

17. Exchange of letters between Hitler and Franco

1941

Letter From Hitler to Franco

6 February 1941

(...)

DEAR CAUDILLO!

If I write this letter it is done in order to determine once again with extreme clarity the individual phases of the development of a situation which is not only important for Germany and Italy but could have been of decisive importance to Spain.

When we had our meeting, it was my aim to convince you, Caudillo, of the necessity of common action of those states whose interests in the final analysis are certainly tied up indissolubly with each other. For centuries, Spain has been persecuted by the same enemies against whom today Germany and Italy are forced to fight. In addition to the earlier imperial strivings inimical to our three nations there now arose, moreover, antitheses conditioned by world-outlook: The Jewish-international democracy, which reigns in these states, will not excuse any of us for having followed a course which seeks to secure the future of our peoples in accordance with fundamental principles determined by the people and not those imposed by capital. As concerns the German determination to follow this fight through to the final consequence, I need waste no word. The Duce thinks no differently. On the basis of this analysis, the Japanese people as well will not in the long run get by, unless it be by a submission sacrificing the future of the Japanese people. I am now convinced that Spain faces the same fate. Caudillo, if your struggle against the elements of destruction in Spain was successful, it was only because of the democratic opponents forced to be cautious by attitude of Germany and Italy. You will be forgiven, Caudillo, but never for this victory! Just as little does England think of letting you remain for a long period in North Africa opposite Gibraltar-as soon as she is once again in a position of power. The Spanish seizure of the Tangier zone would in such a case-and this is my deepest conviction, Caudillo-only be a passing intermezzo. England, and probably

America too, will do everything, to render this entry into the Mediterranean in the future even more secure under their dominion than up to now. It is my most heartfelt conviction that the battle which Germany and Italy are now fighting out is thus determining the future destiny of Spain as well. Only in the case of our victory will the present regime continue to exist. Should Germany and Italy lose this war, however, then any future for a really national and independent Spain would be impossible.

I have thus been striving to convince you, Caudillo, of the necessity in the interests of your own country and the future of the Spanish people, of uniting yourself with those countries who formerly sent soldiers to support you, and who today of necessity, are also battling not only for their own existence, but indirectly for the national future of Spain as well.

Now at our meeting we agreed that Spain declare its readiness to sign the Three-Power Pact and to enter the war. In setting the date, periods in the far future were never considered or even mentioned, but instead the conversation always was concerned with a very short time-limit within which you, Caudillo, still believed that you could carry out various economic measures favorable for your country.

I personally have been skeptical from the beginning about the hope of receiving very soon more real economic benefits for Spain.

1. England indeed has no thought at all of really helping Spain! England is only endeavoring to postpone the Spanish entry into the war, to put it off in order in this way continually to increase her distress and thus to be able finally to overthrow the Spanish Government of that time.
2. But even if England were about to think otherwise, in an impulse toward some kind of sentimentality never present in British history up to now, she could not really help Spain under any conditions. She is absolutely not in the condition even in transportation alone to aid another country in a time in which she herself has already been forced to the most rigorous retrenchments in her standard of living. And the need for transport space will as the months go by not decrease but instead will get more and more serious.

In spite of the fact that I, therefore-as stated-have been thoroughly skeptical about this from the beginning, I nonetheless brought to bear every bit of appreciation for your efforts in at least trying, even before entering the war, to get shipments of foodstuffs into Spain from countries overseas as well.

Germany, however, has for her part, declared herself ready to deliver to Spain, immediately after undertaking entrance into the war, food, that is-grain-to as great an extent as possible! Furthermore, Germany has declared herself prepared to replace the 100,000 tons of grain which was waiting in Portugal

destined for Switzerland in order that it might benefit Spain immediately. This of course remains contingent upon the final decision for Spain's entry into the war. For about one thing, Caudillo, there must be clarity: We are fighting a battle of life and death and cannot at this time make any gifts. If it should later be asserted that Spain could not enter the war because she received no supplies, that would not be true! For immediately after settling the entry into the war, a fixed date of which there has as yet been no outward indication at all, Spain would receive the first supplies, that is, 100,000 tons of grain. I doubt whether 100,000 tons of grain could really have reached Spain from abroad within the same period of time, even if such an inclination had existed. Thus, I also doubt that this is going to happen. The assertion, however, that - if our grain had been delivered immediately - the Spanish people could thus by propaganda have been prepared for entry into the war is self-contradictory for another reason.

