How coherent were the European neutrals in the context of British diplomacy, 1939-1941?

Leslie Illingworth, “Come off the Ice!’ cries Churchill’, *Daily Mail*, 22 January 1940

MA History (Political Culture and National Identities) Thesis

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Introduction

When the Second World War broke out in September 1939 there were just four participants, but by the time it finished in 1945 only five European states had successfully managed to stay out of the conflict. They plotted a course of neutrality that, through a combination of diplomatic skill, good fortune and factors outside of their control, saw them avoid being dragged into a war that sucked in most of their European neighbours, either through invasion, coercion or their own free will.

The five countries were Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, Sweden and Ireland. Turkey is often regarded as another neutral but it did eventually enter the war in February 1945, albeit as a token gesture. Minor states such as Andorra and Liechtenstein were also neutral throughout the war but their importance for Britain was negligible. This essay will therefore look at the five countries listed above.[1]

Efraim Karsh writes that 'there is probably no policy so controversial, so subject to contrasting and contradictory treatment and interpretation, as neutrality'.[2] Historical figures as diverse as Machiavelli, the Prophet Muhammad and Woodrow Wilson have attacked neutrality as a policy, and John F. Kennedy's favourite quote was apparently a misinterpretation of a line from Dante's *Inferno*: 'the hottest places in Hell are reserved for those who in time of moral crisis preserve their neutrality'.[3] And yet in the 1930s neutrality was a very valid policy, as illustrated by the number of nations who attempted to follow it in the war.

Roderick Ogley defines four types of neutrality – 'neutralisation', which is imposed upon by agreement, 'traditional neutrality', where the country is neutral by choice, 'ad hoc neutrality', where the country just wants to keep out of a particular war, and 'nonalignment', a post-1945 phenomenon with the Cold War, signifying a state that did not want to be part of a bloc.[4] Of the five nations

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1 It should be pointed out that Spain was not actually 'neutral' throughout the war; after the fall of France in June 1940 it adopted a position of 'non-belligerency', a rather vague term coined by Mussolini to describe his position at the outbreak of war. A non-belligerent could be defined as a country not involved in the fighting but with an interest in one side. Spain quietly returned to a position of 'neutrality' in September 1942. For the purposes of this paper, however, the 'neutrals' will include Spain.

2 Efraim Karsh, *Neutrality and Small States*, (London: Routledge, 1988), 1

3 *ibid*., 1-2, http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/Ready-Reference/JFK-Miscellaneous-Information/Dante.aspx (accessed 7 May 2013)

4 Roderick Ogley, *The Theory and Practice of Neutrality in the Twentieth Century*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 2-4

studied here, Switzerland and Sweden were 'traditional neutrals' whilst Spain and Portugal were 'ad hoc neutrals'. Ireland is a slightly different case as there is no mention of neutrality in its constitution and it did not follow neutrality in the same sense as Switzerland and Sweden did. The Second World War was really the first conflict it had to define its position in but seeing as it had no real intention of entering the war and has remained neutral ever since, with neutrality becoming an unofficial cornerstone of its foreign policy, it is fair to group the Irish in with the 'traditional neutrals' as well. Watt believes Ireland was a 'non-aligned' state but in Ogley's definition this is only applicable after 1945 and Watt's statement is likely to have been affected by Ireland's post-1945 activities.[5]

At the outbreak of war in 1939, the international law surrounding neutrality was based on conventions laid down in 1907 at the Second Hague Conference. Convention V dealt with 'the Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers and Persons in case of War on Land'. Some of its key articles were:

Article 1: The territory of neutral Powers is inviolable.

Article 2: Belligerents are forbidden to move troops or convoys of either munitions of war or supplies across the territory of a neutral Power.

Article 4: Corps of combatants cannot be formed nor recruiting agencies opened on the territory of a neutral Power to assist the belligerents.

Article 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.

Article 11: A neutral Power which receives on its territory troops belonging to the belligerent armies shall intern them, as far as possible, at a distance from the theatre of war.[6]

Convention XIII dealt with neutrality with regards to naval warfare, with some its key articles being:

Article 1: Belligerents are bound to respect the sovereign rights of neutral Powers and to abstain, in neutral territory or neutral waters, from any act which would, if knowingly permitted by any Power, constitute a violation of neutrality.

Article 2: Any act of hostility, including capture and the exercise of the right of search, committed by belligerent war-ships in the territorial waters of a neutral Power, constitutes a violation of neutrality and is strictly forbidden.

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5 Donald C. Watt, 'Britain and the Neutral Powers 1939-1945: Some General Considerations', in Louis-Edouard Roulet, ed., *Les États Neures Européens et la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*, (Neuchatel: Le Passé Present, 1983), 246

6 Hague Convention V, 'Convention Respecting the Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers and Persons in case of War on Land', http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hague05.asp, (accessed 7 May 2013)

Article 5: Belligerents are forbidden to use neutral ports and waters as a base of naval operations against their adversaries, and in particular to erect wireless telegraphy stations or any apparatus for the purpose of communicating with the belligerent forces on land or sea.

Article 6: The supply, in any manner, directly or indirectly, by a neutral Power to a belligerent Power, of war-ships, ammunition, or war material of any kind whatever, is forbidden.

Article 12: In the absence of special provisions to the contrary in the legislation of a neutral Power, belligerent war-ships are not permitted to remain in the ports, roadsteads, or territorial waters of the said Power for more than twenty-four hours, except in the cases covered by the present Convention.

Article 19: Belligerent war-ships may only revictual in neutral ports or roadsteads to bring up their supplies to the peace standard.[7]

As can be seen, some of these articles can be rather vague and this shows that neutrality was not a clear-cut concept. During the war all of the neutrals broke at least one of the articles in the conventions.

Justification of the Topic

A huge amount of literature has been written surrounding the Second World War, and touching upon all aspects of history. However, surprisingly little has been written on the European neutrals, and even less on British policy towards them.

Neville Wylie, the main writer on neutrality in this period, writes that few historians have seen the neutrals as worthy subjects, what with them seemingly having had little impact on the war and being somewhat of an anachronism.[8] In another work, he believes it is rather 'mystifying (the) lack of interest shown in Britain's dealing with (the) neutrals or the manner in which the British government, consciously or unconsciously, conceptualised its relations with the neutral camp as a whole'.[9] However, one reason as to why there is a real lack of literature on British diplomacy towards the neutrals as a whole could be that the neutrals cannot, or should not, be studied as a group. Indeed, Nils Orvik in his study on the 'decline of neutrality' states that the five European neutrals cannot be grouped together, although he chooses to only really deal with the United States and Norway and fails to properly get to grips with the European neutrals.[10] Furthermore, Wylie admits that 'any attempt to consider the neutrals as a group is fraught with difficulty, given the huge

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7 Hague Convention XIII, 'Convention Concerning the Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers in Naval War', http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hague13.asp, (accessed 7 May 2013)

8 Neville Wylie, 'Introduction: Victims or Actors? European Neutrals and Non-Belligerents, 1939-1945', in Neville Wylie, ed., *European Neutrals and Non-Belligerents During the Second World War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2

9 Neville Wylie, *Britain, Switzerland and the Second World War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 11

disparities between the individual neutrals states and the extent to which British officials differed in their attitudes towards neutrality'.[11]

The hypothesis that the five neutrals cannot be studied as a whole is an interesting one and something that needs attention as it has been passed over in the historiography. This thesis will therefore set out to analyse how much truth there is in this hypothesis, with the question to be answered being 'how coherent a group were the European neutrals in the context of British diplomacy, 1939-1941?' This will then lead on to being able to make an assessment as to whether they can be studied historically and whether the gap in the literature is justified. Furthermore, if the neutrals are found to be able to be studied as a sound group, then a follow-up question can be *should* the neutrals be studied together. This could look at the possible benefits of studying the neutrals together and what advantages, if any, can be gained from doing it in this manner.

Historiography

In terms of the existing historiography, on neutrality as a policy two important works are Roderick Ogley's *The Theory and Practice of Neutrality in the Twentieth Century* and Efraim Karsh's *Neutrality and Small States*. Karsh takes as his focus the Second World War and discusses how the neutrals needed to find the right balance between what he terms 'positive' – persuading the belligerents of the benefits of the continued existence of their neutrality – and 'negative' – deterring the belligerents by making the cost of attacking disproportionate to the reward – elements. For an unexplained reason, however, he omits Portugal from his study. Ogley's study is more on neutrality as a policy in general and rather than looking at one specific case study as Karsh does with the war it provides documents relating to neutrality as a policy and various documents from countries that have tried to follow neutrality in the twentieth century. It is rather like a textbook with 'suggested exercises' but it does provide a good understanding of the policy. However, although important for an understanding of the policy, neither have much to do with British diplomacy.

The major study on the European neutrals in the Second World War is Neville Wylie's *European Neutrals and Non-Belligerents During the Second World War* which features articles on all of the states that tried to pursue a neutrality policy, including those who failed. Due to its wide-ranging nature it is unable to really delve into any of the countries but provides a good overview of the situation. Another study is Jerrold Packard's *Neither Friend Nor Foe: The European Neutrals in World War II* which looks at all five neutrals, although it sometimes reads more as if the author wanted to write a thriller rather than an academic text. This means that some of the drier aspects, such as certain parts of economic warfare, are not given the attention they deserve. An early study on the neutrals is *The War and the Neutrals*, edited by Arnold and Veronica Toynbee as part of the 'Survey of International Affairs'. The book does cover British, as well as German, diplomacy towards the neutrals and has a useful section on economic warfare but it is nearly fifty years old and a lot of new information has come to light since its publication.

10 Nils Orvik, *The Decline of Neutrality, 1914-1941*, (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1971), 216-7

11 Wylie, *Britain, Switzerland and the Second World War*, 11

In terms of propaganda there are two main books – Robert Cole's *Britain and the War of Words in Neutral Europe, 1939-1945* which looks at the Ministry of Information's propaganda efforts and Edward Corse's *A Battle for Neutral Europe* , which focusses on the British Council and how it attempted to use culture to win over neutral populations. For economic warfare, W.N. Medlicott's official history *The Economic Blockade* is still useful, although the neutrals are only one aspect of this. There have also been a number of articles written focussing on specific aspects of economic warfare, usually with regards to an individual neutral.

With regards to British policy towards the neutrals, all five countries do feature in the official history, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War* by Llewellyn Woodward, but they are only one aspect of a wider study of British foreign policy and the work is also rather dated now. Neutrality does also feature in other wider studies of the war and British policy but there is nothing on which the focus is on British foreign policy towards the European neutrals. However, there are some works that look at the relations with individual neutrals during the war.

On Spain, the main work is Denis Smyth's *Diplomacy and Strategy of Survival*. His central argument is that diplomatic relations required a very careful balancing act, especially in the field of economic warfare, on behalf of both states which they just about managed to achieve. However, the book does not really discuss how the British used Portugal to try and drag Franco away from Hitler's clutches, as well as making little mention of the British bribery of prominent Spaniards, although this only really came to light after publication. The ambassador to Spain for most of the war was Sir Samuel Hoare, a former Foreign Secretary who had fallen from grace, and he wrote his memoirs *Ambassador on Special Mission* about this period. It is a rather self-congratulatory text written with the benefit of hindsight and was criticised by colleagues but it does give a good insight into the situation. Another useful contemporary book is David Eccles's *By Safe Hand*, a collection of letters sent between Eccles, a Ministry of Economic Warfare official, and his wife during the war which is helpful for understanding the economic efforts made by the British.

For Portugal the key secondary text is Glyn Stone's *The Oldest Ally: Britain and the Portuguese Connection, 1936-1941*, which provides a good insight into Anglo-Portuguese relations and also looks into the relationship with Franco, something ignored by the literature focussing on Spain. Other sources are *Lisbon* by Neill Lochery, a recent book which takes the capital during the war as its main focus and thus has information on the intelligence and refugee aspects of the war and the most recent English-language biography of Antonio Salazar, the Portuguese dictator during the war, by Filipe de Meneses, *Salazar: A Political Biography*, which gives a Portuguese perspective to the diplomacy.

The key text for British policy towards Switzerland is Neville Wylie's *Britain, Switzerland and the Second World War*. This is the only book in English to focus on Anglo-Swiss diplomatic relations in the period and gives a detailed account of the issue. One of its central themes is how the intelligence reports coming from Switzerland were so important to Britain that the intelligence services effectively had a veto over the diplomatic dealings, meaning that economic plans by the Ministry of Economic Warfare were often thwarted. Wylie also makes much of how the British Establishment's positive, almost nostalgic, impression of Switzerland – some of the main decision makers had lived there, and many politicians and officials holidayed there – affected their attitude and dealings towards the Swiss.

There is not much on Anglo-Swedish relations during the war, with John Gilmour's *Sweden, the Swastika and Stalin* one of the few English-language books on Sweden and the war – but this work focusses on the Swedish perspective. The relationship between Britain and Sweden during the 'Phoney War' period, featuring how Britain attempted to solve the problem regarding Swedish iron ore, is well-covered by Thomas Munch-Petersen in *The Strategy of Phoney War*, but there is a lack of literature on relations after this point.

British policy towards Ireland has received the most attention from historians, most likely due to the language, close proximity and controversy surrounding it. One of the important works is Robert Fisk's very readable *In Time of War: Ireland, Ulster and the Price of Neutrality, 1939-1945*. A more recent overview of the topic is *Britain, Ireland and the Second World War* by Ian S. Wood, which is useful as a starting point to the topic, whilst there are a number of works looking at particular aspects, such as propaganda, espionage or Irish culture during the war.

It can be seen here that there are a handful of books that deal with British diplomacy and relations with individual neutrals during the war, and a few books that look at the experiences of multiple neutrals during the war. Within these, Toynbee's *The War and the Neutrals* features a section on British diplomacy towards individual neutrals, whilst Woodward's *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War* also details relations with individual neutrals, but for both of these books this is only one of many aspects and, furthermore, both of the books are now rather old and new research has meant they are somewhat out-of-date. There is not a single book that takes as it central theme the British diplomacy towards the neutral nations as a group, or on the British attitude towards neutrality as a policy. There is certainly room in the literature for a study such as this one, which takes the specific aspect of testing the coherency of the five neutrals as a group in the context of British diplomacy. This will then hopefully lead to being able to say whether the main gap in the literature – there being nothing on British diplomacy towards the neutrals as a group – is justified or not.

Methodology and Sources

The first section of this thesis will look at the context of the British diplomacy. This will begin by putting forward some thoughts on the British attitude towards neutrality and the neutrals before going on to some background on Britain's position in the war and the background of each individual neutral. This section will finally deal with the British considerations and aims with regards the neutrals. The second section will analyse the methods that the British used to achieve these aims and discuss their effectiveness.

Ways to test the coherency of the neutrals in the context of British diplomacy include looking at aspects such as the neutrals' positions and contexts, the British attitude towards them, what Britain was hoping to achieve and the methods that the British used. From these aspects comparisons, similarities and differences can be drawn to give a better idea of the coherency of the neutrals with regards to British diplomacy.

