Are we so Different? Military Interventionism in Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States

¿Somos tan diferentes? El intervencionismo militar en España, Reino Unido y Estados Unidos

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to carry out a comparative study of military interventionism in Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The thesis on which it is based is that armies intervene when the conditions are created for them to do so. There is no such thing as a dichotomy between interventionist and non-interventionist armies in the political decision-making process.

Keywords: Assault on the *Cu-Cut*, Business Plot, 23-F coup d'état, Armed Forces, Curragh incident, military interventionism.

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Resumen

El objetivo de esta investigación es realizar un estudio comparado del intervencionismo militar en España, Reino Unido y Estados Unidos. La tesis que defendemos es que los Ejércitos intervienen cuando se crean las condiciones para ello. No existen, por tanto, Ejércitos no intervencionistas y Ejércitos intervencionistas en el proceso de toma de decisiones políticas.

Palabras-clave: Asalto al *Cu-Cut*, *Business Plot*, golpe de Estado del 23-F, Fuerzas Armadas, incidente de Curragh, intervencionismo militar.

Introduction

In early May 2021, a group of retired French military officers –most of them holding the rank of general[2]– wrote a public letter to President Emmanuel Macron warning of the dangers facing their nation –especially the wave of Islamic terrorist attacks– and the immediate need to neutralise them. The letter included a significant paragraph warning of the possibility of military intervention in the political decision-making process if this situation was not tackled:

> If nothing is done, the weakening will continue to spread inexorably through society, eventually leading to an explosion and the intervention of our active comrades in a dangerous mission to protect our civilisational values and safeguard our compatriots at home.

These phrases should come as no surprise to French historians or, even less so, to Anglo-Saxon historians. The study of the Armed Forces (AF) and the causes and levels of their intervention in the political process from a comparative history perspective has a long tradition, embodied in the works of the German Alfred Vagts (1958), the British Samuel E. Finer (1969) and the North Americans Gwyn Harries-Jenkins and Charles Moskos (1984), Morris Janowitz (1967) and Samuel P. Huntington (1957). By contrast, in the case of Spain, studies in this field have focused solely and exclusively on what happened in our country, and above all on the idea that the *pronunciamiento* and the coup d'état are the basic instruments used by the military to intervene in the political decision-making process. The result has been the consolidation of a mainstream thesis according to which the military have been fundamental actors in Spanish political life during a large part of Modernity. This is in stark

[2] The different ranks within the generalate have been translated into their US Army equivalents. The only exception is that of Field Marshal.

contrast to what has happened in other Western nations, where the military is depicted as respectful of the law, distant from political affairs, and exclusively interest in external defence. This situation, which has been called "militarism" or "praetorianism" (Vagts, 1958: 164), is therefore a feature of Spanish political culture, which reached its peak with the Civil War (1936-1939) and the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco Bahamonde (Boyd, 1990; Cardona, 1988; Payne, 1976; Seco Serrano, 1984, Lleixá, 1986).

In contrast to this approach, the thesis developed in this research is that there are no interventionist and non-interventionist armies, but rather that the military "form an effective pressure group on the organs of government" (Janowitz, 1967: 13) that acts in the political decision-making process when they consider that the homeland is in danger due to the actions of civilians. In order to develop it, a comparative history exercise will be carried out between two military interventions that took place in Spain –the incident of the officers of the Barcelona garrison in 1905 and the coup d'état of 23 February 1981– and two that took place in the United Kingdom (the Curragh incident of 1914) and the United States (the *Business Plot* of 1933-1934). The choice of the two major Anglo-Saxon countries is determined by the fact that they are recognised for the strength of their democratic institutions and for being the paradigm of civilian supremacy in the political decision-making process.

This research is based on three main sources: the minutes of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), the body that investigated the *Business Plot* (McCormack-Dickstein, 1934); the articles of the journalist Louis Spivak, who collected some witness statements that were not incorporated into the previous document (Spivak, 1935); and the British Army documents on the Curragh incident compiled by Ian Beckett (1986). In addition to these three resources, press articles and the abundant literature on AF in Spain, the United States and the United Kingdom have been used.

In terms of structure, this article is divided into three sections. The first section analyses the role of the military as political actors. In the second, the Curragh incident is compared with the action carried out by Spanish officers in Barcelona in 1905. Finally, the Business Plot and its similarities with the 23-F coup d'état are explained.

The Military as Political Actors

In the second part of his famous book *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote a paragraph reflecting the changes in the military in the first half of the 19th century: "In the old French monarchy, officers were given only their noble title. Today, only the military title is given. This small change in treatment

is enough to indicate that a great revolution has taken place within society and the army" (Tocqueville, 1989: II, 226). The dynamic to which the French political thinker was referring was the emergence of modern military institutions, whose origins can be traced back to the period of the Liberal Revolutions (1789-1848), more specifically between 1815 and 1848. Over the course of those thirty-three years, modern armies were created with the core objective of safeguarding internal order, i.e. with a clear "internal vocation", and also defending the external borders of these countries. However, in their formation there was no break with the military elite of the *Ancien Régime*, as the officers continued to be linked to "the European post-feudal nobility and [to] its social equivalents in the United States" (Janowitz, 1967: 87-110; Vagts, 1957: 164). This social background and the very characteristics of the military profession, where authoritarianism played a key role (Dixon, 2001: 269-293), defined the creation of a conservative, even reactionary, military culture in the West, articulated around a very precise set of values (Muñoz Bolaños, 2019: 27-28):

