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Franco and the Jews: The Effects of Image and Memory on Spanish-Jewish Reconciliation

Rene H. Cardenas

The news of Francisco Franco's death on the morning of 20 November 1975 affected the Spanish public in various ways. Clothiers in grieving Galicia and Madrid found themselves hard-pressed to provide enough black ties and armbands to satisfy the insatiable demand, a situation vastly different from the dancing and celebrations that burst forth in the Basque provinces of Guipuzcoa and Vizcaya. Manuel Vasquez Montalban, a Barcelona novelist, chronicled the activity in the heretofore "occupied" city: "Above the skyline of the Collserola Mountains, champagne corks soared into the autumn twilight. But nobody heard a sound." Barcelona was, after all, a city of good manners.¹ As Franco's body lay in state at the Sala de Columnas of Madrid's Palacio del Oriente, nearly 500,000 people filed past; some to mourn, others to confirm that he was truly dead. Compared in his lifetime to the Archangel Gabriel, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Charlemagne, Napoleon, and Jesus Christ, Franco was buried on 23 November 1975 at Valle de Los Caidos, outside Madrid.² Only one noteworthy Head of State, the Chilean dictator Gen. Augusto Pinochet, attended the funeral.

¹Manuel Vasquez Montalban, *Barcelonas* (London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1992), 175.

²Paul Preston, *Franco* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 9, 52, 329-330.

After Franco's 36-year tenure in a role of unchallenged power and authority, a significant amount of scholarship has grappled with the complex question of his *legacy*. Motivated by admiration, fascination, and disgust, foreign observers – not Spaniards – have spearheaded the task to represent and remember Franco as an archetypal dictator, megalomaniac or calculating *politico*. This study will also analyze his memory, but one that scholars have not previously emphasized – the Jewish memory of the dictator based upon Israeli policy toward Franquist Spain and the details about Franco's life that were “forgotten” in order to generate it.

The Spanish institutionalized memory of Francisco Franco is heavily influenced by a wide spectrum of Spanish politicians, intellectuals, and social commentators who collaborated in what came to be known as *el pacto del olvido*, or pact of forgetting. Franco was not necessarily forgotten post-mortem, though; instead, an immense national appetite for details about the private *Caudillo* fueled a cathartic release of diaries and memoirs for years after his death. *El pacto* only stressed no settling of accounts, no revenge. No one sought to open what was considered a Pandora's box for fear of igniting another devastating civil war like the one responsible for catapulting Franco into power forty years earlier. Thus, collective amnesia, or anti-memory, became the consensus of an uneasy Spanish public.³ In the Jewish memory of the dictator, this

³For a developed commentary on collective memory and anti-memory, see Pierre Nora, *Rethinking the French Past: Realms of Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 1-23.

amnesia has a different origin - one rooted in the dictator's ambiguous stances and policies themselves.

Although *El Caudillo* publicly articulated a Catholic, knightly, warrior-based formula for Spanish identity and simultaneously sought to ingratiate himself with *Sephardim* communities (Jews of Spanish ancestry), many of whom immigrated to Palestine during or immediately after the Spanish Civil War, his duplicity was not entirely of his own design.⁴ It was also a consequence of the Jewish experience in Spanish history.⁵ According to Norman Berdichevsky, bitter memories of the Inquisition and the Jewish expulsion of 1492 dominated Jewish memories of the Iberian Peninsula for centuries.⁶ Equating Jews to Moorish "infidels in league with the devil," Spain retained this hostile posture until immediately after the French Revolution, and only after the adoption of the Constitution of 1868 did official persecution come to a halt. Immediately thereafter, a number of Spanish intellectuals started to question what Spain might have lost as a result of the Sephardic eviction and its lasting antagonism.⁷ Noting the important cultural, political, and economic contributions credited to Jews in Northern Europe, Greece, Turkey, the Caribbean,

⁴Stanley Payne, *The Franco Regime* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987) 623-625.

