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What Might Have Been: Spain's Possible Entry in WWII on the Side of the Axis

- Translated Title: *Memorandum by the German Ambassador in Madrid, August 8, 1940*
- Source of English Translation: United States. Department of State. 1946. *The Spanish Government and the Axis; documents. March 1946.* (Department of State publication. European series ; 8). Washington: U.S., Govt. Print. Off.

Memorandum by the German Ambassador in Madrid, August 8, 1940, written by German ambassador to Madrid Eberhard von Stohrer, is a text relaying the conditions in which Spain could possibly enter the War on the side of the Axis. The original text from 1940 was translated and released to the press in the form of a booklet by the U.S. Department of State on March 4, 1946. The original microfilm has proven elusive but from what I have researched it does exist and is listed in *A Catalog of Files and Microfilms of the German Foreign Ministry Archives 1920-1945*, compiled by George O. Kent. This I know because my second source, *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, which contains the translated version, makes note of where to find the originals and even includes a film serial number. The 1946 translation was published along with fourteen other documents relating to the Spanish and Axis governments. The original text consisting of thirty-nine pages can be found in the UCSB library, and I was able to locate it and use it for my exploration.

This information yielded many interesting and relevant results that prove useful in examining Spanish-Nazi relations during the Second World War. Germany wanted an ally that could provide raw resources, all the while taking control of a valuable strategic strait in the form of Gibraltar. That ally would come in the form of Spain and its new nationalist government headed by Francisco Franco. Negotiations, however, were restrained due to perceived risks and timidity on both sides. Nonetheless, these connections existed, and Nazi penetration into Spain did exist despite the fact that Spain remained neutral throughout the war.

The author of the memorandum was German diplomat Eberhard von Stohrer (1883-1953). Stohrer was an aristocratic career diplomat who had served in Spain during World War I

and by 1936 had been named German ambassador to the Spanish Republic.¹ During the Spanish Civil War, which lasted from 1936 to 1939, Stohrer was stationed in Madrid. In Madrid under Hitler's orders, he acted as a spy and observer of the Spanish government, reporting news back to the Nazi government in Berlin.² During this period Stohrer gently attempted to guide Spanish foreign policy in relation to Germany. This especially became evident as he helped organize the Franco-Hitler meeting at Hendaye. This meeting between Spanish and German delegations at the Spanish-French border town was one of great importance as it dealt with a wide range of economic, press, and political issues.³ Among these issues and perhaps the most important, was Spain's entry and participation in World War II on the side of the Axis. Stohrer would continue to serve as ambassador until January 11, 1943, when Hans Adolf von Moltke arrived to recall Stohrer.⁴ Stohrer's restrained diplomacy had been deemed a failure by Berlin.

The actual content of the 'strictly secret' memorandum revolves around the conditions in which Spain could possibly enter the war. Stohrer weighs the pros and cons of Spain joining the Axis powers and a subsequent invasion of Gibraltar. The positives, Stohrer argues, would include a great blow to British prestige, the cutting off of Spanish iron, copper, pyrites and other minerals to the UK, and most importantly Spanish control of the Strait of Gibraltar. The negatives were that if Britain learned of the plan, they might invade Spanish territory first. These territories included not only mainland Spain but the Canary or Balearic Islands as well. There could also be potential ramifications for Portugal as well, as Britain might occupy Lisbon or Lagos and use them as a platform to invade from the West. Most importantly, Spain did not have sufficient food and fuel to keep its population happy, hence military setbacks could trigger domestic riots. Transportation of goods and arms proved to be another problem, as Stohrer notes that the available routes were susceptible to British bombardment from the sea. Stohrer concludes that allowing for a weak and impoverished Spain to enter the war too early could prove disastrous and hence must continue to monitor German advancements in the campaigns against Britain.

¹ Whealey, Robert H. *Hitler and Spain: The Nazi Role in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*. (Lexington, Ky.: U of Kentucky, 1989), 65-66.

² "Eberhard Von Stohrer." Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 19 Feb. 2019, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eberhard_von_Stohrer.

³ Bowen, W. *Spaniards and Nazi Germany: Collaboration in the New Order*. (Columbia, Mo: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 89.

⁴ Bowen, W. *Spaniards and Nazi Germany: Collaboration in the New Order*. (Columbia, Mo: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 121.

Annotated Bibliography in Chronological Order

1. United States. Department of State. 1946. *The Spanish Government and the Axis; Documents. March 1946.* (Department of State publication. European series ; 8). Washington: U.S., Govt. Print. Off.