This thesis will only focus on the period from September 1939 until the end of 1941, although there may be some slight overlap after this end-date with certain policies. The reasoning

behind these dates is that after 1941 and the American entry into the war Britain's position gradually became less important not only from a military point of view but also from a diplomatic one. With the United States in the war diplomacy did still heavily involve the British but it became more and more American-led. Until 1942, however, Britain had been the key player – indeed, from June 1940 onwards the only player – in the diplomatic efforts towards the neutrals. Moreover, after 1942 the neutrals became less important to the Allies whereas in the period to be studied they were given a fair amount of consideration by the Foreign Office. Finally, as the war went on objectives regarding the neutrals were liable to change quite a lot and quite quickly, which makes a study quite difficult within the word limits, whereas between 1939 and 1941 the aims of the British were a bit more consistent and this provides a more stable base from which to consider the coherency of the neutrals. A comparison that involved what Britain wanted in 1939 and in 1945 would be just too large.

In addition to the secondary literature detailed above, primary sources will be an important part of this thesis. The most important of these are the Foreign Office correspondence (Confidential Print) sent between embassies in neutral Europe and the Foreign Office in London. These documents have been collated in various volumes and provide a good insight into British attitudes and policy, as well as the internal situation of the neutrals. However, there are a few caveats that should be pointed out with these volumes. Firstly, they are just the collections of Foreign Office correspondence and so sometimes what is suggested or proposed in them never became actual policy; other primary and secondary sources have to be used to clarify in these cases. Secondly, the officials were writing in a highly pressurised and uncertain environment and made mistakes, especially regarding the internal politics of the neutrals, although this can actually lead to some interesting results, in particular with the British attitude towards the neutrals. Thirdly, not everything has been included in these volumes and officials often did not use the diplomatic correspondence for highly confidential matters; for example, papers regarding the bribery of Spanish generals were separate to the correspondence, although these have since been released into the public domain in their own right. Fourthly, and finally, because these documents are Foreign Office documents they unfortunately do not include Ireland, which as a dominion at the time was dealt with by the Dominions Office.

Other useful primary sources for this thesis are the War Cabinet records which are available online and which provide an excellent insight into the decision-making process at the highest level. Furthermore, a number of officials – especially diplomats – have written memoirs and diaries. These do not always feature the neutrals but there are some useful ones, such as Hoare's memoirs on Spain already mentioned and Hugh Dalton's diaries.

1. The Neutrals and Britain

1.1 The British Attitude towards Neutrality

Patrick Salmon is the one of the few historians to look at the British attitude towards neutrality in an article focussing on both world wars. He writes that the British saw neutrality as a pain during the wars because it hampered their efforts to conduct the fight against the enemy, and they also saw it as morally wrong by failing to oppose enemies who were more than just military enemies such as Nazism.[12] However, he goes on to say that 'for one reason or other…Britain's treatment of neutral states was far more circumspect than the rhetoric of its leaders might have suggested', with reasons being a desire for something from the neutrals, such as raw materials, that the British were often incapable of doing anything about the neutrals, as well as genuine moral qualms and the fear of upsetting others, in particular the United States.[13] Neutrality was, however, not just something that the British took for granted. Donald Watt, who has also studied British attitudes towards neutrality, writes that before the war Britain 'had come to see the state of neutrality not so much as a state of law to be respected as a series of attitudes and commitments to be used, where possible, as instruments of British policy'.[14] The British were willing to twist the neutrality policy to meet their own ends when possible, which reinforces the idea that they did not respect it as a political choice.

12 Patrick Salmon, 'British Attitudes Towards Neutrality in the Twentieth Century', in Jukka Nevakivi, ed., *Neutrality in History*, (Helsinki: SHS, 1993), 117

13 *ibid*., 118-119

14 Watt, 'Britain and the Neutral Powers 1939-1945: Some General Considerations', 251

Salmon has defined seven 'rules' based on what Britain did regarding the neutrals, although he admits they are rather basic and that the 'rules' were frequently broken.[15] They are 'do not make a formal commitment to respect neutrality if there is any possibility that you may wish to violate it', 'discourage neutral cooperation', 'exploit British maritime strength to exert pressure on neutrals', 'appease neutrals', 'find allies within neutral countries', 'do not allow ideology to influence policy' and 'as a last resort, consider forcible action against a neutral state'.[16] However, some of these seem a little inadequate – in particular, although Salmon does admit Britain did like to see neutral cooperation 'on rare occasions', the British did not 'discourage' cooperation and in some cases encouraged it. For example, one of the two main British targets regarding Portugal was to get them to increase cooperation with Spain and the British helped set up an economic agreement between themselves, Spain and Portugal. Another example would be British efforts to get Norway and Sweden to work together regarding Finland and the Winter War in the context of the British aim of securing the Swedish iron ore mines.

However, these basic thoughts do go some way to explaining the British attitude towards the neutrals. They were generally a little suspicious of them, they believed that they were not on the 'right' side of the battle – alongside Britain – and so were morally questionable and yet they did generally appease the neutrals and force was only a last resort.

One of the key threads running through British rhetoric throughout the war regarding the neutrals is how London respected neutral rights whilst Hitler trampled all over them. Of course, this was not entirely true and Britain did violate the neutral rights from time to time, such as the 'Altmark Incident' of February 1940 when the Royal Navy boarded a German ship in neutral Norway's territorial waters and released the prisoners on board or Britain regularly sending flights over Swiss territory en route to northern Italy, several times accidentally bombing Swiss cities. The British used some round-about logic to justify these violations of neutrality, saying that they had to violate the law to protect the rule of law – the neutrals and the idea of neutrality would be destroyed by the Germans if Britain did not take the necessary measures, which occasionally meant infringing their rights.[17]

In comparison to Germany's treatment of the neutrals, however, these were only minor indiscretions and Britain tried to make the most of this. For example, in a speech in January 1940, Churchill said that:

> 'so far it is the small neutral States that are bearing the brunt of German malice and cruelty. Neutral ships are sunk without law or mercy - not only by the blind and wanton mine, but by the coldly considered, deliberately aimed, torpedo. The Dutch, the Belgians, the Danes, the Swedes, and, above all, the Norwegians, have their ships

15 Salmon, 'British Attitudes Towards Neutrality', 121

16 *ibid*., 121-128

17 Joan Beaumont, 'Great Britain and the Rights of Neutral Countries: The Case of Iran, 1941', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 16, 1 (Jan 1981), 223-4

> destroyed whenever they can be caught upon the high seas. It is only in the British and French convoys that safety is to be found'.

It was in this speech that he uttered one of his best-known phrases regarding the neutrals: that 'each one hopes that if he feeds the crocodile enough, the crocodile will eat him last'. He suggested that these 'victims upon whom Hitler's hate and spite descend', 'wondering which will be the next victim on whom the criminal adventurers of Berlin will cast their rending stroke', should 'stand together with the British and French empires against aggression and wrong' in what was sure to be a long war.[18] In a speech in March 1940 he said that Britain had the greatest sympathy with the neutrals but suggested that the war could have been a short one had they stood alongside Britain and France. He also reminded them that Britain provided safe shipping against German threats and picked out Holland for criticism for shooting at British aircraft at the same time as the Royal Navy was rescuing Dutch sailors.[19] Churchill surely did sympathise with the plights of the neutrals but these speeches are not without criticism of their policies and this reinforces the idea that Britain saw neutrality as an immoral position to take. These speeches were made whilst Churchill was still First Lord of the Admiralty which probably meant that he had a little more freedom to speak his mind compared to his time as Prime Minister, and they perhaps offer a better insight into his views regarding the neutrals.

During the period in question there were two Prime Ministers – Neville Chamberlain and, from May 1940, Churchill. There were also two Foreign Secretaries with Lord Halifax being replaced by Anthony Eden in December 1940. Individuals did not dictate policy, although Churchill may have been close to doing so, and certainly not regarding the neutrals who were generally left to the various departments to deal with, but these politicians did have a tremendous impact upon British foreign policy.

It is extremely difficult and troublesome to unpick exactly how much influence an individual politician had regarding the policy towards the neutrals, especially considering all the twists of the war, the different aspects of the neutrals to consider and the various other officials involved. However, from what we know about Churchill and Eden in comparison to Chamberlain and Halifax – famously anti-appeasement as opposed to famous appeasers – it would not be unreasonable to conjecture that Churchill and Eden did not look upon the neutrals as favourably as Chamberlain and Halifax did. Unfortunately there is nothing in the documents that explicitly states a change of policy under Churchill or Eden, and because the situations in the war and in the neutrals were so fluid there are not many constants from which to see if a change can be found from looking at the events. However, as an example, Britain instituting tougher economic sanctions against Ireland at the end of 1940 suggests a slight hardening of the leadership's attitude towards the neutrals, or at least Ireland. Again,

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18 Winston Churchill, Speech - 'The War Situation: House of Many Mansions', 20 January 1940, London, Broadcast

19 Winston Churchill, Speech – 'Dwelling in the Cage with the Tiger', 31 March 1940, London, Broadcast

though, this has to be conjecture and who is to say that Chamberlain would not have done the same thing in the same situation? As a second example, although most of the War Cabinet saw military intervention as desirable in Sweden during the 'Phoney War' period to secure the iron ore mines, it was Chamberlain and especially Halifax who were most against it, whilst Churchill was the most outspoken in favour of action.[20]

On the other hand, an example that highlights the danger of assuming someone's attitude came in June 1940 when it was Chamberlain pushing to use military force against Ireland and Churchill, in a role reversal from a few months before in more than one sense, having to moderate this view.[21] Needless to say, this is all rather conjectural and therefore not too much weight will be put on a theoretical change in the leadership's attitude in the final conclusion, but if a hypothesis had to be put forward it would be that there was a slightly less favourable attitude towards the neutrals under Churchill and Eden, who had already shown their anti-appeasement credentials.

Regarding the British political infrastructure there were different Foreign Office departments dealing with the neutrals – one for northern Europe which included Sweden, and one for southern and central Europe which dealt with Spain, Portugal and Switzerland. Indeed, Wylie writes that the 'officials in the Foreign Office's northern department were distinctly less charitable in their views on neutral rights than their colleagues in the southern and central departments'.[22] Unfortunately this point is not expanded and it is difficult to ascertain exactly why this was and how these views manifested themselves without specific research in London. Furthermore, Medlicott tells us that the Foreign Relations department of the Ministry of Economic Warfare was at first divided up into northern Europe and southern Europe departments.[23] Unfortunately there is no information as to which countries fell under whose jurisdiction, but assuming that MEW followed the Foreign Office's lead then Sweden was dealt with separately from an economic warfare perspective to Spain, Portugal and Switzerland as well. Furthermore, Ireland was under the jurisdiction of the Dominions Office. This did not bode well for a coherent attitude and approach.

The neutrals were one of the key aspects for MEW as they tried to wage economic warfare against Germany and a lot of effort was put into the economic side of the diplomacy towards the neutrals and the methods that were used against Germany usually had an impact on them. For the Foreign Office they were also rather important, but during this time there

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20 Thomas Munch-Petersen, *The Strategy of Phoney War: Britain, Sweden and the Iron Ore Question 1939-40*, (Stockholm: Militarhistorika Forlaget), 85-6, 109, 252-4

21 Robert Fisk, *In Time of War Ireland, Ulster and the Price of Neutrality, 1939-45*, (London: André Deutsch, 1987), 167

22 Wylie, *Britain, Switzerland and the Second World War*, 11

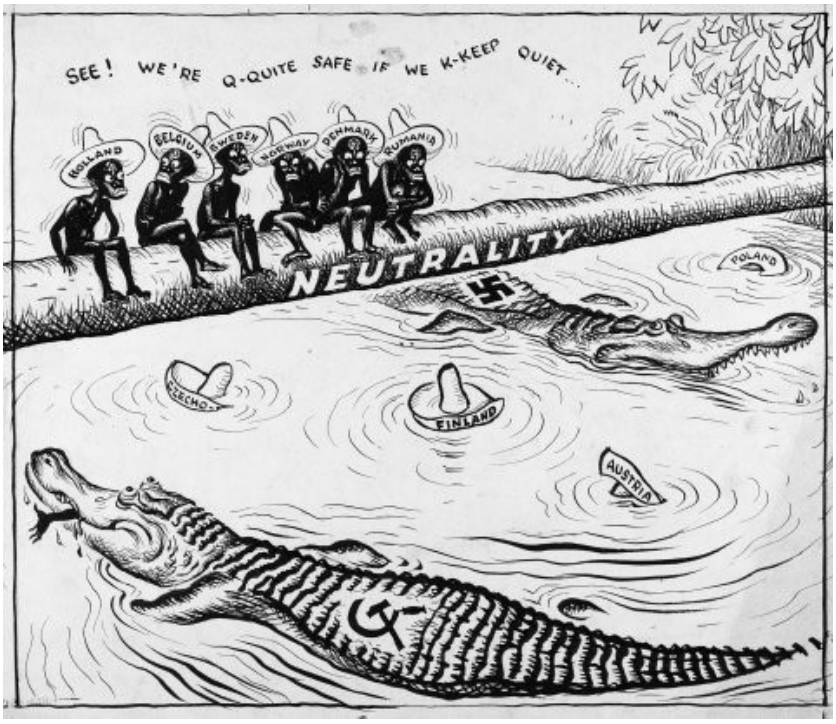
23 W.N. Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade, Volume I*, (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1952), 64

also had to be liaison with France and the other allies, as well as the larger and probably more important neutrals of the USA, the Soviet Union, Italy and Japan to consider, all at a time of war, uncertainty and sudden changes. Therefore the five neutrals discussed here, with the exception of Spain, were not consistently at the top of the Foreign Office's priorities except for brief periods.

The neutrals appeared on the agenda of the War Cabinet quite regularly, although again there were much bigger issues that occupied their time and so what was going on with the neutrals was only a minor sideshow, with the odd exception. Spain and Ireland cropped up throughout the time period and Sweden was a particular focal point in late 1939 and early 1940 as the government deliberated over what to do regarding the iron ore and Winter War questions. However, if a search is undertaken of the titles and descriptions of the War Cabinet records, then 'neutrals' appears just five times, 'neutrality' 22 times – but most of this regards the neutrality of an individual neutral or the United States – and 'neutral' 42 times. This is for the two year period of 1939 to 1941, when the British interest in the neutrals should have been at its peak. The names of all five neutrals appear at the same time in only two of the War Cabinet records for this period, and in these they are dealt with as separate items on the agenda rather than as a group. There also does not seem to have been any guidelines laid down for how to deal with the neutrals as a whole. The War Cabinet's discussions on the policy towards the neutrals therefore were completely about them as individual states rather than as a group.