You, yourself, Caudillo, have indeed personally indicated to me the importance of not yet consummating publicly the entrance into the Three-Power Pact, because you feared that this would have hurt your other efforts, for example in obtaining more grain, indeed would perhaps have wrecked them. How much less possible would it then have been to carry on open propaganda for entering the war? No, I am taking the liberty once more to confirm that:

1. During our conversation, it was never considered that Spain's entry into the war would perchance not take place until autumn or the coming winter, and that-
2. Germany was ready to furnish supplies to the Spanish Government at the moment when the final date for entering the war was determined.

When I had the request made to you, Caudillo, with the impression of urgency to bring relief to the Italian ally and to set this date in the middle or the end of January, that is, to permit the German march against Gibraltar to begin on or after January 10, in order to start attacking at the end of January, then for the first time our negotiators were unequivocally informed that such an early date could absolutely not be considered and this was again motivated by economic factors. However, when I thereupon let it be known again that Germany was indeed ready to begin at once with deliveries of grain, Admiral Canaris received the conclusive information that this delivery of grain would not be decisive at all, for via railway, it certainly could accomplish no practical effect. It was now further declared that since we had already made available batteries for the Canary Islands and moreover intended also to provide dive-bombers for additional security-even that was not decisive, since the Canary Islands from the point of view of food could no longer be held after six months.

That it is absolutely not a matter of economic factors but rather of others is apparent from the last statement in which it is stated that for climatic reasons to march in this season could not succeed, but on the contrary should only be considered at the earliest in the autumn or winter.

Under these conditions, of course, I do not understand why one should first want to declare an event impossible on economic grounds, which is now said to be impossible simply for climatic reasons. Now I do not believe that the German Army would be disturbed during its march in January by a climate which in itself is nothing out of the ordinary for us. In any case, we solved our problems in the Norwegian campaign under varied conditions and with severe climatic hindrances in the form of snow and ice, not to mention the fact that, from the participation of German soldiers and officers in your campaign, Caudillo, the climatic conditions of Spain are nothing unfamiliar to us. I regret most profoundly, Caudillo, this your opinion and your stand since:

1. I feel it my duty to bring relief to my Italian friend and ally and thus be of help to him indeed be of help at the moment when he experienced an unfortunate mishap. The attack on Gibraltar and the closing of the Straits would have changed the Mediterranean situation in one stroke.
2. I am of the conviction that in war, time is one of the most important factors. Months which one lets slip by are often never regained again!
3. Finally however it is clear that, on January 10 if we had been able to cross the Spanish border with the first formations, Gibraltar would today be in our hands. That means: Two months have been lost, which otherwise would have helped to decide world history.
4. I am further of the convictions that Spain's economic condition would have improved and not become worse because of what would in any case have come to Spain through us and that on the other hand the deliveries which since then actually came to Spain from abroad during this time can only amount to a fraction compared to that which would in any case have been delivered at once by us.

But quite aside from this, Caudillo, I should like now to mention the following:

The entrance of Spain into this struggle has certainly not been conceived of as exclusively to the benefit of the interests of Germany and Italy. Spain herself has advanced very great territorial claims for the fulfilment of which the Duce and I had declared ourselves ready in every degree which could at all be reconciled with an acceptable new arrangement of the African colonial possession for Europe and its countries. And I may point out in this regard that in this struggle up to now first Germany and then Italy, have suffered the most prodigious blood sacrifice, and that both, in spite of this, themselves made very modest claims.

In any case, however, the moment of military operations above all can only be proposed by the one who therewith assumes the main burden of the struggle and who must therefore calculate it into the total program of a military analysis which is after all of world-wide extent. That I myself have no other goal in mind than the common success is certainly understandable. Indeed in this case, Caudillo, my urging in and of itself only proves the strength of my consciousness of responsibility toward my ally as well. For wheresoever in the course of this war difficulties should arise, it will be my unbending will to help out with them; and my decision to make good in the final settlement whatever during one or another stage of this war can perhaps at first have miscarried. This affects Spain as well. Spain will never get other friends than those given [her] in the Germany and Italy of today, unless it becomes a different Spain. This different Spain however would only be the Spain of decline and of final collapse. Even for this reason alone, Caudillo, I believe that we three men, the Duce, you, and I, are bound to one another by the most rigorous compulsion of history that is possible, and that thus we in this historical analysis ought to obey as the supreme commandment the realization that in such difficult times, not so much an apparently wise caution as the bold heart, rather, can save nations.