The first English translation of the memorandum was released to the press by the U.S. Department of State on March 4, 1946. It was published along with fourteen other documents relating to the Spanish and Axis governments. The Department of State annually publishes large volumes of reports, statements, and releases on foreign affairs. This publication was part of the European series which includes various translations of texts relating to Europe and World War II. This particular publication also includes a statement by the Department of State. The statement acknowledges the situation in which Spain and its people find themselves, while simultaneously calling into question the relationship that will follow between the Allied victors and a nation brought to power by “German Nazism and Italian Fascism.” It makes clear that these nations have no intention of interfering in the internal affairs of Spain but in the case that the Franco government be deposed and democracy restored they would fully restore diplomatic relations.

2. Germany. Auswärtiges Amt. 1949. *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, from the archives of the German Foreign Ministry. (Department of State publication ; 3277, etc). Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off.

The translated memorandum listed as Doc. No 313 once again appears in this collection of German documents from 1918-1945. Similar to the first US publication I was also able to locate this piece in the library. This piece essentially shows the same 1940 document but within a much larger collection of documents. The preface also explains the process in which these documents were gathered and selected for translation. These documents are “presented as a source book for the study of history, and not as a finished interpretation of history. It has been the aim throughout to keep any interpretative comment out of the footnotes.” This is very different from the following sources in that it simply provides the text and nothing more. An interesting note is that this same publication was also published in England by Her Majesty’s Stationery Office in 1957.

3. Burdick, C. 1968. *Germany's Military Strategy and Spain in World War II.* Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press.

This book, published 22 years after the original translation, focuses on the role, or rather the role Spain didn't play in Nazi dominion over Europe. It follows Nazi relations with Spain throughout the Second World War up until Hitler's final moments in 1945. It emphasizes a point made by Hitler in his final testament, "Taking advantage of the enthusiasm we had aroused in Spain and the shock to which we had subjected Britain, we ought to have attacked Gibraltar in the summer of 1940, immediately after the defeat of France."⁵ The book places a large emphasis on Nazi fear and timidity when it came to Spain and a potential conquest of Gibraltar. It notes Germany's lack of natural resources and unpreparedness for total war, both of which it claims would determine its fate in the end. Stohrer and his memorandum are noted continuously throughout the first chapter, "The Rock," in which it explains the German realization that Gibraltar would prove vital for Axis naval efforts. Another interesting note is the fact that this book directly cites the original 1946 Department of State translation and makes heavy use of other translated publications from the Department of State.

4. Bowen, W. 2000. *Spaniards and Nazi Germany: Collaboration in the new order*. Columbia, Mo: University of Missouri Press.

This book focuses on German and Spanish relations from 1933 until 1945. It particularly looks into Falangist collaboration with Nazi Germany and its evolution from the onset of the Spanish Civil War until Germany's defeat at the hands of the Allies. It also examines the evolution of a collaborative vision in which not only Germany would benefit but Spain as well. This book presents a broad exploration of German-Spanish relations rather than simply looking at the military strategy or any sort of invasion. Stohrer's memorandum is brought up in this book as a small portion of a much larger picture. It is referenced and cited in the chapter "The Axis Temptation" in which the chapter focuses on the possibility and conditions in which Spain would enter the war. In the end however incompetent diplomacy and a string of mistakes resulted in the lack of enticement for Franco to enter the war.

5. "The Spanish Government and the Axis: Documents." *The Avalon Project - Laws of War : Laws and Customs of War on Land (Hague IV); October 18, 1907*, Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008, avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/sp02.asp.

The purpose of the Avalon Project is to produce digital documents relevant to the fields of

⁵ Burdick, Charles Burton. *Germany's Military Strategy and Spain in World War II*. (Syracuse University Press, 1968), 2. Burdick cites this quote from the *The Testament of Adolf Hitler. The Hitler-Bormann Documents, February-March 1945* written by Francois Genoud and subsequently translated and published by R.H. Stevens in 1961.

Law, History, Economics, Politics, Diplomacy, and Government. Here I not only found the initial memorandum but the entire original 1946 publication in digitized form. Though this project does not include commentary it does add value to the text by linking to supporting documents expressly referred to in the body of the text. In the case of the memorandum it linked it to other documents in the publication.

6. Rankin, Nicholas. 2017. *Defending the Rock: How Gibraltar Defeated Hitler*. Faber & Faber.

This work focuses on the narrative followed by Gibraltar throughout the war. It gives context into Gibraltar through not only its strategic importance but through its history as disputed territory between England and Spain. It notes the many enemies this single piece of land had throughout the war while highlighting why it was of such strategic importance. Because this work focuses so heavily on Gibraltar itself, it actually makes great mention of Stohrer's memorandum. It notes the pros and cons of an invasion as noted in the memorandum while providing context for them as well. Rankin fits it into the larger picture of the war culminating in Hitler's demise and his reasonings for what went wrong, one of the main reasons being his failure to invade Gibraltar.