⁵Norman Berdichevsky, "Spanish-Jewish Reconciliation: Israel's 38-year struggle to establish diplomatic relations with Spain" in *Midstream* 49:5 (2003): 2.

⁶Henry Kamen, *How Spain Became a World Power 1492-1763*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003), 21-22, 242-243.

⁷*Ibid.*, 3. See also Elie Kedourie, *Spain and the Jews: the Sephardi Experience, 1492 and After*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1992), 1-20.

and the United States, scholars such as Angel Pulido, himself a Jew, dedicated their careers to settling the Spanish-Sephardic rift. Having spoken before the Cortes, or Spanish Senate, visited the Sephardic communities in Turkey and met with their chief rabbi, and written articles for the Spanish press, Pulido presented an image of a Spain held hostage by a fervent ultra-nationalistic, Catholic ideology during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.⁸ The Jewish intellectual was so well accepted among all echelons of society that King Alfonso XIII proposed the renewal of a “Greater Spain” with Sephardim reconciliation as one of his primary objectives during the first decades of the 20th century. In this spirit, Spain voted in favor of the British Mandate for Palestine in 1922, and the Republican government welcomed Chaim Weizmann, who would become Israel’s first president, in 1932. With the Star of David in the ascendant, the Catholic Church in Spain became increasingly insecure about its influence, and this discomfort would come to influence Franquist policy toward Israel later. Thus, the direction of Judeo-Spanish reconciliation, although promising, was still uncertain immediately before the largest European civil conflict since the French Revolution. To better understand how Judeo-Spanish relations continued their uncertain path after the Spanish Civil War propelled the shy Galician Franco to power requires knowing more about the array of experiences and influences in the leader’s life that, by

⁸Jose Antonio Lisbona, *Retorno a Sepharad: La política de España hacia sus Judios en el siglo XX* (Barcelona: Silex, 1993).; See also Maria Antonio Bel Bravo, *Sefarad, Los Judios de España*. (Madrid: Silex, 1997), 349-354 qtd. in Berdichevksy, “Spanish-Jewish Reconciliation,” 2-3.

the 1930s, would turn him in his own psychology into the savior of a historic Spain.

Franco's Military Exploits and the Foundations of a Vision

Upon graduation from the Spanish Military Academy at Toledo in 1910, the 17-year-old short, frail-looking Second Lieutenant Franco volunteered to serve in combat in Morocco, where he immersed himself in Army life and paid extreme attention to personal attributes like detail and duty. While developing an interest in topography and Spanish history, Franco absorbed the idea of the Army's moral responsibility as the "guardian of the essence of the nation."⁹ According to that principle, when a government disgraced its country by allowing disorder, it was the Army officer's duty to combat that government in the name of the nation.

At the tender age of 20 and despite a growing reputation for valor in combat, the lieutenant was still withdrawn, a private contemplative with few friends. Eschewing the drinking, gambling, and philandering that dominated the leisure time of many officers in Spanish Morocco, Franco poured over supply lists and maps late into the evening. By 1917, at the age of 24, his competence and the cunning, yet fatalistic charges that won him battle after battle in Morocco warranted him a promotion to major. After a brief return to Spain, Franco again ventured across the Straits of Gibraltar in 1920 where his service to both the French Foreign Legion and the elite division of the Spanish Army launched him to the top of the military hierar-

⁹*Ibid.*, 10.

chy. When his assignment ended in 1927, he was a thirty-three-year-old brigadier and one of Europe's youngest generals. The changing political situation in Spain during the mid-1920s and 1930s, coupled with important changes in his person life, would catapult the general to yet unforeseen heights.

