to Poland.⁸¹ Not once was the objective of cleansing Germany's major cities of Jews, which was discussed at length in Promi meetings, mentioned.⁸²

As we can see, Goebbels' key directives and principles of propaganda were implemented through the embassy's bulletins, although there was some re-directing over specific matters. In this sense the case of Poland was one of the most repetitive issues, as it was relevant to the idea of neutrals in danger, while other significant issues like religion were introduced in a more measured manner, without forgetting to mention the dangers of freemasonry, or the Gibraltar issue. But there is another significant proof of the specialized

⁷⁷ Boelcke, *op. cit.*, 342.

⁷⁸ María Luisa Rodríguez Aisa, *El cardenal Gomá y la guerra de España: Aspectos de la gestión pública del Primado: 1936-1939* (Madrid: Instituto Enrique Flórez, 1981), 160–2, 183; Gonzalo Redondo, *Historia de la Iglesia en España, 1931-1939. Tomo II La guerra civil, 1936-1939* (Madrid: Rialp, 1993), 208–10, 379.

⁷⁹ Baird, *op. cit.*, 54.

⁸⁰ Sáenz-Francés San Baldomero, *op. cit.*, 164.

⁸¹ AGA 9 (17.12) 51/20898.

⁸² These plans were discussed at length during Goebbels' Promi meetings. Boelcke, *op. cit.*, 26.

treatment of the embassy's propaganda. On 14 June 1940 Goebbels ordered his subordinates to publish an article about the debts that Spain had still to settle. A summary of this article should be spread in Spain.⁸³ Not a single reference to Spain's debts to Germany can be found in the bulletins analysed, however. This does not only reveal a keen exercise of diplomatic propaganda, but it also confirms Lazar's statements about the need to assure Spain's potential participation in the conflict taking into account its circumstances and sensitivities.

As we said at the beginning, the documentation analysed here was found while researching the archives of the *Falange's Servicio Exterior*. For this reason we would like to make a short reflection on the effect of nazi propaganda on the party. Nazi propaganda was well received by the *Falange*, who were eager to learn more about the functioning and structure of the New Order that was awakening over Europe. In fact, not only did nazi journalists and correspondents enjoy a privileged treatment,⁸⁴ but the Assistant Secretary of Popular Education, the section of the party in charge of media control, also played its part by promoting nazi propaganda, particularly during the first phase of the war, when a victory of the Axis powers seemed unavoidable.⁸⁵ Of course we should also take into account the effective work of Hans Lazar, who had no small part in the predominance of Axis propaganda that reigned over the Spanish media until early 1943.⁸⁶ Lazar himself argues in his memoirs that the pro-Axis tone of the Spanish press was ultimately based on the common anti-bolshevism and on the debt of gratitude acquired during the Spanish Civil War; anyway this seems to be something of an exaggeration, as his own press department was very active until 1945.⁸⁷

Obviously, political and cultural propaganda was not the only instrument employed to foster bonds between *Falange Española* and the NSDAP, but we will not enter into a discussion of them here. During the period analysed, the *Falange* was still being structured and the General Secretary of the Movement was empty, as no secretary had been appointed since general Muñoz Grandes' resignation. But regardless of that, some important steps like the creation of the Youth Front and the establishment of an elite group within the party took place in this period. Moreover, control over the syndical organization had been transferred to the party. It seemed a fruitful stage for the *Falange*, which was eager to culminate the conquest of the state for Spanish Fascism. In fact three ambitious projects were proposed to reinforce the party's role; the foundation

⁸³ *ibid.*, 397.

⁸⁴ Antonio César Moreno Cantano, "El control de la prensa extranjera en España y Alemania durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial," *Historia Contemporánea* 32 (2006): 311–34, 318.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 322.

⁸⁶ Sáenz-Francés San Baldomero, *op. cit.*, 161.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 164.

of Political Management Schools, the creation of a Work Front in clear connection with the *Deutsche Arbeitsfront*, and the nationalization of the banks. None of these projects was taken to completion, but they revealed that *Falange* was confident on its position to pressure for more power in the state.

To what extent can we attribute this to propaganda? We do not know, as it is very difficult to measure the effectiveness of propaganda. But we can guess that the messages delivered through the bulletins and other means played their part, reinforcing an image of the war that was already constructed and maintained the illusion of a victorious Germany, long after this did not seem to be a possibility any more. The *Falange's* press would not really begin to change its view of the war until early 1943. In fact, when, in that same year, Mussolini fell, the General Secretary of the Movement became chaotic scenery, with falangists destroying documents while deciding which country would provide them with political asylum.⁸⁸ The conscience of *Falange's* fate being inevitably linked to that of the Axis became evident at this point, and only the rhetorical and political effort of José Luis de Arrese, secretary of the party, achieved to correct the party's ideological identification with totalitarianism by forging the idea of a catholic and organically democratic state⁸⁹. But even then, disputes over pro-Axis propaganda within *Falange's* publications were usual among the ministry of Foreign Affairs and the ministry and secretary of the party.⁹⁰

To finish, we can draw two main conclusions. The first is that, although general propaganda directives were respected, the German embassy's press office in Spain tried to re-direct propaganda in order to avoid unnecessary trouble and misunderstanding in the host country. Secondly, everything seems to indicate that the effort to create a sense of brotherhood between the German and Spanish regimes was not in vain, at least as far as the *Falange* was concerned. As far as our research goes, we can assume that nazi propaganda in Spain was not exactly ineffective, although it is very important to point out that the adaptation of general propaganda directives to Spanish sensitivities was made by the Madrid embassy, not by the Promi or the Foreign Affairs Ministry. Any specialized plan for propaganda in Spain seems to be an integrated part of diplomatic actions, more than of the Promi activities.

⁸⁸ "Informes de las repercusiones de la caída de Italia en medios políticos españoles (17 agosto 1943)" in *Documentos inéditos para la historia del Generalísimo Franco*, tomo IV (Madrid: Fundación Nacional Francisco Franco, 1992), 366-368.

⁸⁹ For more information on Arrese's rhetorical turn, see Álvaro de Diego González, *José Luis Arrese o La Falange de Franco* (Madrid: Actas, 2001) and Mercedes Peñalba, *Falange Española: historia de un fracaso (1933-1945)* (Pamplona: Eunsa, 2009).

⁹⁰ Javier Tusell, *Franco y Mussolini* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1985), 235. For more information on the effort of falangists to avoid the orders that forbade them to comment on foreign affairs, see Alfonso Lazo Díaz, *La Iglesia, la Falange y el fascismo: (un estudio sobre la prensa española de posguerra)* (Sevilla: Secretariado de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Sevilla, 1995), 295-306.

Finally, it is only fair to ask ourselves to what point these nazi propaganda translated into party's publications and to what extent did it tainted public opinion, but this will have to be addressed in future studies.