This seems to have been indicative of the general attitude towards the neutrals. Britain found common themes amongst them that defined the British attitude – the neutrals were a little suspicious and morally suspect, but they were to be appeased if possible and only dealt with by force as a last resort. We can therefore see a 'group' bound together in the British eyes by their neutrality and by the British attitude towards them, which gives a certain degree of coherence. However, in terms of actual policy matters when they arose, the neutrals were dealt with within the British government on an individual basis and were taken out of the context of the neutrality 'group'. The exception to this would be when another neutral was involved, most usually Spain and Portugal or Sweden and the other Scandinavian states.

This cartoon from March 1940 exemplifies the British perception of the neutrals as being cowardly for choosing not to join the fight against the evil of Nazism (and, at that time, communism) with the neutral states quivering above the river that has consumed their fellows. The crocodiles presumably



refer to Churchill's phrase about 'each (neutral) hopes that if he feeds the crocodile enough, the crocodile will eat him last'. There is, however, no Spain, Portugal or Ireland in this cartoon.[24]

1.2 The Internal Contexts of the Neutrals

Britain and France declared war on Germany on the 3rd of September 1939 after Hitler had invaded Poland. The British dominions of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa joined in soon after. The British and French initiated the naval blockade of Germany on the same day.

Germany and the Soviet Union soon carved up Poland between themselves and the period known as the 'Phoney War' ensued, where very little was done militarily by either side. This afforded Britain, who had not been ideally prepared for the war, some breathing space and also allowed them to conduct diplomatic efforts towards the many European states which had stayed out of the conflict. The 'Phoney War' came to an end in April 1940 when Germany invaded Norway and Denmark, and then in May 1940 the Netherlands and Belgium were overrun. A disastrous period for Britain followed – the Maginot Line was circumvented, British troops were forced to evacuate mainland Europe at Dunkirk, Italy entered the war on the side of the Axis and lastly, on the 22nd of June, France capitulated. The British Empire was left alone against a seemingly-invincible Germany, and the continent was mostly under Axis domination. This made the survival of the few remaining neutrals in Europe especially remarkable and gave them added importance from a British strategic and economic perspective.

The most populous of the neutrals was Spain. The country had been involved in a bloody and divisive civil war – sometimes described as a precursor to, or even as the first part of, the Second World War – from 1936 until 1939. The right-wing forces of General Franco, who headed an alliance of sorts made up of monarchists, conservatives, religious right-wingers and members of the political far-right, had emerged victorious and Franco became Spanish dictator, combining the forces in his alliance into a political movement called the Falange. Franco had been greatly aided by Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy during the Civil War with the fascist leaders providing invaluable men, airplanes and equipment, but he had also been inadvertently helped by Britain and France who set up a Non-Intervention Committee which prevented the democratically-elected government of Spain

24 Leslie Illingworth, 'And Then There Were Six', *Daily Mail*, 15 March 1940

from buying arms to defend itself. Despite this, members of the Spanish regime looked on Britain and France with suspicion for their role – or lack of – in the Civil War.

Spain had been ravaged by the war and was in a poor state by the time the Second World War broke out. The railway system had been seriously damaged, there were shortages of key goods such as petrol and the population was broken after three years of war. There was also a desperate shortage of food and the Franco regime seemed unable to alleviate the problem – a popular Spanish joke at the end of 1940 was Hitler ordering the Spanish regime to arrange the starvation of England. When asked how they would do this, Hitler said 'export to England all (of) the Abastos organisation (the organisation responsible for administering food), and the country will be starving within a week'.[25]

Spain's Iberian neighbour was also under a right-wing dictatorship which was led by former professor Antonio de Oliveira Salazar. The wily Salazar had been Prime Minister since 1932 and had stabilised the volatile Portuguese economy as well as establishing the power of his regime, the *Estado Novo* (New State), which was based on corporatist lines and took inspiration from Mussolini. On the other hand, Portugal was allied to Britain – dating back to the late 14th century the alliance is the oldest in the world still in force – and Salazar was eager to keep out of the war.

Switzerland is probably the best known neutral country with its neutrality being officially established in 1815 and being recognised by the League of Nations in 1920. However, Switzerland pursued a policy of armed neutrality with a citizen militia ready to defend its borders and make any attack during the war not worth the cost for the belligerent involved. At one point during the war men under arms made up 20% of the total population.[26] During the war the Swiss used the idea of the 'National Redoubt' – a falling back to fortifications in the Alps to conduct an indefinite resistance against invasion. Switzerland also provided important railway tunnels between Germany and Italy which became critical after Italy's entry into the war; the Swiss planned to blow up these tunnels if invaded by the Germans, meaning that any attack could actually damage the Axis war effort. After Germany established itself in the Balkans these tunnels became less important but the German need for Swiss manufactures and the usefulness of Swiss financial facilities still made an attack on Switzerland undesirable.

Similarly to Switzerland, Sweden had a tradition of neutrality having not been involved in a war since 1814. Sweden also pursued a policy of armed neutrality with most of its army being sent up to the north of the country where Sweden's valuable iron ore mines were situated – a not-too-subtle hint that any attack on the country would lead to the Swedes destroying their own mines and thus taking out a very important resource. Despite its desire to stay out of the world war, Sweden was worried by the proximity of the 'Winter War' – the Soviet invasion of Finland that lasted from the end of November 1939 until March 1940 – and sent aid to its Scandinavian neighbour to help in the battle against the Bolshevik threat.

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25 Foreign Office (hereafter FO): Samuel Hoare to Viscount Halifax, 5 November 1940

26 Stephen P. Halbrook, *Target Switzerland: Swiss Armed Neutrality in World War II*, (Cambridge: Da Capo, 2003), 75

The fifth neutral, Ireland, had, of course, an antagonistic relationship with Britain dating back hundreds of years. Born out of rebellion against Britain, the Irish state – known as Eire in Irish and sometimes referred to as such in the secondary literature – saw the partition issue as a crucial barrier to better relations with Britain and refused to enter the war. Despite being a dominion of the Empire, and despite Churchill's protestations to the contrary, Ireland did not have to fight; the 1937 constitution stated that war had to be declared by the Dáil (the Irish parliament) rather than the King.[27] Relations between Britain and Ireland had, however, begun to improve before the war; ironically, one of the key moments in this softening of tensions would lead to calls for Britain to invade Ireland in the war. The Treaty Ports of Berehaven, Cobh (or Queenstown) and Lough Swilly had been retained by the British as part of the treaty that led to the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922 but were given back to Ireland in 1938. This allowed the Irish to stay neutral during the war as otherwise they would have been obliged to be a belligerent. The British were therefore unable to use these ports which were important for protecting the Atlantic, and this allowed German U-boats to disrupt Atlantic shipping. The vast majority of the Irish population supported the neutrality policy followed by Eamon de Valera, revolutionary hero and Taoiseach (Prime Minister).

The British were especially critical of the Irish decision to stay neutral; here, already-invaded neutrals can be seen telling de Valera, atop the donkey of 'neutrality at any price', that he is 'heading for the entrance' of the Nazi camp they are being held in.[28]

As can be seen, there were a few similarities between some of the neutrals but also many differences. As defined by Ogley above, Switzerland and Sweden both followed 'traditional neutrality', Spain and Portugal were 'ad hoc neutrals' whilst Ireland, although an unusual case, could probably be grouped into the 'traditional' category. Along similar lines, Switzerland, Sweden and Ireland were democracies whilst Spain and Portugal were right-wing dictatorships. However, the party in power in Ireland was conservative, in Sweden there was a national government from December 1939 but the Prime Minister was a left-winger whilst the Swiss system of a seven-member Federal Council with a rotating president presents difficulties in defining its political composition, but the presidents for 1940 and 1941 were both members of the liberal party. As dictators Salazar in

27 H McD. Clokie, 'International Affairs: The British Dominions and Neutrality', *The American Political Science Review*, 34, 4 (Aug 1940), 740

28 Leslie Illingworth, *Daily Mail*, 9 November 1940

Portugal and Franco in Spain exerted great control over their countries – although Franco's brother-in-law, Ramon Serrano Suñer, nicknamed the *cuñadisimo* ('super brother-in-law'), was also a very powerful politician – and the situation was similar in Ireland where de Valera was really the only political figure of note. In contrast, there was no single outstanding political figure in Switzerland and Sweden.

One similarity that can be found in the situation of the neutrals, admittedly to varying degrees, was the support for Britain amongst the general population. At the close of 1939 the British Embassy in Bern was reporting back to the Foreign Office that they had 'no doubt that 95% of the whole population are most anxious that the war should end in complete victory for the Allies'.[29] When it became clear that the war was not going to end quickly, opinion divided into two camps – the majority German Swiss detested the Nazis and sided with Britain, whilst the minority French Swiss sympathised with Marshall Pétain in Vichy and were rather defeatist.[30] In Sweden the British ambassador believed that when he arrived there in 1940 90% of Swedes supported Britain but as the war dragged on they became more fearful.[31] The Portuguese, especially the lower classes, were also found to be strongly pro-British.[32]

Sentiment for the British was not quite so widespread in Spain and Ireland, but people were more supportive of the British than the Germans there. In Spain, Samuel Hoare felt that in June 1940 'nine Spaniards out of ten believe that Hitler will win the war in three weeks' but the British view was also that most of the population were not pro-German.[33] In Ireland, the situation is probably summed up well by the story of a farmer saying at the outbreak of war that his ambition was to see Britain 'not bate, but nearly bate'.[34] Relations were tense between the two countries, especially regarding the partition issue, but much of the Irish population realised how closely linked they were to Britain economically and culturally, and many also had a relative working in or fighting for Britain during the war.

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29 FO: George Warner to Viscount Halifax, 30 December 1939

30 David Kelly, *The Ruling Few, Or The Human Background to Diplomacy*, (London: Hollis & Carter, 1952), 269

31 FO: Victor Mallet to Viscount Halifax, 8 July 1940

32 FO: Ronald Campbell to Anthony Eden, 4 March 1941

33 Samuel Hoare, *Ambassador on Special Mission*, (London: Collins, 1946), 31, FO: Maurice Peterson to Viscount Halifax, 8 January 1940

34 Tim Pat Coogan, *De Valera: Long Fellow, Long Shadow*, (London: Arrow Books, 1995), 521

1.2 British Strategic, Political and Economic Considerations and Aims Regarding the Neutrals

1.2.1 Spain

For Spain, the British aim was pretty clear: to keep them out of the war for as long as possible. Of the five neutrals, Spain was the most important case for the British to get right. Writing after the war, Winston Churchill would say that 'Spain had so much to give and even more to take away' and that 'Spain held the key to all British enterprises in the Mediterranean'.[35]

The geographical position of Spain at the mouth of the Mediterranean, with the important British naval base at Gibraltar at the foot, made it a critical country for British politicians, diplomats and military strategists. Had Spain joined or been forced into the Axis then Gibraltar would have fallen, upsetting the balance of power in the Mediterranean in favour of the Axis and severely damaging British contacts with the Empire in the Middle East. Furthermore, Gibraltar was an important port in terms of protecting Atlantic shipping and stopping German ships. Two less-mentioned points are that a neutral Spain was very important for North Africa and any hoped-for French revival there, and that North Africa was also a convenient area for if the Americans joined the war – as it proved to be with the British-American invasion of North Africa, Operation Torch, in November 1942.[36] A further minor point, but one that is also often overlooked, is that if the Mediterranean was cut off for Britain then it would have wider economic effects than just difficulties in contacting the Empire; for example, in June 1940 the Minister for Mines mentioned how if the Mediterranean should be shut for British shipping then the only markets Britain could sell their coal to would be in South America, Ireland and Portugal.[37]

There were certainly strong fears in Britain about the likelihood of Spain linking up with Germany, either voluntarily or by force. When Maurice Peterson was appointed as ambassador in February 1939 he was told by Robert Vansittart, the 'Chief Diplomatic Advisor', that the Spanish were 'very far committed to the Axis' and that no one would blame him if they did join.[38] Hugh Dalton

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35 Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War, Volume II: Their Finest Hour*, (London: Cassell & Co., 1949), 458-60

36 Denis Smyth, *Diplomacy and Strategy of Survival: British Policy and Franco's Spain, 1940-41*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3

37 War Cabinet (hereafter CAB): Memorandum: 'Coal Position 1st-15th June', 21 June 1940

joked that Peterson's successor Samuel Hoare put a ladder up against his garden wall every night in order to make a quick escape for when the Germans entered.[39]

The British were not overly confident that they could keep Spain out for the entirety of the war so their aim early on, and especially in the period immediately after the fall of France, was to postpone an eventual Spanish entry for as long as possible. Hoare defended the economic policy he was trying to formulate, which will be discussed later, saying that it did not mean approval of Franco – 'it means one thing and one thing only, namely, the most effective way of keeping Spain out of the war altogether if possible, and, if that is not possible, for as long a period as we can'.[40]

The British fears of Spanish entry into the war were not unfounded. Serrano Suñer, described by the British embassy as 'consistently defter, quicker to act, and more effectively ruthless than any of his enemies' and as 'the 'Eminence Grise' of the new Spain', was the effective head of the Falange and was openly supportive of the Axis.[41] After Franco he was by far the most powerful politician in Spain during this period, being Minister of the Interior, and thus responsible for the press and censorship, until October 1940 and then Minister of Foreign Affairs until September 1942. He visited Hitler in Berlin and Mussolini in Rome and was the most well-known proponent of entering the war in Spain, and as the second most important politician in the country his voice was certainly heard.

Furthermore, Franco and Hitler did actually meet to discuss possible Spanish involvement in the war at Hendaye on the French-Spanish border in October 1940. Obviously these discussions came to naught but there are two schools of thought on this event. The first, favoured in the official Spanish histories under Franco and by pro-Franco historians afterwards, is that Franco deliberately pushed for rewards that he knew Hitler would not be willing to give, namely territory in North Africa belonging to the Vichy regime, who at that point Hitler was wary of provoking. He thus managed to wheedle his way out returning the favour that the Germans believed he owed them after their help in getting him into power. This explanation sees the Caudillo as the wise and far-sighted leader. The second view, which is currently the most popular, is that Franco simply overplayed his hand and did want to join the Axis. At this point Hitler, although having failed to invade Britain, was still in a strong position and did not really need Spanish support, especially if it meant upsetting the more useful

38 Maurice Peterson, *Both Sides of the Curtain*, (London: Constable, 1950), 173

39 Ben Pimlott, ed., *The Second World War Diary of Hugh Dalton, 1940-45*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1986), 67

40 FO: Samuel Hoare to Viscount Halifax, 26 July 1940

41 FO: Enclosure by Arthur Yencken in 'Review of events since arrival', Samuel Hoare to Anthony Eden, 5 January 1942, FO: 'Leading personalities', Maurice Peterson to Viscount Halifax, 23 August 1939

Vichy.[42] Serrano Suñer certainly later believed that if Hitler had offered French Morocco in exchange for Spanish entry into the war then Franco would have accepted.[43]

The British diplomacy towards Spain must be read in this context – that even though the British were putting a lot of effort into Spain there were some factors that they just could not control. Of course the British did have some idea of what Franco was up to but none of their information was concrete. Smyth writes that Spanish non-belligerency was pretty much secured by the winter of 1940, after the Hendaye meeting, although obviously this is something that can only be said with confidence in hindsight and the British were not to know this so they continued to try and wean Spain off the Axis.[44]

Although the British had some economic considerations regarding Spain, particularly the need for wolfram (tungsten), by far the most important considerations for them were strategic ones based off Spain's geographical positions and their aim here was clearly to postpone Spanish entry into the war for as long as possible.