In 1923, Franco married Maria del Carmen Polo y Martinez Valdes, the beautiful 17-year-old daughter of an affluent Asturian businessman. She injected into their upper middle-class household a potent dose of Catholic piety. This served as a personal reawakening, since his pious youth had given way to an irreligious existence in Morocco, never attending Mass there. The apparent lull in the General's career during this period was actually of critical importance because it allowed for the synthesis of a romanticized Spanish military ideal with the reemergence of Franco's Catholic beliefs. As he helplessly watched the collapse of the monarchy and the proclamation of the Second Republic, Franco's renewed Catholicism would become important to the justification of actions to come.¹⁰

During the political turmoil between 1923 and 1936, Francisco Franco perfected the technique that several historians conclude characterized his regime – deliberate and shrewd calculation motivated by self-preservation.¹¹ On 13 September 1923, disputes over direct representation, local autonomy in Catalonia and

¹⁰Joaquin Arraras, *Francisco Franco: The Times and the Man* (Milwaukee: Brace Publishing Co., 1938), 244.

¹¹Payne, *The Franco Regime*, 622.; Chaim Lipschitz, *Franco, Spain, the Jews, and the Holocaust* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1984), 9-11.; Preston, *Franco*, 722.; Haim Avni, *Spain, the Jews, and Franco* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1982), 70, 85, 208.

the Basque Provinces, and foreign, military and social reform paralyzed the parliamentary system and ushered in the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, one of Franco's previous superiors. Five years later, Rivera established a military academy at Zaragoza for officer candidates and named Franco its Director. While the General possessed the rigid attitude necessary to provide the prospective officers with a strong foundation in Spanish military psychology and esprit de corps, his lack of experience in military technology and theoretical training obligated him to hire a comprehensive staff, and many high-ranking officers in charge after the Nationalist victory in the Spanish Civil War were part of this group from 1928-1931. Although Rivera's administration temporarily corrected many of the breakdowns that overwhelmed the government of Alfonso XIII, it too succumbed to outside pressures and collapsed, bringing down the monarchy with it. It would not fall, however, without first leaving a lasting impression on the future *Caudillo*. Despite its imperfections, the military regime's relative internal stability persuaded Franco that dictatorship was the ideal form of government for Spain.¹²

Aware that the balance of power rested with liberal factions at the start of the 1930s, Franco took great care not to offend the new administration by deed or word. The liberals' attitude toward Franco, however, was not as conciliatory. During the initial transition from Rivera's dictatorship to the Second Republic, a

¹²Paul Preston, *The Politics of Revenge* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 27, 132.; Chaim Lipschitz, *Franco, Spain, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 13.; See also Paul Preston, *The Triumph of Democracy in Spain* (London: Unwin Lyman, 1986), 42-56.

key priority of the left-wing government entailed eliminating the vestiges of the old order by forcing the Army's older, more conservative officers into retirement, thus altering the balance of power within the Spanish army.¹³ Furthermore, many of the campaign promotions that Primo de Rivera awarded Franco were rescinded, and the general plummeted to the bottom of the officer seniority list. His silent acquiescence was rewarded in 1932, however, when the War Ministry gave him command of the garrison at La Coruña and, a year later, the important post of commander at the Balearic Islands garrison. After Centrists assumed power in 1934, relations between the military and the government greatly improved. Franco was promoted to major general and named Commander-in-Chief of the elite crack divisions in Morocco. He was then appointed Chief of the General Staff in May 1935, after he publicly aligned himself with CEDA, a coalition of moderate, conservative, and clerical parties. Franco took advantage of his role to appoint anti-leftist officers, but the ensuing crisis caused by the leftist Popular Front's victory in February 1936 elections brought forth newer, far more important priorities.¹⁴ Although conservative leaders urged Franco and the War Ministry to annul the leftist victory and declare martial law, the General refused. Removed as Chief of Staff and, in effect, exiled to the garrison at Tenerife in the Canary Islands, Franco watched as liberal officers

¹³Stanley Payne, *Franco's Spain*, 5-9.