Moreover, Caudillo, this war is decided regardless of what ephemeral successes the British believe they can achieve anywhere on the periphery. For independently thereof, the fact remains that the British power in Europe is broken and that the mightiest military machine in the world stands ready for every additional task which may be put to it to solve. And how good and reliable this instrument is, the future will prove.

Accept my cordial and comradely greetings.

Your ADOLF HITLER

LETTER FROM GENERAL FRANCO TO HITLER**26 FEBRUARY 1941**

EL PARDO, 26 February 1941

DEAR FÜHRER:

Your letter of the 6th makes me wish to send you my reply promptly, since I consider it necessary to make certain clarifications and confirmation of my loyalty.

I consider as you yourself do that the destiny of history has united you with myself and with the Duce in an indissoluble way. I have never needed to be convinced of this and as I have told you more than once, our Civil War since its very inception and during its entire course is more than proof. I also share your opinion that the fact that Spain is situated on both shores of the Strait forces her to the utmost enmity toward England, who aspires to maintain control of it.

We stand today where we have always stood, in a resolute manner and with the firmest conviction. You must have no doubt about my absolute loyalty to this political concept and to the realization of the union of our national destinies with those of Germany and Italy. With the same loyalty, I have made clear to you since the beginning of these negotiations the conditions of our economic situation, the only reasons why it has not been possible up to now to determine the date of Spain's participation.

Having in mind our own post-war difficulties, you will recall that I have never fixed too short a period for our entry into the war. Permit me, Fuehrer, to say that the time elapsed until this moment has not been completely lost, since we have been obtaining not certainly great enough quantities of grain to permit us to build stocks, but certainly for some of the bread necessary for daily sustenance of the people who otherwise would have perished of starvation in considerable numbers.

Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that in this question of the supply of foodstuffs, Germany has not fulfilled her offers of effective support until very recently. We are now beginning to move in the realm of concrete facts and within this field there is nothing I desire more than to hasten the negotiations as much as possible. With this end in view several days ago I sent to you information on our needs as to foodstuffs and in general economic and military fields. These data are open to new examination, clarification,

verification, and discussion in order to reach quickly the solution which interests us both equally. However, you will understand that at a time when the Spanish people is suffering the greatest starvation and enduring all sorts of privations and sacrifices, it is not certainly propitious for me to ask further sacrifices of them if my appeal is not preceded by an alleviation of this situation, which at the same time may permit us to carry out beforehand an intelligent propaganda on the constant friendship and effective support of the German people, which will reawaken in the Spaniard the sentiments of sincere friendship and admiration which he has always had for your Nation.

My remarks about our climate were simply an answer to your suggestions, and were not in any way a pretext to postpone indefinitely that which at the right moment it will be our duty to do.

During the recent Bordighera conference I gave proof to the world of the nature of my resolute attitude; this conference also served as a call to the Spanish people marking the direction in which lie their national obligations and the preservation of their existence as a free nation.

One observation I must repeat to your Excellency; the closing of the Strait of Gibraltar is not only a prerequisite for the immediate amelioration of the situation of Italy but also perhaps for the end of the war. However, in order that the closing of Gibraltar may have a decisive value it is also necessary that the Suez Canal be closed at the same time. If this last circumstance should not take place, we who are making the actual contribution of our military effort have the duty sincerely to say that the situation of Spain in the event of an inordinately prolonged war would then become extremely difficult.

You speak of our demands and you compare them with yours and those of Italy. I do not believe that one could describe the Spanish demands as excessive, still less, when one considers the tremendous sacrifice of the Spanish people in a battle which was a worthy forerunner of the present one.

Concerning this point the necessary preciseness does not exist in our agreement as well. The protocol of Hendaye-permit me to express it - is in this respect extremely vague and Your Excellency remembers the conditions (today so changed) of this vagueness and lack of preciseness. The facts in their logical development have today left far behind the circumstances which in the month of October had to be taken into consideration with respect to the prevailing situation, and the protocol then existing must at the present be considered outmoded.

These are my answers, dear Fuehrer, to your observations. I want to dispel with them all shadow of doubt and declare that I stand ready at your side, entirely and decidedly at your disposal, united in a common historical destiny, desertion from which would mean my suicide and that of the Cause which I

have led and represent in Spain. I need no confirmation of my faith in the triumph of your Cause and I repeat that I shall always be a loyal follower of it.

Believe me your sincere friend, with my cordial greetings,

F. FRANCO