There was a real fear in Britain that Spain would join the Axis – this cartoon from May 1939 shows Franco and Japan being wooed by Hitler and 'Prince Mussolulu' (a portmanteau of Mussolini and a popular horse racing pundit of the time) whilst 'Democracy's Dark Horse' wanders off.[45]

1.2.2 Portugal

As mentioned earlier, Portugal had been in an alliance with Britain since the fourteenth century and could have been ended up on the British side, but both Britain and Portugal saw neutrality as the best policy.[46] According to Glyn Stone, the Foreign Office believed that 'a neutral Salazar exercised a restraining influence in Madrid, if not in Rome as well, and that if Portugal were required to adopt a

42 Wayne H. Bowen, *Spain During World War II*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 17

43 Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography*, (London: HarperCollins, 1993), 400

44 Smyth, *Diplomacy and Strategy of Survival*, 8

45 David Low, 'Undecided Backers', *Evening Standard*, 24 May 1939

belligerent status her present disarmed state would make her a military liability'.[47] A belligerent Portugal would have presumably panicked an already worried Franco regime in Spain too as the country could have acted as a launching ground for a British invasion of Iberia. Portugal's geographical position and especially the Atlantic islands would have had to have been taken into account as well, and entering the war would have given Germany – not that Hitler had a strong record of respecting neutral rights – a good cause to attack.

Keeping Portugal out of the war required a lot less effort on the part of Britain than keeping Spain out did because Salazar was equally keen to remain neutral and tried to follow international law regarding neutrality as closely as possible in this period, often to the consternation of British officials. Ronald Campbell, British ambassador in Lisbon from 1940 until 1945, wrote to the Foreign Office in June 1941 to say that Salazar would answer the alliance if called upon and expected Britain to do the same but until then he would be rigidly and strictly neutral.[48] There were therefore two other main aims that the British had with regards to Portugal. A third aim, to get the use of the Azores as a base for Allied military purposes, was also a target but most of this happened outside of the period studied here so will not be discussed.

The first aim was to use the better-disposed Portuguese regime to try and shore up the neutrality of the worrisome Spanish regime. This can be seen before the war, with Walford Selby, Campbell's predecessor, telling the Foreign Office in June 1939 that if 'we gave (Salazar) the necessary encouragement in substantial and effective support, he might exercise an influence in the Iberian Peninsula calculated to contribute to counter the pressure of the Axis Powers'.[49] Halifax told Selby in August 1939 that 'we would much prefer to try and draw Portugal into closer consultation upon our policy and interests in Spain' and to speak to Salazar regarding this.[50]

The second aim was economic and the goal was to reduce the supplies of wolfram available for the Germans. Wolfram was an important resource for the armaments industry and was used in the production of weapons such as armour-piercing shells. At this time around 37000 tons of wolfram was produced annually worldwide, with 3000 of that being produced in Portugal. The importance of Portugal for this resource can be seen in that the next biggest producer in Europe was Sweden which produced 300 tons a year.[51] With the British economic blockade working hard to stop

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46 FO: Viscount Halifax to Walford Selby, 4 September 1939

47 Glyn Stone, *The Oldest Ally: Britain and the Portuguese Connection, 1936-1941*, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1994, 131

48 FO: Ronald Campbell to Anthony Eden, 7 June 1941

49 FO: Walford Selby to Viscount Halifax, 15 June 1939

50 FO: Viscount Halifax to Walford Selby, 15 August 1939

51 Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade, Vol I*, 527

goods from the rest of the world making it to the Axis and especially when the entry of the Soviet Union stopped any wolfram coming in from the east, Portugal became especially important to the Germans as a way of getting the much-needed resource and therefore it was equally important to the British to try and stop this.

1.2.3 Switzerland

The British were happy to believe that the Swiss with their long history of neutrality had no interest in joining the war. The embassy in Bern wrote back to the Foreign Office at the end of the 1939 to say that the Swiss were very keen to stay neutral and 'will, if attacked, put up a strenuous resistance'.[52] In terms of geographical position and military considerations, Switzerland offered very little to Britain. Initially the British had France as an entry route to Germany and then with the fall of France and the entry of Italy into the war Switzerland was completely cut off. David Kelly, ambassador to Switzerland, wrote to the Foreign Office a year after Paris fell to say that 'in practically every respect the collapse of France has made all the preceding events as far as Switzerland is concerned matters of academic interest. Economically, Switzerland became overnight virtually dependent on German goodwill'.[53]

As a country Switzerland had very few raw materials but before the war Britain had been its second biggest customer after Germany.[54] Switzerland produced valuable manufactures that were needed for the war effort, a number of which were not attainable elsewhere, such as machine tools, fuses, watches and anti-aircraft guns, and after Dunkirk and the loss of a lot of military equipment armaments contracts with Swiss firms became a priority.[55] Wylie writes that 'while Britain's fate did not hinge on its access to Swiss manufacturing sources, it would clearly be wrong to underestimate the importance of these supplies'.[56] Of course, the surrender of France made it extremely difficult to get goods out of Switzerland and into Britain but this was still an aim, either through legal means that could go through the German counter-blockade or through smuggling. Later on in the war a new aim arose, to try and stop Swiss financial collaboration with the Nazis, but most of this falls outside of the time period of this thesis.

A second consideration that the British had to take into account regarding Switzerland was its value as an intelligence centre right in the heart of occupied Europe. Wylie writes that 'it is impossible to understand Switzerland's place in Britain's war effort without appreciating the

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52 FO: George Warner to Viscount Halifax, 30 December 1939

53 FO: David Kelly to Anthony Eden, 4 June 1941

54 Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade*, *Vol I*, 223

55 Wylie, *Britain, Switzerland and the Second World War*, 124-6

56 *ibid*., 127

importance London attached to its intelligence resources in Switzerland', and from summer 1940 until the end of 1942 the intelligence coming out of there was seen as so useful that the intelligence community in London effectively had the power of veto over the British policy in Switzerland.[57] Regarding things such as being a 'protecting power' – a state which represents the interests of another state in a third state - and help for British prisoners of war, which are often seen as being important aspects of Britain's relationship with Switzerland in the secondary literature, these are not applicable to this study. The Swiss only became Britain's 'protecting power' after the United States entered the war; up until that point the Americans had represented Britain in Germany and the other Axis states. Although the 'protecting power' aspect was an important consideration for the British, it only became so after the end-point of this study and thus will not be studied here.

Wylie says that with most of the other neutrals the British knew where their primary interests lay but with Switzerland it was quite ambiguous.[58] However, this does not seem quite the case – it was clear that Switzerland held little value to Britain in a strategic sense in the way that Portugal and especially Spain did, but Britain certainly had an interest in trying to keep economic channels open as long as possible and keeping the Swiss on side so that they could continue collecting information from Europe. Indeed, for Switzerland, it could be said that intelligence matters were the primary consideration for Britain.

1.2.4 Sweden

From a purely military strategy viewpoint Sweden was also not too important, being as it was in the heart of Scandinavia and then cut off from the rest of Europe once Germany took Norway and Denmark. However, in a similar way to Switzerland, Sweden did offer a few other reasons as to why it was worth dealing with.

The major consideration that took up the British government's time regarding Sweden was its iron ore mines in the far north of the country. In 1936 Germany had imported 72.6% of the Swedish iron ore and the British believed that even if the Germans got hold of the French mines in the Lorraine region they would still need the high quality Swedish iron ore in order to effectively wage war.[59] Britain thought that if they could therefore shut off or reduce supplies of the Swedish iron ore to Germany then it would be a severe blow to their enemy. Furthermore, Sweden also produced other valuable resources such as lead and zinc that were used by the Germans.[60] For their part, before the war Britain and France had imported a much greater amount of Swedish goods than the Germans had; in particular, Britain was by far the biggest importer of timber, wood pulp and

57 *ibid*., 267, 280-1, 299

58 *ibid*., 13

59 Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade*, *Vol I*, 141-2

60 *ibid*., 622

paper.[61] Of course, these were supplies that could be got elsewhere but Sweden was particularly convenient for Britain. Swedish ball bearings also played a perhaps surprisingly large role in the war, with Sweden providing 58% of German and 31% of British ball bearings, which were crucial in the armaments industry.[62] The United States could not supply enough ball bearings and so Britain had to continue to try and get them from Sweden, even when it became cut off, and according to Golson 'at various points hundreds of British tanks and up to 10% (1700 units) of all British aircraft production were awaiting Swedish bearings'.[63] In June 1940, with Sweden cut off, a British official in Stockholm was told by the Ministry of Supply that it was 'of paramount importance that we receive all the war stores on order in Sweden (ball-bearings, machine-tools, special steels, Swedish iron ore, etc. etc.) You must repeat must at all costs get them to England'.[64] This would lead to some dramatic blockade-running during the war.

The iron ore aspect was of great importance to Britain in the 'Phoney War' period and Churchill, then still First Lord of the Admiralty, pushed very hard on the point of stopping the exports to Germany. As far back as September 1939 he was telling the War Cabinet that 'it must be understood that an adequate supply of Swedish iron ore is vital to Germany, and the interception or prevention of these Narvik [a port in the Arctic Circle] supplies during the winter months…will greatly reduce her power of resistance'.[65] In January 1940 the Minister of Economic Warfare was telling his colleagues in the War Cabinet that 'the experts were agreed that a complete stoppage of Swedish iron ore would prove decisive in the long run' and the Minister for the Coordination of Defence said that 'an expert – an ex-industrial magnate of Czechoslovakia – had in fact stated that the complete stoppage of ore exports from the northern Swedish fields would ruin Germany within six months'.[66] This was not correct but it shows the importance at the time of the iron ore in the minds of the British government.

In April 1940, the British government authorised the mining of neutral Norway's territorial waters to force German freighters sailing from Narvik out into the open sea where they could be targeted by the Royal Navy. However, as this was being put into force the Germans invaded Norway and Denmark meaning that the plan had to be abandoned unfulfilled. In addition, Britain and France had also tried to involve themselves in the 'Winter War' that was being fought by Finland and the Soviet Union. Despite being greatly outnumbered the Finns were hanging on and had been appealing

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61 *ibid*., 142

62 Eric B. Golson, 'Did Swedish Ball Bearings Keep the World War Going? Re-Evaluating Neutral Sweden's Role', *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 60, 2 (2012), 165

63 *ibid*., 173

64 Ralph Barker, *The Blockade Busters*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1976)

65 CAB: Memorandum: 'Norway and Sweden', 29 September 1939

66 CAB: Conclusions, 31 January 1940, CAB: Conclusions, 25 January 1940

for help from Sweden and Britain and France. The two allies spent quite a while trying to work out what to do and eventually asked Sweden and Norway for permission to transport men across their territories to help Finland. This would provide an opportunity to secure the iron ore mines and interrupt supplies to Germany.[67] The Swedes and Norwegians unsurprisingly refused, and Finland soon signed a peace treaty that gave away territory. This damaged the chances of Britain being able to do anything physically about the iron ore mines, and this was completely gone when Norway and Denmark capitulated.

In March 1940 Victor Mallet, ambassador to Sweden, presumed that British policy would be to try and pursue normal trade with Sweden and 'at the same time we shall continue to rub in the shortsightedness from their own point of view of supplying more iron ore to Germany than can possibly be avoided'.[68] In addition he discussed the question of whether Britain's needs were best suited by pressure or persuasion; he believed that pressure could force Sweden into German arms but he thought that they would appreciate some praise for the help they had given to Finland and even better would be to sell them some war material.[69]

Another consideration for the British with Sweden was again like Switzerland – its value for gathering intelligence. Similarly to Switzerland, Sweden's position as a neutral state surrounded by countries nominally unfriendly to Britain made it an important intelligence centre for gaining information about Germany and its allies, as well as a base for linking up with resistance organisations in Scandinavia, northern Europe and Germany. Medlicott, writing in his book on economic warfare, saw military intelligence at the most valuable benefit to be gained from Sweden.[70] By October 1940, Mallet had realised that it was highly unlikely that Sweden would cut the iron ore supplies and said that 'it is as a centre of military intelligence that the advantages to our Service Departments of the survival of an independent Sweden are most evident'.[71] One of the results that came about from the intelligence received in Sweden was the sinking of the famous German battleship Bismarck in May 1941.[72]

Economic aims, and more specifically the reduction of iron ore to Germany, were the most important considerations for Britain regarding Sweden. The iron ore issue was hottest during the

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67 John Gilmour, *Sweden, the Swastika and Stalin: The Swedish Experience in the Second World War*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 42

68 FO: Victor Mallet to Viscount Halifax, 23 March 1940

69 *ibid*.

70 Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade, Vol I*, 617

71 FO: Victor Mallet to Viscount Halifax, 7 October 1940

72 Henry Denham, *Inside the Nazi Ring: Naval Attaché in Sweden 1940-1945*, (London: John Murray, 1984), 84-6

'Phoney War' period because after Norway and Denmark fell under Axis sway the British were pretty powerless to do anything with Sweden. However, they did retain hope of being able to reduce supplies somewhat. Furthermore, there were other raw materials that the British had an interest either in reducing the supply of to Germany or in getting for themselves. As time went by the British hopes of reducing the iron supplies decreased – although the hope was never given up – and the perceived importance of it decreased too. However, as this consideration went down, the intelligence aspect went up as Sweden became increasingly important in that respect. On the other hand, military and strategic considerations were negligible.

This cartoon, playing on *Oliver Twist*, sums up what Britain thought was going on in Sweden at the time – the baleful yet threatening Hitler being given more iron ore from helpless little Sweden under the guise of 'trade'. This is quite sympathetic towards Sweden but also shows how important this issue was in British minds at the time.[73]

1.2.5 Ireland

The fifth neutral, Ireland, was a bit of a different case from a British strategic point of view from the other neutrals. Obviously the British would have been happy to see the other four neutrals join them in their war against Germany – although a belligerent Portugal without a belligerent Spain may have been more of a hindrance than a help – but they were realistic in their view that this was very unlikely to happen and therefore concentrated their efforts in improving relations and the economic field. However, the British policy towards Ireland was to try and involve them in the war, at least in the early period before they realised quite how intransigent de Valera, and indeed the general population, was on this matter. Another major consideration was the need for better protection for shipping convoys in the Atlantic that were being sunk by German submarines; the Royal Navy with its bases at Plymouth and Milford Haven in Wales just could not cope. This led to the major British aim towards Ireland – gaining the use of the Treaty Ports of Berehaven, Cobh and Lough Swilly.