¹⁴Preston, *The Politics of Revenge*, 8-12.

replaced his conservative nominees for important posts.¹⁵

With tensions increasing between Left and Right, whispers of a broad military conspiracy to overthrow the government grew louder. Led by Brigadier General Emilio Mola, a cadre of mid-level officers championed the effort. Although they represented a broad cross-section of the political spectrum – monarchists, fascists, clerical reactionaries, and a collection of officers without ideological leanings, the primacy of liberal officers in senior positions put the conspiracy in a difficult position. For this reason, Franco's conservative reputation and respected accomplishments made him an important potential candidate to represent the diverse anti-liberal, anti-socialist Junta. Nevertheless, the exiled General kept his distance. He had no desire to destroy a storied career because of an uncalculated blunder. On 25 June 1936, he wrote a letter to President Azaña actually warning him of the Army's eroding loyalty, but it went unanswered.¹⁶ Only after the Popular Front government created a Marxist-leaning militia did Franco cast his lot with the conspirators in July 1936. Although the General only had a basic understanding of Spain's economic and political intricacies, he was keenly aware of current public unrest and leftist revolutionary organizations.¹⁷ The chaos in Spain had become so problematic that sitting back any longer and watching matters deteriorate was worse than joining the rebels. Franco also

¹⁵Alan Lloyd, *Franco* (London: The Longman Group, 1970), 58-69.

¹⁶Payne, *Franco's Spain*, 9.

¹⁷Lloyd, *Franco*, 59-69.

thought it advantageous to side with the Republican faction than to face a potentially stronger Leftist menace later. Thus, the first phase of a life-long anti-Communist crusade - the fight against the Popular Front - had begun. It was one battle in a campaign that would deeply impact the way he would be remembered later.

El Caudillo Emerges

Franco's eventual emergence as the Nationalist leader was due to a combination of his successes, his vision, and luck. Although General Emilio Mola and other leading conspirators had been eager for the general to hold an important role in the revolt, General Jose Sanjurjo had been tapped as its primary leader. On 20 July 1936, however, Sanjurjo's plane burst into flames as it departed from Lisbon and the team of generals in the *Junta de Defensa Nacional* invited Franco to become its ninth member on 3 August 1936.

As the Junta consolidated its coalition of conservative elements under a unified body, Franco emerged as the strongest individual member of the movement, because he commanded the most important of the Nationalist forces - the Armies of Africa and the South of Spain. In an interview a week after he joined the Junta, Franco categorically announced: "Spain is Republican and will continue to be so. Neither the regime nor the flag have changed. The only change will be that crime is replaced by order and acts of banditry by honest and progressive work. Spain will be governed by a corporative system similar to those installed in Portugal, Italy, and Germany."¹⁸ However,

¹⁸Payne, *The Franco Regime*, 111.

five days later, Franco replaced the Republican flag with the traditional monarchical yellow and red standard, hailing it as *the* flag for which patriots had given their lives in a hundred battles. A public announcement of Franco's leadership, the Junta's Decree of 29 September 1936 read: "In accordance with the resolution adopted by the Junta de Defensa Nacional, General Francisco Franco Bahamonde is named Chief of the Government of the Spanish State, and will assume all the powers of the new State."¹⁹ His investiture speech in Burgos in early October declared: "You are placing Spain in my hands. My hand will be firm, my pulse will not tremble, and I shall try to raise Spain to the place that corresponds to her history and her rank in earlier times."²⁰

Franco possessed a basic set of beliefs whose fundamental values changed little in comparison to the evolution of the regime.²¹ Franco's belief in the Spanish "essence" resonated with a sense of a mythical national, Catholic past superseding Jewish and Muslim identities, one that could resurface as a force behind the modern Catholic "Spanishness" for which he lobbied. He had also come to the conclusion that Spain could not adapt to a parliamentary system, and he saw himself as a bulwark against all that he abhorred: Communism, Marxism, Masonry, materialism, and internationalism.