In October 1939, Anthony Eden, at this point still the Dominions Secretary and thus responsible for Ireland, gave the British representative to Ireland instructions to tell de Valera that 'it has now become imperative that we should escort our convoys both inwards and outwards to and from a position further to the Westward'.[74] The question of the Treaty Ports caused a lot of problems for the British and vexed a number of people considering Ireland's position as a dominion and that they had only given them away in 1938. The British press also portrayed it as a stab-in-the-back by

73 Sidney Strube, 'Adolf Twister Asks For More', *Daily Express*, 26 April 1940

74 CAB: 'Memorandum: The Need for Berehaven', 23 October 1939

the Irish.[75] Robert Fisk points out that the Germans had the British naval codes so they knew where the shipping was anyway, but does say that it 'remains undeniably true that a naval base at Berehaven *would* have given the British a wider radius of action for their anti-submarine operations in the Atlantic and provided the convoys with more regular and more frequent protection'.[76]

A further consideration the British had to take into account was Ireland's close proximity to Britain and the possibility that Germany might use Ireland as a stepping stone to an invasion. There were also even some fears that the IRA might act as a fifth column in Ireland and rise up to aid a German invasion, although this turned out to be rather unfounded and the Irish were quite effective at rounding up IRA members or stopping their activities. However, these strategic considerations meant that a secondary aim for Britain was to strengthen military ties between them and the Irish with the goal of setting up a joint defence plan, and for British and Irish intelligence to work together more closely. As far back as August 1938 Ireland had approached Britain to discuss cooperative security and intelligence measures; Wood calls the intelligence work carried out by Irish agents against the IRA and Germans 'the hidden side of the Irish state's neutrality'.[77] One final consideration which was important but which will not be looked at too explicitly in this essay as it falls outside of its main focus is the effect that Ireland could have on American political and public opinion at a time when Britain was hoping that Roosevelt would increase assistance and join the war. The fear of antagonising the United States through British actions against Ireland stymied London's hand and did affect their policy.

If the main considerations of the British government towards the neutrals were divided into two very basic groups of militarily strategic considerations and non-militarily strategic – economic, political and information – considerations, then Spain and Ireland would clearly fall into the first group whilst Sweden and Switzerland would fall into the second. Portugal is a bit more difficult to assess because it did have some strategic concerns, unlike Sweden and Switzerland, and the political considerations surrounding it – using Portugal to shore up Spanish neutrality – do have strategic connections, but the importance of the economic aspects probably mean that it is fairer to put it in the second group. Looking at it from this angle there is not much coherency in the five neutrals from the viewpoint of British considerations. In fact, the only real similarity is that the British had things to consider about all five neutrals but even this is not particularly coherent; for example, Spain was a much more important case than, say, Sweden.

In terms of the war itself, Britain was happy to see Spain, Portugal, Switzerland and Sweden – apart from a brief period where they thought the Swedes might get involved as part of the Winter War and help Britain stop the iron ore exports to Germany – stay out of the conflict and aimed at trying to improve relations and, in the case of Spain in particular, maintain the current

75 Joseph T. Carroll, *Ireland in the War Years*, (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1975), 24

76 Fisk, *In Time of War*, 250

77 Ian S. Wood, *Britain, Ireland and the Second World War*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 56-8

non-involvement, whereas for Ireland the British did want to see them actively involved in the war. It is true that Britain came to realise that it would be very difficult to convince the Irish to join them but they did retain hope right up until the American entry and the end period of this study, as will be discussed in the next section.

However, digging a bit further into the five countries, the similarities between Switzerland and Sweden are quite striking. They were both 'traditional' neutrals, and recognised as such, the last time they had been in a war was 1815 and 1814 respectively, they both had reasonable defences and, although no match for Germany, they would not be easily conquerable, they both had democratic governments and were well-developed economically and socially, they possessed no singular stand-out political leader unlike a number of European states at the time and they were both cut off from Britain after summer 1940 which meant that they became economically dependent on Germany but also provided a useful base for British intelligence activities in occupied Europe. In addition, one thing that Victor Mallet picked out as a reason for continuing activities in Sweden which is equally applicable to Switzerland was the value 'of the continued existence of a free democratic oasis in the totalitarian desert', which provided hope for the rest of Europe and showed that maybe Germany was not omnipotent.[78] Furthermore, the main considerations and aims of Britain with regards both countries were economic – iron ore for Sweden, valuable manufactured goods for Switzerland - and intelligence ones. In fact, it would seem that Switzerland and Sweden were remarkably coherent from a British diplomatic point of view – conditions 'on the ground' were pretty similar and so were the British aims – and so a similar diplomatic approach could be taken.

However, as has been mentioned, there were different departments with the British administration dealing with Sweden and Switzerland with, according to Wylie, different attitudes towards neutrality. The next section will look at the methods used by Britain with regards to the neutrals and their success, and so another comparison of Sweden and Switzerland can be made in that respect. A similar approach taken by two departments, or four if MEW is included, would indicate a good degree of coherence between these two neutrals.

If Switzerland and Sweden appear very similar in terms of context and British considerations and aims, then there are also some similarities between Spain and Portugal. An obvious one is their geographical positions neighbouring each other in the Iberian peninsula, but this also led to important strategic considerations for Britain. Furthermore, both countries were under the rule of authoritarian, right-wing, quasi-fascist dictatorships with rather wily characters at the head and neither state was in a position to fight a war. Both countries also had some wolfram deposits, although for this Portugal was far more important than Spain. On the other hand, in an economic sense Portugal was in a far better position than a Spain that had been torn apart by the civil war and was on the verge of famine. Moreover, Franco had friendly relations with Hitler and especially Mussolini, whilst Portugal had an alliance with Britain, albeit one that was not invoked. The British goal regarding both of them was for them to stay out of the war. For Spain the hope was that it would not join with the Axis, whilst for Portugal the British hoped that it could be used to shore up Spain whilst also helping them with the wolfram trade. Regarding Ireland, if Sweden and Switzerland can be linked together, and Spain and Portugal to some extent, then Britain's neighbour was the odd one out.

78 FO: Victor Mallet to Viscount Halifax, 7 October 1940

Overall, taking into account the individual backgrounds of the neutrals and the British diplomatic considerations and aims towards them, there is a lack of coherency between the five. There are some similarities between two, three, four of the neutrals but the only real things that were the same for all five were that they were all neutral, the general populations were more pro-British than pro-German and that the British did have things they wanted to achieve with all of them. The second section will look at the diplomatic methods the British used and how successful these were to see how similar the British approach was to these rather disparate states.

2. British diplomacy

2.1 The Infrastructure of British Diplomacy

The Foreign Office at this time was a well-established, major ministry but as has been mentioned there were different departments with different attitudes towards neutrality, which did not help the coherency of a British policy. Far less established was the Ministry of Economic Warfare which sprang into action at the outbreak of war. It was the spiritual successor of the Ministry of the Blockade, which had been a major aspect of Britain's First World War policy. The first Minister of Economic Warfare was Ronald Cross who was replaced by Labour politician Hugh Dalton in May 1940, who had also been an opponent of appeasement and who pushed for a tougher line against the neutrals. The planning for this ministry had begun in 1936 and it was equipped with a lot of information on Germany's economic status but as a new department most of the staff had little experience.[79] The methods available to MEW were various and will be looked at in more detail below.

79 Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade*, *Vol I*, 1

Medlicott writes that the very high expectations of economic warfare at the start of the war were misplaced and as MEW struggled to fulfil the hopes of the government its reputation decreased.[80] The staffing levels fluctuated quite wildly, with 886 staff in September 1939 rising to 1506 staff in June 1940 before falling to 915 in September 1940, presumably due to the fall of France, and then rising back up to 1209 in June 1941.[81] However, much of MEW's activities fell outside of the office and were rather in the embassies and consulates and naval patrols. Medlicott writes that 'one of the abiding problems of the department throughout the war (was) that its weapons were not directly controlled, or were only partially controlled, by the Minister'.[82] The Ministry of Economic Warfare was, however, the key department alongside the Foreign Office in terms of dealing with the neutrals, and may have even been more focussed on them than the Foreign Office, which had to deal with numerous other matters as well.

MEW and the Foreign Office did not always work too well together on matters. Dalton recalled speaking to R.A. Butler, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and telling him that the Foreign Office was too slow; in response, Butler said that MEW had 'the reputation in the Foreign Office of always hustling and brow-beating them upon the telephone, so that red-faced and flustered men rush into (Butler's) room saying that the Minister of Economic Warfare and his minions are on their tails again' and that his officials were not adequately knowledgeable on MEW's problems.[83] A second example highlighting the uneasy working relationship between the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Economic Warfare was Dalton secretly cultivating contacts with a Spanish republican organisation behind the backs of the Foreign Office, who knew nothing about it for quite a while and who did not want to be dealing with Spanish dissidents as it would cause a lot of trouble with Franco if it came out.[84] Considering that these were the two most important ministries regarding the neutrals, it did not bode well for a particularly effective or coherent policy.

Two other aspects of the British infrastructure worth looking at briefly were the Ministry of Information (MOI) and the War Cabinet. Like MEW, the Ministry of Information was a department set up specifically for the war and it was responsible for propaganda campaigns at home and abroad. There were four Ministers for Information during the period studied here, all of them Conservatives and one of whom was a former Director-General of the BBC. MOI suffered from a number of problems that hindered its effectiveness at the start of the war, such as the inexperience of the staff, a lack of enthusiasm for propaganda, disputes over exactly how propaganda should be divided between the Foreign Office and MOI and the lack of press attachés.[85]

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80 *ibid*., 43-4

81 *ibid*., 68, 463

82 *ibid*., 68

83 Pimlott, ed., *Second World Diary of Hugh Dalton*, 76

84 FO: Note by Hopkinson, 2 October 1940

The War Cabinet was the highest decision-making institution in the system and all major policies had to pass through it. Chamberlain's War Cabinet consisted of nine ministers, including Churchill. When he came to power, Churchill reduced it to five permanent members – initially the Conservatives Churchill, Chamberlain, Halifax and the Labour politicians Attlee and Greenwood. In addition, many other ministers would attend certain sessions if it was so required; for example, Dalton would attend if economic warfare matters needed discussing.

The final piece of the British infrastructure were the embassies themselves. Britain had well-established embassies in Madrid, Lisbon, Stockholm and Bern, but there was not one in Dublin. Amongst other things, the embassies dealt with the implementation of British policy, put British requests to local leaders and pushed for a friendly stance, and reported back to Whitehall what was going on within the countries.

One embassy, or rather ambassador, worth looking at is the Madrid embassy. Sir Samuel Hoare arrived in Spain as 'Ambassador on Special Mission' on the 1st June 1940. The previous representative, Maurice Peterson, had been recalled because the Foreign Office was unhappy with his achievements there and complaints had been made against him, although he denied being in the wrong and criticised London in his memoirs.[86] In the 1930s Hoare had been one of the rising stars in the Conservative Party and was appointed Foreign Minister in 1935 but he is probably best known for the 'Hoare-Laval Pact' of December of that year, an abortive agreement that offered to carve up Abyssinia as an appeasement measure towards Mussolini and which forced his resignation. With his political ambitions in potential ruin, Hoare had brief spells at the Admiralty, Home Office and the Air Ministry and he was also known as a big supporter of Chamberlain's appeasement policy. He was not a particularly popular figure. Dalton, who called him 'Slimy' Sam, mocked his arrogance - 'he was sure that if the Germans entered Spain they would regard him as their most important capture. 'After all, I am a British ex-Foreign Secretary'' – and Alexander Cadogan, undersecretary at the Foreign Office, thought that the only upside to him being sent to Madrid was that there was a good chance of him being shot.[87] Indeed, Cadogan went so far as to say that Hoare would be 'the Quisling of England when Germany conquers us and I am dead'.[88]

This therefore leads into one of the two theories about Hoare's appointment – that the government just wanted to get rid of him.[89] There is certainly some accuracy in this, but the second theory, put forward by his biographer, is that the government needed a prestigious figure as their

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85 Robert Cole, *Britain and the War of Words in Neutral Europe, 1939-45: The Art of the Possible*, (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1990), 2-8

86 Maurice Peterson, *Both Sides of the Curtain*, (London: Constable, 1950), 228-231

87 Pimlott, ed., *War Diary of Hugh Dalton*, 66-7, David Dilks, ed., *The Diaries of Alexander Cadogan, 1938-1945*, (London: Cassell & Co., 1971), 287

88 Dilks, ed., *Diaries of Alexander Cadogan*, 287

ambassador in a Spain that they were becoming increasingly worried about.[90] Between the two theories probably lies the truth – the government did send other heavyweights to important missions, such as Stafford Cripps to the then-neutral Soviet Union and Halifax to the then-neutral United States, and they just happened to have an unemployed big-hitter who could have caused some trouble lying around – but there is a third consideration that has not been put forward in the historiography and could be rather indicative of British policy towards Spain.

As mentioned, Hoare was a known supporter of appeasement and, indeed, his removal from the War Cabinet had been a necessity to secure Labour's involvement in Churchill's national government. Although this was a disadvantage for Hoare in Britain, this was actually an advantage in Spain. To the Spanish it represented that the British were willing to appease them and there would be no trouble from London. The Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs told the departing Peterson that in Hoare 'he would gladly welcome not only a very distinguished man but one who had consistently and courageously taken the right lines both on Abyssinia and towards Spain', the reference to Spain being because he had supported the Nationalists during the civil war.[91]

This relates to the British policy firstly in that it shows that Spain was the most important of the five neutrals from a British point of view. The other neutrals got changes of ambassadors at various points too, but they were all career diplomats - none were a former Foreign Secretary. The only other appointment worth mentioning is that of John Maffey, a former governor-general of Sudan and undersecretary of state for the Colonies, who was brought out of retirement to be the 'British Representative to Ireland'. Unfortunately there is not too much in the primary sources on the actual reasons behind Hoare's appointment, and the two main theories mentioned above are certainly true to some extent, but if his appeasement background was indeed a conscious factor in London's decision then it can tell us two things - firstly, that the British wanted to appease the neutrals, or at least Spain, and secondly that they were taking into account the individual contexts of the neutrals. The appointment of an ambassador known to have been pro-appeasement would have been thought to have had a positive impact on the relatively new, inexperienced and fearful Franco regime – as indeed it did, as evidenced by the remarks above –whereas it was less necessary, and perhaps would have backfired, in the more established, settled countries like Sweden and Switzerland for whom appeasement had clearly failed.

In terms of the actual British diplomacy, three aspects will be studied – propaganda, inducements and economic warfare. These were the main areas in which the British diplomats interacted with their neutral counterparts and were the most important aspect of the diplomatic effort. There were other areas of British focus that were important, such as the intelligence work that was especially valuable in Sweden and Switzerland or the work of the Special Operations Executive; however, these

89 Richard Wigg, *Churchill and Spain*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 8

90 J.A. Cross, *Sir Samuel Hoare, A Political Biography*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977), 322

91 FO: Maurice Peterson to Viscount Halifax, 27 May 1940, Jill Edwards, *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*, (London: MacMillan, 1979), 23, 101-2

aspects were not 'diplomatic' as such and did not involve the usual diplomatic channels, and so they will not be a part of this thesis. Bribery will be studied, however, because this heavily involved the Foreign Office and British embassy in Madrid. Smuggling and blockade running also feature because, although not strictly 'diplomatic', they were important aspects of the economic warfare campaign.

2.2 Propaganda

British propaganda towards the neutrals can be divided up into two categories – 'traditional' propaganda, such as new bulletins, broadcasts and reports, and 'untraditional' propaganda, which covers cultural propaganda and word-of-mouth propaganda.

Propaganda was a key part of the British diplomacy towards the neutrals and, indeed, the neutrals were the main markets for British propaganda as it was here that opinion could be really swung and have an effect. On the eve of war, the Foreign Office, because the Ministry of Information had not yet been formed, told the embassies that 'the first objective of your propaganda should be to stress the ethical argument of the struggle, showing Britain as the champion of smaller and weaker peoples who wish only the right to lead their lives. The second objective should be to stress the material as well as moral strength of the Allies'.[92] By January 1940 MOI's main theme throughout Europe was the certainty of allied victory, and the propaganda also tried to impress upon the neutrals the German threats and broken promises, the ideological similarity between Germany and the Soviet Union ('communazism'), the poor conditions in occupied Poland and the economic strength of Britain.[93]

Despite the big variations in the neutral countries, Britain did try and find some broad themes that could encompass Britain and the neutrals but not Germany. Perhaps the main initial one was the theme of Christianity and how Britain was fighting to uphold Christian values against the godless Nazis. This should have had a particularly powerful effect in the strongly Catholic states of Spain and Portugal, but Robert Cole, the main writer on wartime propaganda and the neutrals, writes that this did not work out entirely as planned because the Spanish saw Britain as anti-Catholic and therefore anti-Christian.[94] Other early common themes that the British developed were that they were protecting the economic well-being of the neutrals, the necessity of the blockade and how Britain was not using it to damage the neutrals but to damage Germany, and that Britain was fighting to protect the rights of small states.[95] Cole also writes that the British initially aimed to display British trustworthiness by faithfully reporting British losses in combat; this policy had to change when

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92 Robert Cole, 'The Other 'Phoney War': British Propaganda in Neutral Europe, September-December 1939', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 22, 3 (July 1987), 459

93 CAB: 'Memorandum: Propaganda January-February 1940', 5 March 1940

94 Cole, 'The Other 'Phoney War'', 461

95 *ibid*., 462, Cole, *Britain and the War of Words*, *9*

Britain continued to lose battles and was in danger of being invaded.[96] Of course, propaganda changed as the war changed – anything linking Nazi Germany with the Soviet Union had to be dropped after Operation Barbarossa, for example – but common themes such as British resilience and economic strength were constants throughout.

It can be seen here that the British did have some guidelines for their propaganda towards the neutrals and developed some common themes of how to approach it. However, due to the big differences in the contexts of the neutrals there was some tailoring to fit individual countries; the propaganda effort was not a 'one size fits all' policy.

In Spain Hoare sought to capitalise on what he saw as the xenophobic character of the Spanish by making much of the German menace on their borders, and told the Foreign Office that he was working along the lines of approaching the Spanish 'as friends who have tried to understand their personal characteristics and their national history'.[97] In Portugal the British realised that one of the key points there was rearmament and the Portuguese fear that they were not adequately prepared for war and, although difficult for Britain who needed all the armaments they could get, they did place them higher in the priority list and they hoped that this message would get out to the population.[98] In Ireland the British press attaché John Betjeman, who would go on to be poet laureate, focussed on pushing the message that Britain was not anti-Irish and tried to influence Catholics by using Papal speeches and Radio Vatican broadcasts, as well as asking the BBC to broadcast more ecclesiastical news.[99] Incidentally, Betjeman was seen as doing such a good job in Ireland – Corse writes that 'he was to show the Irish that not all the British were die-hard imperialists' – that the IRA planned to assassinate him; this was called off when a poetry-loving IRA leader heard of the plot.[100]

One of the main methods of propaganda was simple news bulletins or papers produced by the British in which the British reported the news and conduct of the war as they saw it. In Spain and Switzerland these were particularly successful. Kelly, the ambassador in Switzerland, recollected that the bulletins, which were published two to three times a week, had a circulation of 80000 copies – the limit placed by London for economic reasons – which was higher than any Swiss newspaper.[101] In Spain the twice daily bulletins produced of BBC news were passed from Spaniard to Spaniard and apparently were even sold on the black market; again, this meant that the effective circulation was

96 Cole, *Britain and the War of Words*, 9

97 FO: Samuel Hoare to Anthony Eden, 24 February 1942

98 FO: Walford Selby to Viscount Halifax, 8 Jan 1940, 23 Jan 1940, CAB: 'Memorandum: Situation in Portugal', Halifax, 11 May 1940

99 Edward Corse, 'British Propaganda in Neutral Eire after the Fall of France, 1940', *Contemporary British History*, 22, 2 (2008), 164-5, 170

100 *ibid*., 169, Kingsley Amis, 'Betjeman, Sir John (1906–1984)', rev. M. Clare Loughlin-Chow, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2009)

higher than any native newspaper.[102] The growth of German power on the continent and especially the fall of France made it increasingly difficult for propaganda produced in Britain to make it through to the neutrals, so simple news bulletins that could be made and distributed from the embassies became very important. Other methods included sending information and photographs for use in newspapers in the neutral countries, BBC broadcasts targeted at the specific countries and things such as newsreels – the Stockholm embassy reported the Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs as seeing one and saying it was 'excellent'.[103] Films were the epitome of a 'one size fits all' approach but they only became available on a reasonable scale after 1941.[104]

In the second category of 'untraditional' propaganda, cultural propaganda and the work of the British Council was a very important aspect. This has only been studied by Edward Corse, in his recent book on the topic, and so much of the information in this section will come from that. The British Council aimed to promote British culture abroad and for the war it only really operated in Spain, Portugal and Sweden – its access to Switzerland was restricted and it, perhaps strangely, saw little point in entertaining the 'hostile population' of Ireland.[105] The Council's main focus was on the elites in the neutral countries and it set up events such as lecture tours, art exhibitions and language classes, and although a 'one size fits all' approach was not entirely possible there were a surprising number of similarities in what they did in each neutral because of the similar intended audience.[106] On the other hand, like the 'traditional' propaganda discussed above, there was a tailoring to the audience – a post-war director said that 'the Council was acutely aware of the existing sociological conditions of each country and the differences which needed to be taken into consideration to make its cultural propaganda effective – and (it) attempted to be 'chameleon-like''.[107] Corse writes that economic and resource constraints meant that a 'one size fits all' approach was desired and was indeed often possible, but that the tailoring of propaganda to local audiences 'was often the element that made the Council's message heard above the whispering galleries of the neutral capitals of Europe and above the more highly resourced (cultural propaganda) campaigns of Germany and

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101 Kelly, *The Ruling Few*, 275

102 Hoare, *Ambassador on Special Mission*, 135

103 FO: Victor Mallet to Viscount Halifax, 7 October 1940

104 Edward Corse, *A Battle for Neutral Europe: British Cultural Propaganda During the Second World War*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 119

105 *ibid*., 33, 44

106 *ibid*., 7, 35, 87-8

107 *ibid*., 88

Italy'.[108] It is hard to define the success of the Council's cultural propaganda, but from this it would seem that it was when the British approached the neutrals as individuals that it was at its most successful.

Part of the reasoning behind targetting the elites was because it was a good way to get word-of-mouth propaganda across. Lectures and cultural events provided a setting for British officials to talk to leading members of the neutral population face-to-face which they hoped would set off a chain reaction, as these elites spoke to their friends and so on, achieving a trickle-down effect to the lower segments of the population.[109] This word-of-mouth propaganda was also used to good effect by Betjeman in Ireland, who was nothing to do with the British Council, suggesting that this was a method which the British were keen to try in all the neutrals and which was a success everywhere.[110]

It would seem that the British approach to propaganda was relatively similar everywhere. The main methods involved the dissemination of news and war information through bulletins, papers or BBC broadcasts, and cultural propaganda which was less tangible but tried to draw the elites closer to Britain. There was not really any particular method that stands out as being used in only one place – not everything was used everywhere but this was usually due to factors outside of Britain's control – and the British did try and keep things as close to a homogenous policy as possible. The 'traditional' propaganda was more coherent than the 'untraditional' propaganda mostly because the British Council was unable to work in Switzerland and did not work in Ireland. However, 'word-of-mouth' propaganda was a big success in Ireland.

However, on a more specific level, the actual propaganda itself varied from place to place. This is not really surprising, and propaganda intended for Switzerland just would not have worked in Spain, for example. It seems that specially tailored propaganda was the most effective, and over time the British officials tasked with propaganda matters, both in Whitehall and on the ground, developed it as they found out about the quirks of the countries in question. We can therefore see that there were two visions of the neutrals regarding propaganda – on a more general, theoretical level they were a coherent group in which the same types of propaganda with common themes would be used, but on the actual level of the content of the propaganda itself they were treated as individuals. Regarding the effectiveness of the propaganda, however, the British could have had the best in the world and it would not have mattered had the war been going against them – propaganda could only have a certain degree of effect on the neutrals; it was the conduct and flow of the war that had the greatest effect on their opinion.

2.3 Inducements

108 *ibid*., 127, 172

109 *ibid*., 108

110 Corse, 'British Propaganda in Neutral Eire', 165-6, 175

Another aspect of British diplomacy was the inducements it offered to the neutrals to try and improve relations and gain benefits from them. Whilst propaganda often had a direct effect on the population of a state, with its effect on the government being more indirect, these inducements usually directly targetted the leadership of the neutrals. The hope was that by offering something – whether that be territorial concessions, money, reassurances or cooperation – the British would be able to gain something in return. These inducements could only really be applied to the neutrals as there was not much that could be offered to those countries already under Nazi domination, and if there was it was extremely unlikely that it would be able to have any impact.

Inducements do raise problems regarding the coherency of the neutrals as usually they were focussed on a specific neutral. However, this was really the nature of them; for example, a joint defence plan might have worked with Ireland but it would have been impossible with, say, Switzerland. This highlights the difficulties with regards seeing the neutrals as a group, both from the British perspective at the time and from a historical perspective for this essay. Although economic inducements were certainly an important part of British policy these will be discussed in the economic warfare section following.

The first case worth looking at has already been mentioned somewhat, and that was the British desire to use Portugal and Salazar to improve terms with Spain and Franco. As has been mentioned, these thoughts were already in British minds before the war began. This aspect does not really get dealt with adequately in the secondary literature on the topic, and contemporaries of Hoare criticised the 'Ambassador on Special Mission' for not giving the Portuguese due credit for their help in his memoirs.[111] Britain sent a memorandum to Salazar personally in May 1940 asking him to secure assurances from Spain and saying that they had 'always recognised that the personal influence of the head of the Portuguese Government is the strongest factor making for peace in the Peninsula'.[112] In July 1940 the Spanish and Portuguese added a protocol to their non-aggression pact which recognised Portugal's alliance with Britain. The protocol reassured the Spanish, and Hoare wrote that it was very important coming as it did at a time of high anxiety, and suggested that Churchill write a letter of thanks to Salazar.[113] These approaches had been targetted at the highest level of the Portuguese regime, Salazar himself. The British were unable to offer anything tangible in return for the Portuguese help, but a shoring up of the Franco regime certainly helped Portugal and made the Portuguese feel safer in the peninsula. The British, Spanish and Portuguese also signed an economic pact, but this will be dealt with in the section on economic warfare. Nevertheless, this was also very important – David Eccles wrote that 'the single most effective action, the one that gave Franco the most powerful and easily understood reason for not entering the war, was the Tripartite Agreement'.[114] However, this should be read with the knowledge that Eccles was the official behind the agreement.

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111 David Eccles, *By Safe Hand: Letters of Sybil and David Eccles 1939-42*, (London: The Bodley Head, 1983), 103

112 FO: 'Memorandum for Salazar' in Walford Selby to Viscount Halifax, 23 May 1940

113 FO: Samuel Hoare to Viscount Halifax, 15 August 1940, Samuel Hoare to Viscount Halifax, 31 July 1940

There was not really an opportunity for Britain to do something like this elsewhere. The closest was the issue regarding the Winter War and the Scandinavian countries when Britain asked Sweden and Norway for permission to transport troops across their territory, nominally to help Finland but also with the intention of securing the Swedish iron ore mines. This offer was rebuffed and had a negative effect on how the Swedes viewed Britain.[115]

The Portuguese-Spanish pact was a big achievement for Britain and did a lot to help London achieve its aim of keeping Spain out of the war. What makes it particularly interesting for this essay is that it was really the only occasion that Britain used one neutral as part of its policy towards another neutral. That this did not happen elsewhere was due to the impossibility of doing so and of course it helped that Spain and Portugal were close geographically, politically and culturally, but it does show that Britain was able to conceive of the neutrals as more than just individuals. In this respect, in the British eyes the neutrals could be seen as a group. On the other hand, the fact that this was only able to happen once again highlights the differences between the five neutrals in their own contexts.

The pact also shows that the British were willing to use a neutral for their aims with regards another neutral or wider policy, as opposed to using them for their own aims in terms of getting tangible strategic or economic benefits from that neutral for Britain. The Swedish example can also go some way to supporting this idea, as Britain was using Sweden to not only gain benefits from Sweden but also from Finland in terms of stopping them falling under Soviet rule, and was using Norway and Finland to gain benefits from Sweden. However, this was less well thought out and much harder to pull off than the Portuguese-Spanish pact. Nevertheless, it does again show that the neutrals were not simply viewed as unconnected individuals by London.

Something that again highlights the importance of Spain was the bribery of some prominent Spaniards in the hope that they would combat the pro-intervention elements of the Franco regime led by Serrano Suñer. This is something that is not really dealt with in much of the secondary literature but that is because the full details of the operation have only recently become available. The scheme began in June 1940 when Hoare feared that the 'swing away from neutrality (was) gathering momentum and (he felt) that the time has come to take immediate action to check it'.[116] Although there were some thoughts within the Foreign Office that Hoare was overstating the danger, around £10m – a lot of money in 1940 when a war was being fought – was authorised to be sent to the leading Spaniards as chosen by the British officials in Madrid, who included Franco's brother and ambassador to Portugal, Nicolas, and a number of leading generals.[117] In an interview well after the war, David Eccles, by then Lord Eccles, who had been involved in the operation intriguingly answered 'not from us' when asked if Franco himself received any money.[118] Soon after the operation began Hoare wrote back to London saying that he had 'reason to believe that the arrest of plotters against

114 Eccles, *By Safe Hand*, 103

115 FO: 'Political Survey of Sweden for 1940', Victor Mallet to Anthony Eden, 18 February 1941

116 FO: Samuel Hoare to Viscount Halifax, 4 June 1940

117 FO: Commander Furse to Viscount Halifax and Winston Churchill, 26 June 1940

Franco's Government was not a little due to our action' and in May 1941, after Franco removed Serrano Suñer from office as Minister of the Interior, he said 'no doubt you have realised that the political changes here are directly due to (the) secret plan'.[119] Serrano Suñer did become the Minister for Foreign Affairs afterwards but his influence had been curtailed and he played a decreasingly important role in politics. It is hard to define the exact success of this operation, partly because there is no explicit evidence for its exact role in what happened and partly because there were other factors at play, but the Madrid embassy certainly thought it had been successful. One of the generals bribed did, however, end up leading the volunteer 'Blue Division' that Spain sent to fight against the Soviet Union.