The Church provided Franco with much of the propaganda he would adopt to publicly define himself after the Nationalist victory. The image of Franco as a

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 116.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹Preston, *Franco*, 10.

modern Catholic crusader was promoted by Enrique Pley y Deniel, Bishop of Salamanca. A letter on 30 September 1936 quoted Augustine of Hippo and compared the “earthly city,” or Republican zone, where Communism and anarchy reigned, with the celestial, or Nationalist zone, where heroism and love of God prevailed. Toward the end of the war, on 16 April 1939, Pope Pius XII gave Franco his apostolic blessing and praised him for his “noble and Christian sentiments.”²² Feverishly committed to retaining power and now backed by the Church, he believed that the Nationalists had an absolute right to suppress Republican supporters. Victory, according to Franco, had to be complete.

Consequently, one of his first acts as Head of State was to ban all leftist and liberal parties. The Falangist state was to be a “national syndicalist state” in which “the state, to discipline the economy, employs the instrument of the syndicates.”²³ He admired the social programs of those regimes that had helped his victory over the Leftists – Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.²⁴ Yet, Spanish authoritarianism, as Franco called it, was not derived from Hitler’s National Socialism or Mussolini’s *fascismo*, but instead from the centralized monarchy of Ferdinand and Isabella. This revived “integral nationalism” would somewhat base itself upon Franco’s perceptions of the Spanish Golden Age, including the intolerant conventions of Spanish government and society, such as the “Black Legend” – the myth of the Inquisition’s genocidal barbarism.

²²*Ibid.*

²³Payne, *The Franco Regime*, 117, 119, 169.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 22.

The Emerging Dictatorship, Jewish Memory, and the Heyday of National-Catholic Identity

While much can and has been said about the brutal character of Franco's regime, this study analyzes the generally overlooked and vexing problem of how his policy toward Jews complicated the Jewish response to his regime and his person. The devastating war between 1936 and 1939 was arguably largely responsible for the image of Franco that would thwart attempts at Judeo-Spanish reconciliation thereafter. His fascist coalition derided in orchestrated campaigns the radical and "communist Jews" who had championed the Republican cause that Franco considered impious and anti-Spanish. A strong intellectual and financial base for the Republican movement, liberal Jews proved a formidable foe for the fascist Nationalists. However, by strategically linking a Jewish Republican plot with long-disliked progressive Catalan separatists, the *Falange* was able to galvanize Spanish public opinion in its favor. Ultimately, it is debatable whether Franco himself stirred up anti-Semitic sentiment among the *Falange* or whether he allowed them to decry the "Judeo-Catalan" conspiracy in order to sustain its popularity. Although anti-Semitic epithets can be found in the general's speeches, they are remarkably few by comparison with the virulent anti-Jewish rhetoric in fascist newspapers.²⁵

Domestically, the 1940s and early 1950s marked the heyday of Franco's image of a Spain based on an anachronistic amalgam of medieval romanticism, nationalism and a re-born sense of destiny. Having acted to outlaw opposition parties, control all media

²⁵Lipschitz, *Franco, Spain, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 16-20.

and insert pro-Franco rhetoric into the educational curriculum, El Caudillo monopolized the discourse about Spanish identity. His 1942 *Raza*, a semi-biographical novel, exalted a nation and people born out of the ashes of fierce conflict. As for Franco himself, it presented him as a “gift from God,” a popular theme in the period’s educational curricula, that protected Spain’s Catholic roots. Jose Churruca, the story’s main character, incarnated the dictator’s idea of his nation - resilient, crusading, protective, and spiritual.²⁶ The Nationalist fervor born out of victory in the Civil War also influenced the regime’s economic policy. Eschewing international trade, Franco’s autarkic measures played a dual role during the administration’s early years. While these served as an economic manifestation of Spain’s independence and a post-World War II response to international ostracism, the harsh realities of running a country trumped the ideological constructs of Spanish identity. As starvation became a tangible problem, Franco’s coffers suffered. It was in this context that Franco courted limited diplomatic relations with Israel in hopes of easing Spanish international isolation.²⁷

The only clear evidence of any personal ill will toward the Jewish people was Franco’s reaction to Israel’s 1949 U.N. vote against admitting Spain to that body as punishment for his alliance with Hitler in the Spanish Civil War and Axis sympathy in World War II. On 16 May 1949, Israeli ambassador to the United Nations Abba Eban responded to a proposal by several

²⁶Jaime de Andrade [pseu. Francisco Franco Bahamonde], *Raza* (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1997), 1-20.