No mentions of bribery or anything similar appear in the sources for the other neutrals, although this does not mean that it was not considered. It was something that could have been applied to the other countries if it had been needed, even cut-off Switzerland, as Swiss banks were used in this scheme. However, it was probably not necessary with regards to the other countries and this reinforces the idea that Spain was the case which was particularly worrying for the British. It also shows just how important it was to try and keep Spain on-side using whatever means possible; £10m was an awful lot of money for a scheme that really had no guarantee of success and could have backfired.

Another aspect is Britain offering tangible benefits such as territory to the neutrals, notably a few hints towards Spain regarding Gibraltar and North Africa and suggestions towards Ireland about sorting out the problem of partition. Regarding the other neutrals there were not really any outstanding issues with the Swedes, Swiss or Portuguese that could be resolved in this way and none of the countries seemed to desire anything anyway.

Gibraltar was, and still is, a sticking point in Anglo-Spanish relations but Hoare recognised that Morocco was probably even more important to the Franco regime, many of whom, including Franco and his Minister for Foreign Affairs, had been stationed there.[120] The War Cabinet was of the opinion that not much could be done regarding Morocco because of the trouble it would cause with General de Gaulle – in a similar way to how Hitler had been unable to meet Franco's demands for fear of alienating Vichy – but Hoare was authorised to tell the Spanish that the future of Gibraltar could be discussed after the war.[121] However, not too much effort was put into this and Smyth says that it would probably have had little effect on the suspicious Spanish regime anyway.[122]

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118 'Politics is OK and I Love Power, But When it Comes to the Point I Prefer the Girl', Interview with Lord Eccles by Terry Coleman, *The Guardian*, 15 January 1983

119 FO: Samuel Hoare to Viscount Halifax, 21 June 1940, Samuel Hoare to Anthony Eden, 10 May 1941

120 FO: Samuel Hoare to Viscount Halifax, 13 September 1940

121 CAB: 'Memorandum: Spain, Gibraltar and Morocco', 28 September 1940

122 Smyth, *Diplomacy and Strategy of Survival*, 44-9, 205-6

With Ireland discussions centred around getting the use of the Treaty Ports and the idea of offering to end partition was mooted as a way of convincing de Valera to enter the war and allow Britain to use the ports. Of course, this was a very delicate issue, especially considering the role Northern Ireland played in terms of manpower and industry, particularly the Belfast shipyards. Malcolm MacDonald, former Dominions Secretary, was given the unenviable task of trying to bring de Valera into the war in June 1940 and suggested the principle of a united Ireland to be sorted out once the war was won; unsurprisingly, de Valera refused and said he wanted a united, neutral Ireland to be immediately formed and which could be used by perhaps American ships and troops but not British.[123] De Valera seemed like he might have been willing to accede to Britain's suggestion if a united Ireland came into being immediately but MacDonald said that this was not possible.[124] The issue was put on the backburner again but seemed to reappear with the American entry into the war, when Churchill sent a top secret message to de Valera saying 'now is your chance. Now or never. 'A nation once again'. Am very ready to meet you at any time'.[125] This has been interpreted by a number of people as another offer of unification, but it apparently referred to Ireland now being able to enter the war in good conscience.[126] De Valera was one of those who took it as meaning an offer of unification, but did not believe it would actually happen and turned it down.[127]

For both Spain and Ireland, these offers from London were not exactly concrete and were rather flimsy suggestions amid vague mentions of sorting them out 'after the war'. However, that the British were even prepared to countenance things such as giving away Gibraltar or Northern Ireland shows their desperation at certain points of the war, their willingness to try unusual methods and perhaps an underhanded side to their diplomacy. Obviously it will never be known whether, if they had made a concrete proposal, the British would have kept their word. It is also interesting that this method was used regarding two very different neutrals, suggesting that it was seen as a useful strategy. That it was not used regarding the other neutrals was not down to British policy, more to do with the fact that there was really nothing that they could offer – it was based on the context of the neutral rather than the British attitude or diplomatic policy towards them. This suggests some coherency on the part of the British regarding the methods they were willing to use, but not on the part of the contexts of the neutrals themselves.

2.4 Economic Warfare

123 Joseph T. Carroll, *Ireland in the War Years*, (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1975), 50

124 *ibid*., 50-3

125 *ibid*., 111

126 Wood, *Britain, Ireland and the Second World War*, 60-1

127 *ibid*., 60-1

Economic warfare was probably the most powerful weapon in the British diplomatic armoury due to the strength of the Royal Navy and the ability of the British to control worldwide shipping. The economic blockade had been a big success in World War I and, as mentioned, in 1939 perhaps too much was expected of it. The official definition set out by the government in July 1939 said that 'the aim of economic warfare is so to disorganise the enemy's economy as to prevent him from carrying on the war'.[128]

The pre-war plans of the Ministry of Economic Warfare had defined three categories of 'economic warfare' – legislative action, which meant controlling commercial and financial activities within their own territory, diplomatic action, meaning controlling the activities of the neutrals, and military action, which consisted of attacking the enemy directly or interfering with imports. Although the third category could affect the neutrals, the second category is the key one regarding the neutrals and within it some of the methods available included negotiations and quotas, forcible rationing, statutory listing (also known as blacklisting) whereby a company that was 'listed' was prevented from trading with British companies, financial pressure and the use of outside organisations such as insurance firms, whereby companies or shipping would not be allowed to be insured.[129] This already gives a degree of coherence to the British economic warfare aspect, as they already had an overall, general plan that was applicable to the neutrals.

Before going on to look at how Britain dealt with the neutrals economically, a brief overview of the mechanisms of the economic blockade will be given. One of the key aspects of the blockade was the navicert system, in which certificates were provided to neutral ships which specified the cargo to show that they were not transporting goods that would be in contravention of the War Trade Agreements or quota systems that the British had set up. These came into operation on 1st December 1939 and made things much quicker for shipowners as if the ship had a navicert it no longer had to spend as much time being searched. However, after all the upheaval of summer 1940 this system no longer worked adequately and it was decided that it was necessary to make navicerts compulsory for all, including the Americans, and this system came in at the end of July.[130] Shipowners had to apply for a navicert at the port of departure and any ship found on the sea without a navicert could be seized. This made the control of what was entering Europe much tighter and allowed Britain to ration the neutrals much more effectively.

Another aspect of the blockade that does not receive as much attention was ship warrants, which allowed ships to use British facilities, including insurance, which were given to owners who had said they would do what Britain required and respect their regulations.[131] This system began in conjunction with the universal navicert system in July 1940. If a ship misbehaved then the warrant would be taken away from the owner, so that all of his ships would not be able to use British

128 Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade*, *Vol I*, 1

129 *ibid*., 17-8, 21-2

130 *ibid*., 431-6

131 *ibid*., 442-5

facilities. Medlicott writes that 'it must always be remembered that the ship-warrant system was of importance not only for economic warfare purposes, but also for the securing of tonnage and for the furthering of other sides of Allied shipping policy'.[132]

Britain tried to get War Trade Agreements sorted with the neutrals early on in the war, with the exception of Ireland because they were a dominion. The agreements were economic treaties that decided which products the neutrals could import and export and set out trade limits with the belligerents, often limiting the neutral to exporting and importing goods with Britain and Germany to 1938 levels. The first War Trade Agreement was signed with Sweden in December 1939 and, as an example of the system, its two main provisions were that Britain would not block reasonable overseas imports so long as Sweden did not re-export them to Germany and that Sweden was able to export its 'normal trade', which meant up to the 1938 level.[133] Agreements with Switzerland – for whom the French were responsible for the negotiations with, although the British ended up becoming disappointed with the French efforts – and Spain were signed in spring 1940. With Portugal and Salazar things were more frustrating, and although negotiations began in October 1939 it was not until January 1941 that an agreement, and then only in principle, was arrived at. A proper agreement was not signed until November 1942. The neutrals usually signed War Trade Agreements with the Germans too. Going against their War Trade Agreement could be seen as an infringement of neutrality and would bring about protests from the belligerent who got a disadvantage from it.

Quotas were not set in stone and were often subject to change as the situation in the neutrals and in the war in general changed. Sometimes it would appear that a neutral really needed more goods for whatever reason, or MEW had reason to believe that it was sending too much or feared that products might find their way to other countries. The seizing of resources stockpiled by other neutrals by the Germans upon invasion also worried the British who did not want to inadvertently help Hitler's war machine by providing too much to a neutral which would then be consumed into the Axis.

It was especially important to achieve the right balance in Spain between sending enough goods to keep them on side and make the regime reliant on Britain and sending not quite enough goods for them to re-export to the Axis or to stockpile for use in a later entry into the war. In July 1940 Dalton told the War Cabinet that, if the worst happened, 'we must secure that, as a belligerent, (Spain) shall be an economic liability and not an asset to Germany' but that help should be given to obtain reasonable imports in an attempt to reduce the influence of those Spaniards who were saying that Britain was trying to starve Spain with the blockade.[134] In his memoirs, Hoare wrote that through this they not only built up mutually beneficial trade but also goodwill within Spanish economic circles

132 *ibid*., 443

133 *ibid*., 151

134 CAB: 'Memorandum: The Application of Contraband Control to the Iberian Peninsula', 12 July 1940

that could counterbalance the political hostility, and established the idea that a Spanish breach with Britain would seriously harm Spanish commerce and industry.[135]

In November 1940 Hoare urged sending more wheat to Spain so that Serrano Suñer would not be able to say that Britain was responsible for the potential famine, and a few days later, 'in view of serious economic distress', the Foreign Office agreed to grant an initial £2m, rising to potentially £4m, of credit for Spain to buy wheat – with the attachment that this was given full publicity in the Spanish press.[136] This had an immediate effect and wheat was soon being sent to Spain, and in January 1941 navicerts for an extra 400,000 tons of Argentinian wheat were granted.[137]

An interesting comparison can be made here with Sweden. From reading the Foreign Office correspondence, the ambassador in Stockholm, Victor Mallet, can also be seen suggesting to Whitehall that sending some extra oil supplies could improve Swedish relations and morale; for example, in January 1941 he said 'by an accommodating attitude about oil we can do something to support morale here and avoid the creation of a 'military vacuum'…which would then inevitably be filled by our enemy'.[138] Despite the first mentions of this extra 'encouragement' coming from Mallet in July 1940 it was not until March 1941 that London heeded his advice and offered a fixed oil quota to the Swedes for use by their naval and air force.[139] This all shows that Britain was prepared to alter its economic policy regards the neutrals if it thought it was to its advantage, but the comparison between Spain and Sweden can also show something – it reinforces the idea that Spain was the critical case, with the Foreign Office reacting far quicker to Hoare's pleas than to Mallet's, but it could also go some way to backing up the theory that the Northern Department dealing with Sweden took a tougher line against the neutrals than their counterparts dealing with Spain did.

Whereas quotas and restrictions were chopped and changed with all the neutrals, the only one for whom there was a sustained tightening against was Ireland. This came about at the end of 1940 when the British seem finally to have realised that they were very unlikely to coax the Treaty Ports away from de Valera, although this hope never entirely went away. A memorandum put before him at the War Cabinet written by an unnamed Irishman and sent on by the British representative seems to have jogged Churchill's mind; in the note the Irishman suggested that a stoppage on shipping to Ireland would upset the population and potentially force de Valera out, and Churchill minuted to his Minister for Food telling him to find out what would happen if Irish food exports to

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135 Hoare, *Ambassador on Special Mission*, 63

136 FO: Samuel Hoare to Viscount Halifax, 28 November 1940, FO: Viscount Halifax to Samuel Hoare, 1 December 1940

137 Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade*, *Vol I*, 542-3

138 FO: Victor Mallet to Viscount Halifax, 29 July 1940, FO: Victor Mallet to Anthony Eden, 24 January 1941, FO: 'Political Survey of Sweden for 1940', Victor Mallet to Anthony Eden, 18 February 1941

139 Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade*, *Vol I*, 630

Britain were stopped.[140] Lord Cranborne, the Minister for Dominions, wrote that 'we should employ every method in our power to keep (Ireland) lean' and 'if we are challenged (we should explain) that we feel an obligation to buy first from those countries that are allied with us'.[141] Cranborne also said that this 'would not merely be treating (Ireland) like other neutrals. It would be penalising her in comparison with other neutrals'.[142] In January 1941 the government instituted a plan to stop Ireland chartering ships through Britain, reducing available shipping to 25% of Irish needs, stopped exporting food, fertiliser, electrical goods, paper and other goods and froze the balance of sterling. The effects were immediately felt and, as an example, Irish imports of feeding stuffs fell from over 5m tons in 1940 to less than 1m in 1941 and none for the next three years; Britain were also unhelpful when Ireland tried to apply for navicerts for the ships that they bought for themselves.[143] Indeed, Kingsley Wood, the Chancellor who proposed the plans, said that Ireland could try and charter ships through Norway or Greece, but that Britain could make sure that this was difficult for them.[144] It must be said, however, that of the two plans put before Churchill this was the more lenient – the other plan proposed stopping insuring ships travelling to Ireland so that the Irish would not be able to charter any ships at all.[145]

As mentioned previously, the British put a lot of effort into getting Portuguese help regards Spain. This manifested itself in the protocol the countries added to their non-aggression pact and also in the Tripartite Agreement signed by Britain, Portugal and Spain in July 1940. One of the key parts of the agreement was Britain helping Spain to buy Portuguese colonial goods that they could not otherwise shift. This helped Portugal because it allowed them to sell their goods, helped Spain because it allowed them to buy goods that they needed and, most importantly from MEW's perspective, helped Britain because it strengthened Salazar's position in Lisbon and prevented Spain from drifting any further towards the Axis.[146] This further reinforces the idea that Spain and Portugal were often thought of together in London, and that their political and economic considerations were highly connected from a British perspective.

Although negotiations over the War Trade Agreement were difficult and although Salazar was a tough negotiator who tried to stick to neutrality rigidly, Portugal was generally quite helpful to Britain in economic matters, exemplified by a payments agreement of November 1940. Within this

140 CAB: 'Memorandum: On Relations by an Irishman', 22 November 1940

141 CAB: 'Memorandum: From Minister for Dominions', 3 December 1940

142 *ibid*.