²⁷Berdichevsky, “Spanish-Jewish Reconciliation,” 3-5.

Latin American countries to lift the U.N.'s diplomatic boycott against Franco's regime:

The United Nations has arisen out of the sufferings of a martyred generation, which included six million dead...That memory alone will determine Israel's attitude. While the Israeli delegation would not for one moment assert that the Spanish regime had any direct part in the policy of extermination, it does maintain that Franco Spain had been an active and sympathetic ally of the regime that had been responsible for that policy and thus contributed to its effectiveness...For Israel, the essential point is the association of the Franco regime with the Nazi-Fascist alliance that corroded the moral foundations of civilized life and inflicted upon the human race its most terrible and devastating ordeal...²⁸

While Franco did not officially recognize Israel in 1948 because of personal ties to Arab states dating back to his career as a leader of a Muslim brigade in Morocco, his regime approached the nascent nation as part of a strategy to overcome the barriers keeping it out of the United Nations. For example, prior to the aforementioned vote, Franco authorized a Jewish synagogue to operate in Spain for the first time since

²⁸United Nations, *Yearbook of the United Nations*, 1948/49 (New York: UN, 1950), 311-315.; United Nations, *Official Records of the Third session of the General Assembly*, pt.2., Plenary Meetings of the General Assembly, Summary Records of Meetings, April 5-May 18, 1949 (Lake Success, N.Y, 1949), 500.; Minutes of the United Nations General Assembly, May 16, 1949.

the Civil War. The Israeli critique above ignored not only Franco's efforts in saving 20,000 to 60,000 European Jews during World War II and after it, but also the delicate political situation that Franco successfully navigated to avoid joining the Axis at Germany's behest.²⁹ In the complicated history of relations between Spain and the Jewish people, Franco's rescue of the Jews during World War II had little recognizable effect on the official Israeli stance toward him later. By labeling *El Caudillo* as a Nazi collaborator and disregarding his pro-Jewish actions, the Israeli government crafted a dubious place for him in Judeo-Spanish history.

El Caudillo's rescue of thousands of Jews had a prior legal basis. The 1924 Primo de Rivera law provided that any individual of Spanish ancestry living outside Spain was entitled to the privileges of Spanish citizenship without ever having to set foot in the country. Franco first oversaw the execution of this law in 1924 and 1925 when, as an army major, he evacuated several hundred Jews from the Moroccan port city of Tetuan. This law did more than simply entitle Sephardic Jews to Spanish citizenship; it afforded them the protection of the government.³⁰ Sephardim living abroad were under the authority of Spanish sovereignty. The Germans accepted Franco's law almost without question, because in the Spanish-Nazi relationship, *El Caudillo* had leverage over his German counterpart.

²⁹Estimates by Yad Vashem, Haim Avni, Chaim Lipschitz, and others give a range of lives saved. The secrecy, in many cases, of the various operations led to an inaccurate reporting of numbers.

³⁰Lipschitz, *Franco, Spain, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 9.

Germany expected Spain to enter World War II on the Axis side after aiding Franco in his defeat of the Republicans. Franco, however, was not eager to win one war just to enter a larger war against the Allies. The regime's quarrel did lay with the Communists and their sympathizers, but not to the extent that Franco could realistically charge into the Axis camp. It would not have been popular among his supporters, and the Head of State would not plunge Spain into a new round of political and social turmoil. Although Spain allowed Nazi u-boats to patrol its waters, its assistance to the Fuhrer would not amount to much more than mouthing the party line at the onset of the war in order to keep the *Wehrmacht* out of the Pyrenees. Hitler could not force Spain into the war against her will either. Risking a guerilla war on his rear should he cross the Pyrenees into the Basque country was too great a risk for Germany to take while Franco at least appeared to be an active sympathizer. Franco constantly put off entering the war, much to Hitler's annoyance, by requesting items like large quantities of gasoline that he knew Germany could not dispense with. When, in the early months of 1943, the Germans concluded that Spain would never enter the conflict, they had no alternative but to curse themselves.³¹ The Spanish leader's policy of issuing visas to claimants of Sephardic ancestry in occupied territories and letting others cross the Pyrenees and reach refugee camps in Navarre annoyed German authorities, and there was a faction of German generals advocating attacking Spain. The German Navy actually sunk a Spanish vessel as a warning shot to the dictator, but Franco

³¹*Ibid.*, 24-38.

did not alter his outwardly ambiguous stance. After the war, official Israeli policy, by indicting Franco, would fail to evaluate the complex political situations that he overcame domestically during the Civil War and internationally during World War II.

Cold War Politics and Israeli-Spanish Reconciliation

Israel's initial rejection of Franco's Spain resulted partly from its own internal political complexities. In 1950, the leaders of the Sephardic communities in a dozen cities worldwide telegraphed Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion in another vain attempt to get Israel to lift the Spanish blockade. Their efforts were blocked by what they saw as the Ashkenazi-dominated government's move to display its supremacy over the Sephardim. The Ashkenazi (Jews of eastern European descent) Mapai and Mapam parties, both socialist and committed to left-wing causes, preserved the image of Franco as a Nazi sympathizer regardless of signs of a more sympathetic Sephardic perspective.³² During the mid-1950s, when Spain was finally admitted into the U.N. and established an overt alliance with the United States, Franco had the opportunity to combine the rebirth of the crusade, now versus Communism, which was always central to his interpretation of Spanish history with a move to improve his relations with Israel. The two nations found themselves in the same geopolitical situation. Both buffers against Communist expansion, Spain would be for the western Mediterranean what Israel was for the eastern Mediterranean – a strategic out-

³²Berdichevsky, "Spanish-Jewish Reconciliation," 5.

post.³³ Even though Spain had finally been released from its forced diplomatic obscurity and was modernizing its economy based on an increasingly sophisticated technocracy in the late 1950s, the memory of Spanish volunteers fighting on the side of the Axis during the Second World War still kept the possibility of an Israeli reconciliation remote.

Franco's rescue of the Jews was not finished in the 1940s, however. In response to a 1956-1960 campaign to relocate 2,733 Moroccan Jews from the ports of Ceuta and Melilla to Israel via Malaga, Israeli Sephardim urged their government to court Spain.³⁴ Despite protests from Franco's Arab allies, Sephardim leaders in both countries promoted an exhibition of books on the Sephardic experience in Spain. In 1960, General Franco hosted a Sephardic delegation that included the Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Great Britain, and Spain established the Institute of Sephardi Studies in the following year.³⁵ Culturally, ties between the two nations increased, but that could not derail the political stalemate reached during the Six-Day War of 1967.

This war also had a profound impact among more sensitive Spanish politicians, who thought that Israel's lightning victory over the Arab coalition called into question the extent to which Franco should follow a pro-Arab foreign policy. However, this change in opinion was neutralized by later Israeli policy toward

³³Mark Kurlansky, *The Basque History of the World*, (New York: Penguin, 1999), 228-230. Kurlansky's work also examines Basque persecution and its role in a unified, centralist, Spain.

³⁴Lipschitz, *Franco, Spain, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 154-158.

³⁵Berdichevsky, "Spanish-Jewish Reconciliation," 5.