143 Fisk, *In Time of War*, 254, 270-2

144 CAB: 'Memorandum: Payments to Eire', 30 December 1940

145 *ibid*., 254

146 David Eccles, *By Safe Hand*, 125

Portugal provided escudos for Britain which would not need to be paid back until five years after the war. Initially the British thought that they would spend up to £15m through this but actually ended up spending around £80m; despite this, the Portuguese – and this is probably the time when it was most to Britain's advantage that Salazar was a stickler for rules – never tried to back out.[147] Medlicott writes that 'this was clearly an arrangement of inestimable value to the British in their pre-emption campaign during the war'.[148]

The pre-emption campaign that Medlicott mentions was especially important in Portugal and, although some of it happened in Spain, it was in Portugal that the British focussed their efforts. There was not the opportunity to do it in Switzerland, they did not need anything from Ireland and although they could maybe have tried to buy more iron ore from Sweden this would have been very difficult and had gone as an option after summer 1940.

In Portugal, one example of the pre-emption campaign is when Britain, perhaps rather comically, ended up buying 150 million tins of sardines to prevent the tin in the tinplate, which made up about 1-and-a-half percent of the actual tin, from falling into German hands, and paid a far higher price for it than they needed to after being deceived by some Portuguese companies.[149] The British focussed most of their pre-emptive energies on buying wolfram and this is where the Portuguese granting of credits really helped. However, most of the real battles over this came in 1942 and later, and so in the period under study here it was just about trying to frustrate the Germans and prevent the output of smaller wolfram producers – for Britain owned the largest mine and took over the lease of the second largest when France fell – from going to Germany, whilst at the same time trying to formulate the most effective plan.[150] Nevertheless, the end of 1941 Britain and Germany were spending around £1m a week on wolfram and sardines, which caused unease amongst the Portuguese government because of many poor workers flocking to try and mine out some wolfram.[151]

As mentioned, British pre-emptive buying was restricted to Portugal with a little going on in Spain. Another tactic of economic warfare, blockade running and smuggling, was, however, limited to Sweden and Switzerland. 'Operation Rubble' of January 1941 saw five ships manned by Brits, Norwegians and Swedes break the German blockade out of Sweden and deliver £1m worth of Swedish goods to Britain, which was especially important because it was a year's supply of material that was not available by other means.[152]After this initial success other similar operations were launched throughout the war which brought much-needed Swedish products to Britain. In

147 Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade*, *Vol I*, 515-6

148 *ibid*., 516

149 *Ibid*., 524-6

150 *ibid*., 526-9

151 W.N. Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade*, *Vol II*, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1959), 315-6

Switzerland important goods and even workers were smuggled out, often circumventing the German counter-blockade by being 'bought' by South American firms, but Wylie says that the success of these operations 'clearly depended on the connivance, or selective amnesia, of numerous Swiss businessmen, customs officials, and bureaucrats'.[153]

In terms of the main aspect of economic warfare, the blockade itself, then there was quite a coherent policy. This was to set up War Trade Agreements – although one was not done with Ireland – and to prevent as much as possible goods getting in to Germany. This was possible due to the British control of the seas, and so it was less successful with Switzerland and Sweden who continued to send their goods to Germany. The British were also willing to alter quotas to either improve relations with the neutrals or to punish them. However, the only sustained economic punishment was against Ireland. That blockade running and smuggling only happened in certain neutrals was not to do with British attitude or policy and more to do with factors outside of their control – just like there was not too much that Britain could pre-emptively buy in Switzerland, the German counter-blockade was not very effective around Portugal and Spain and certainly not around Ireland, and so Britain did not need to try and smuggle goods out. The British generally had clear aims in the economic sphere that were relevant to all of the neutrals and methods to achieve these. However, like with propaganda, this could not be a completely homogenous policy and the intricacies of the neutrals and the flow of the war had to be taken into account.

Conclusion

In terms of the coherency of the neutrals in the context of British diplomacy, there is certainly not a clear-cut answer and this essay has shown that the difficulties in studying them are pretty large. Their own situations, backgrounds and political contexts were rather disparate and, although a few similarities can be seen between multiple neutrals, the only things that all five really had in common were their choice to pursue neutrality and that the general population wanted Britain to win the war.

In terms of the British considerations and aims, too, there is not much of a coherent pattern. The only thing that all five had in common in this respect was that the British did have things they wanted to achieve with all of them, justifying their continued diplomatic efforts. Like in the individual

152 Barker, *The Blockade Busters*, 73

153 Wyle, *Britain, Switzerland and the Second World War*, 128-9

contexts of the neutrals there were similarities between multiple neutrals but very little that covered all five of them.

However, it has been shown that Britain could conceive of the neutrals as a group. Although it should not be said that the neutrals were coherent simply because they were neutral, and there were many more factors at play that highlight their incoherence, this was a very important theme and should not be underestimated from the British point of view. It was quite remarkable that they managed to maintain their neutrality throughout the war and this position defined the period in question for themselves and also defined their relationship with Britain. This already gives the neutrals a strong degree of coherence in the eyes of the British. Furthermore, Britain was capable of conceiving of multiple neutrals as linked, as the close cooperation urged between Portugal and Spain shows. Although there may not have been any explicit guidelines on how to deal with the neutrals laid down by the government, we can see that the British generally conceived of them as morally wrong for staying out of the war and were rather suspicious of them, but were willing to appease them and respected their neutrality for the most part. This was on the more general, abstract level – when it came down to a practical level and decisions actually had to be taken regarding the neutrals, the vast majority of the time they were dealt with as individuals. Despite the suspicion with which Britain viewed neutrality, Britain did generally respect neutral rights, certainly in comparison to Germany. For example, despite strong urges, the government avoided the temptation to seize the Irish Treaty Ports or the Swedish iron ore mines.

To return to Patrick Salmon's 'rules' discussed earlier with regards the British attitude, then it would seem that the majority of these were applicable during this period, in particular 'exploit British maritime strength to exert pressure on neutrals', 'appease neutrals', 'find allies within neutral countries' and 'as a last resort, consider forcible action against a neutral state'. However, as already mentioned 'discourage neutral cooperation' seems to fall down when the cooperation encouraged between Spain and Portugal is taken into account. In addition, 'do not allow ideology to influence policy' is perhaps rather shaky. Certainly there could be a suggestion that the negative attitude towards Ireland – a dominion and part of the empire just twenty years previously and yet staying out of the fight – had a big effect on the British policy and the economic strangulation that was practised.

In terms of the actual diplomacy, which is probably the most important aspect with regards to this essay due to it being in the context of British diplomacy, there is a good degree of coherency. Certainly in propaganda a similar phenomenon to that mentioned with regards the British attitude can be seen. On the higher, more general level there were common themes to be used – the inevitability of the British victory, the morality of the British fight – and there was a desire for a homogenous policy whenever possible, but on the lower, more local level these themes and ideas were taken and tailored to fit the situation 'on the ground'. The economic warfare aspect was also quite coherent, certainly the economic blockade, with an overall plan that encompassed all of the neutrals and methods to achieve this, which again were tailored to the situation of the neutral. The major exception would be the heavy restriction against Ireland which did not happen elsewhere. That there were no major differences in the policy towards both Switzerland and Sweden despite there being separate departments with apparently different attitudes dealing with them also suggests that the overall policy of Britain was coherent. Of course, certain issues, such as the Winter War and iron ore, were only applicable to one.

With regards the other aspects of the diplomacy detailed here – the British inducements and certain aspects of economic warfare, namely blockade-running and pre-emption – the problem is again heavily related to the differences in the neutrals themselves. Britain could hardly push for a pact between Switzerland and Ireland or offer Gibraltar to Sweden. However, that the British were prepared to countenance the idea of going so far as to give Gibraltar to the Spanish or Northern Ireland to the Irish – no matter how wishy-washy these 'offers' were – suggests that this was a tactic that would have been applied to the other neutrals had there been an opportunity and the need. Likewise, it is not unreasonable to assume that had Britain needed to break the German blockade with Portugal or Spain then they would have done, as they did in Sweden and Switzerland, or that they would have engaged in pre-emptive campaigns similar to those in Portugal if the option had been available elsewhere. The only caveat to that is that they did not embark on pre-emptive buying in Sweden with regards the iron ore but it seems that they thought military action was a better option and by the time that idea had been discarded it was too difficult to get involved in a pre-emptive campaign. Unfortunately this all has to be conjecture due to the differences in the neutrals and we will never know whether Britain would have done similar things everywhere had the opportunity arisen, but that they did use similar methods in very different countries when the opportunity was there suggests that this is not an unreasonable conjecture to make. It thus goes some way to saying that the possible British policy towards the neutrals was in the main coherent, even if the neutrals themselves were not.

If the neutrals were to be broken down into smaller groups then we can see that Sweden and Switzerland were remarkably similar, both in terms of their own contexts, in the British considerations towards them and in the actual methods used. Historiographically most of the focus on Sweden has been on the 'Winter War' and the iron ore question, whilst the modern studies of Switzerland have tended to look at the Swiss financial collusion with the Nazis and have focussed on the end part of the war. However, this study has shown that a symmetrical study of Swedish and Swiss neutrality in the context of British diplomacy is very feasible.

To a lesser extent, Spain and Portugal also had a number of things in common and the British certainly saw their situations as connected. Indeed, to go back to an earlier point in the introduction as to whether the neutrals *should* be studied together then the two Iberian nations are a very good example of why they should: a study that only focussed on one country would not fully appreciate the important shared aspects such as the use of Salazar to shore up Franco and the Tripartite Agreement that helped keep Spain neutral.

If there are comparisons to be made between these, then Ireland is on its own. For one thing, Ireland was a dominion and was therefore not dealt with by the Foreign Office. For another, one of the key similarities between the other neutrals was that Britain wanted them to retain their neutrality; this was not the case with Ireland and it is a big anomaly in a study of neutrality. Furthermore, no War Trade Agreement was signed with Ireland – one was with all the other neutrals eventually – and it was the only neutral where Britain went for a sustained economic attack, cutting their supplies right down whereas in this period they often tried to appease the other states by granting extra resources. Churchill had no praise for Ireland after the war, unlike with some other neutrals. In May 1945 he said 'with a restraint and poise to which, I say, history will find few parallels,

His Majesty's Government never laid a violent hand upon (Ireland) though at times it would have been quite easy and quite natural'.[154] Ireland is the most troublesome obstacle to a coherent group of neutrals in terms of actual British policy and attitude.

The neutrals themselves were very different with only a few similarities, but the British attitude towards neutrality encompassed all five. Although they only shared a handful of things, one of the things they did have in common was extremely important in defining their relationship with Britain and this was their neutrality itself. In general the British attitude towards neutrality was not overly favourable, as has been mentioned, but they respected international law for the most part. Differences in what Britain wanted were due to differences in the neutrals and the most important countries seem to have been Spain and then Ireland, which were the two countries in which military strategy considerations were the most important. It is interesting that Britain took different economic warfare routes regarding these two neutrals – Spain was appeased whilst Ireland was the only neutral against which there was a concerted attack, again highlighting that Ireland is a bit of an anomaly. Nevertheless, all five neutrals were given attention, including Sweden and Switzerland after they were cut off when surely there must have been a temptation to refocus efforts and resources elsewhere rather than on what could have been seen as 'lost causes'. The neutrals were certainly important to the British and played a part in their wider thinking.

Despite the differences in the contexts of the neutrals themselves, the actual British policy was generally coherent. There was an overall, encompassing attitude which manifested itself in an encompassing policy in the fields of propaganda and economic warfare. This covered all five of the neutrals, apart from Ireland where a tougher economic tactic was pursued. This general policy was then tailored to fit the situation on the ground. This 'tailoring' was simply a necessity of diplomacy; that there was an overall policy shows that the British conceived of the neutrals as a whole. Inducements were less coherent simply because of the differences in the neutrals, but that similar things were tried when possible suggests a reasonable degree of coherence here too.

To conclude, then, despite the wide differences in the contexts of the neutrals, the British developed a coherent attitude towards them and developed a surprisingly coherent approach which had common themes and tried to use similar methods when possible. The dissimilarities of the neutrals must prevent them from being seen as totally coherent and also prevented a homogenous British policy. However, to answer the question as to how coherent the neutrals were in the context of British diplomacy in this period, it can be said that there was a decent degree of coherency, certainly in terms of the British attitude and in the fields of propaganda and economic warfare. This coherency is perhaps surprising considering the differences of the neutrals themselves.

It can therefore be said that there is enough coherence between the five neutrals to make a study viable, especially considering the importance of the topic. Admittedly the differences of the neutrals themselves raises some problems that would need to be kept in mind and any comparisons that would be made in it, aside from perhaps ones with Sweden and Switzerland, would not be 'strong' ones in terms of historical theory, but there is enough to work with to make it feasible. A study of the neutrals might benefit from ignoring Ireland, or at least treating it as a separate aspect

154 Winston Churchill, 'Forward, Till the Whole Task is Done', 13 May 1945, London

which could be justified on the grounds of Ireland being a dominion rather than a 'foreign' country, as Ireland really did have little in common with the others. Removing Ireland from the equation does make the other four, and the policy towards them, seem more coherent. Therefore, it can be said that the gap in the literature on British diplomacy towards the neutrals in this period is not justified and, although it would not be without problems, that there has not been a study on it remains rather surprising.

As to whether the neutrals *should* be studied together, this essay has shown that despite on the surface looking rather disparate there was a surprising amount of coherence in the British attitude and policy towards them at a more abstract level. This was then altered to suit the local situation but there were common themes and methods applicable to all. Knowledge of the general British policy would therefore help the findings of research into British policy towards an individual to see how this changed 'on the ground', which could be quite revealing about the situation of the neutral itself and perhaps its perceived character. Indeed, a good knowledge of the general British policy towards the neutrals would allow certain theories to be tested, such as Wylie's theory that the British policy towards Switzerland was affected by the positive impression of Switzerland held by many British officials. A study that involved all the neutrals could also reveal more about British diplomacy in general, or the British attitude towards neutrality. Moreover, the neutrals were not isolated; specifically, as has been said above, a study on Spain or Portugal would be much weaker without the other one involved. Any study of British diplomacy towards the Iberian states really needs to look at the other one too and realise its importance, which is something that not all of the secondary literature does.

A study of all five could reveal things that might otherwise have been missed, or could reinforce certain things – as an example, studying all five would highlight the tougher economic stance taken against Ireland – and this study would also give a better understanding of British diplomacy and their attitude towards neutrality. Furthermore, any study of an individual neutral would benefit from a good knowledge of the general policy from which to compare. There are therefore a number of reasons as to why there should be a study on British policy towards the neutrals.

For further research, aside from the missing general study on British diplomacy towards the neutrals, a comparison of Switzerland and Sweden would certainly be feasible and there is much that can be compared. From a different angle, not much has been done regarding the British attitude towards the neutrals, and certainly not from a non-political point of view. A study looking at the British media and population's attitude towards neutrality and the neutral nations could be interesting, and this could further be compared to the political attitude towards them and what actually happened diplomatically. Indeed, a study of the British attitude and perceptions towards neutrality might be easier and more rewarding than a study of the actual British policy because this was affected less by the dissimilarity of the neutrals.

Bibliography

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