Gibraltar. When the Spanish government put forth a resolution seeking to wrest Gibraltar away from British hands in December 1967, Spain's Arab allies voted in favor, but Israel abstained on the grounds that Franco had allowed volunteers to fight on Hitler's side while Gibraltar held out as an allied stronghold during World War II. Again, the influence of Franco's pro-Axis image came to bear on Cold War politics and Israeli-Spanish reconciliation. Nevertheless, cooperation did exist between the two countries' secret services, and American pressure forced Spain to make available the American base at Rota as a logistical staging point for Israeli missions during the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

By this time, Franco had begun fighting a series of serious illnesses which rapidly weakened him. The consummate crusader, Franco clung to life for two years while his government decided its future. The young prince Juan Carlos II, Franco's appointed successor since 1947, welcomed establishing official diplomatic relations with Israel. Such a step would improve the image of Spain in the United States, as it was the last Western European nation without relations with Jerusalem. However, acting Prime Minister Adolfo Suarez inherited from Franco a fragile relationship with Spain's Arab allies; approximately 90% of Spain's petroleum was supplied by Iran and its neighbors. This dependency created a rift between the United States, who felt that Spain was being blackmailed, and the Spanish government, who was not yet ready to handle confronting the Arab world. In 1979, Suarez welcomed a visit from PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat and sparked controversy among European and American observers. Spain and Israel would not speak of diplomatic ties for another six years.

The rise of the socialist PSOE government in the mid-1980s under Felipe Gonzalez brought to fruition a process begun in the early days of Francisco Franco's regime. Although Franco was frustrated by the political nature of the Spanish-Israeli reconciliation process and viewed the plight of the Sephardim as a question of "Spanish identity," the socialist Gonzalez galvanized the voices of those repressed by Franco's regime to create an image that was congruent with the Jewish memory of El Caudillo. Those who remembered the Spanish Republic, the International Brigades, and the early anti-Franco struggle now spearheaded the creation of cultural links that led to the events of April 14, 1986. On that day, Spanish Ambassador Pedro Lopez Aguirrebengoa presented his diplomatic papers in Jerusalem and was greeted by President Yitzhak Herzog with "Welcome after 500 years!" King Juan Carlos II declared, "Spain has overcome a situation that had not corresponded with our own history nor with the present course of our country." Achieving the status of a credible, modern, parliamentary democracy required that Spain, according to its own standards, finally meet this critical goal.

Examining Franco's regime through the Jewish-Israeli lens reveals one of the General's key shortcomings; he took criticism of Spain as a personal insult. A personal bitterness toward the Israeli governments of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s arguably created yet another obstacle to reconciliation. It appears that the exit of Franco was a necessary step in the final diplomatic recognition ten years after his death. Both Franco's regime and Felipe Gonzalez' PSOE Party viewed relations with Israel as a historic problem grounded in the plight of the Sephardim. Perhaps the

Israelis needed the equivalent of a *pacto del olvido* for themselves that would erase *El Caudillo* Axis ties from the Judeo-Spanish historical record.

As Spain and Israel enjoy full diplomatic relations today, *El Caudillo*'s influence on the end result goes uncelebrated and largely unrecognized. Although Franco had the power to create and institutionalize a uniquely Spanish memory that he *felt* had been lost as Spain declined from its zenith to the backwater it became into the 19th and 20th centuries, he could not guarantee the preservation of a positive memory for himself after his death. Franco's inability to bridge the gap between a personally relevant, politically sound, economically expedient Arab friendship and an Israeli alliance probably arose from the contradiction posed for Franco's policy makers between "Spanishness" as a mythologized intellectual and cultural exclusiveness on the one hand and a nostalgic inclusiveness on the other, evidenced by the general's protection of both Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews.

Ultimately, Franco may share the same fate as his suppressed domestic political opponents – remembered only by those he personally impacted. *El Pacto del olvido*, in its refusal to open a so-called Pandora's Box, forced those who were silenced under the regime to accept that there would not be any public recognition of their past lives and memories.³⁶ It can be noted here that collective memory may result from a deliberate campaign to define an identity. It does not exist without the social commentators, analysts, politicians, and historians who choose how it is

³⁶Helen Graham, "Coming to Terms with the Past: Spain's Memory Wars" in *History Today* 54:5 (2004): 31.

constructed. By either omitting or focusing on particular details about *El Caudillo's* life, contemporary Spaniards and Israelis have created a particularly complicated memory of him in the complex history of Judeo-Spanish relations.