- Ethnocentrism and ultra-nationalism supported by a mystique and key concepts such as love of country or the duty to defend it against any enemy (Finer, 1969: 38-83; Janowitz, 1967: 28).
- Non-partisanship but not apoliticism. The dominant ideology was conservative, typical of the European aristocracy and the large landowners of the American South (Janowitz, 1967: 233-254).
- "Professionalism" and autonomy vis-à-vis civilian politicians led them to consider military affairs within their exclusive sphere of decision-making, preventing and rejecting civilian intervention in their management (Finer, 1969: 38-40; Vagts, 1957: 323-359).
- Internal cohesion.
- Importance of honor, duty, hierarchy, discipline, and spirit of sacrifice as fundamental values of the military profession (Janowitz, 1947: 217-232).
- Loyalty to the Crown in monarchical systems.
- Rejection of liberalism, democracy and, above all, workers' movements because of their opposition to the prevailing social order.
- Consideration of extreme violence as the best solution for dealing with political-military problems (Feld, ed., 1977: 71-84). This approach implied the search for a "final solution" that would provide "permanent results" (Hull, 2005: 1). "This kind of thinking led to the desire to exterminate" (Hull, 2005: 100) the enemy, whether internal or external.

These values, contrary to the liberal and democratic tradition that was spreading in Western Europe, would be the cause of numerous conflicts between the military and their civilian rulers, opening a window of opportunity for the intervention of AF members in the political decision-making process. The causes that favoured these military actions can be summarised in seven key ideas (Muñoz Bolaños, 2021: 42-47):

1. Patriotism versus civilian supremacy. From the outset, the members of the AF considered their loyalty to the nation to be above obedience to the civilian authorities (Taylor, 1952: 354). Therefore, if forced to choose between "saving" the nation or subordinating themselves to the institutions of the state, they gave priority to the former. The only exception was the Crown. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, this feudal institution gradually lost most of its political prerogatives, but retained the command of the AF. Precisely this link between monarch and army was embodied in the figure of the "soldier-king" (Puell, 2005: 110-114), which, added to the common aristocratic origin of the holder of the Crown and the military, led to a strong link between the two institutions (Meyer, 1997: 130-145). This dynamic in turn inclined the king to support the military in its conflicts with the political class.
2. Professionalism as a dilemma. Huntington saw civilian and military values as conflicting. Therefore, in order to prevent the AF from intervening in the political decision-making process, it was necessary to favour professionalism, that is, to ensure that officers focused on their technical tasks. In this way it would be possible to establish objective civilian control over the armies, an ideal model for articulating relations between civilian power and the military because it was based on a balance of separation. In this model, the civilian authorities would define defence and military policy and allocate resources for the AF, while the military would be responsible for its implementation. The result would be the lowest possible level of political power for the members of the AF by making them neutral in the public sphere. At the same time, the values and internal autonomy of the military, necessary for the existence of their profession, were preserved (Huntington, 1957: 91-95). Studies by Finer (1969: 39-40) and Janowitz (1967: 403-425) have discussed this hypothesis on the basis of examples such as the German and Japanese armies in the inter-war period, two highly professional and interventionist institutions in the political sphere. The historical development of the 19th y 20th has shown that the military were never and are never isolated from what is happening around them, as Huntington argued, but rather maintain

a "watchful" attitude that allows them to intervene in the political process when they consider that the nation is being endangered (Finer, 1969: 53).

3. The manifest destiny of the AF: serving the national interest. Since the 19th century, the military has been defined by its exclusive service and the defence –even with its own life– of the homeland, considering its mission as "sacrosanct" and its duty to intervene and "save the nation" when it is in danger (Díez-Alegría, 1972: 42).
4. The need for prestige of the armed forces in society. Since its formation, the military has shown two serious weaknesses when intervening in the political sphere. The first was their technical inability to administer a developed community. The second was their lack of legitimacy to govern because they lacked the moral authority to do so (Finer, 1969: 26-36). Therefore, they have always needed to legitimise their actions in the public sphere with the support of a section of civil society, and even needed its support when they took power to manage public affairs.
5. The defence of sectoral interests. The AF has also intervened in the political decision-making process to defend class or social group interests (e.g. the Latin American military in defence of traditional oligarchies) or corporate interests (e.g. defence of military autonomy) (Finer, 1969: 47-81).
6. The existence of frustrations in the AF. A notable case in point is the military defeats against an external enemy that provoked a sense of failure among the members of the AF and a desire for revenge, which led them to try to participate in the political decision-making process.
7. The inability of the civilian authorities to deal with the country's problems. Examples include a situation of persistent economic crisis, prolonged political instability, or a wave of terrorist attacks. These dynamics provide a favourable environment for military intervention.

From these ideas-causes, a conclusion can be drawn regarding military interventionism in the political sphere: to avoid this dynamic, it is not a *sine qua non* condition to establish "objective control" over the AF, as Huntington advocated, but rather to avoid the existence of a favourable situation for such intervention. When such a situation arises, the military tries to take a leading role in the political decision-making process. Recent events in France demonstrate this.

However, the existence of a favourable dynamic has not meant that the military always chooses to act violently, ousting the government of the day from power. On the contrary, their intervention in the political decision-making

process tends to follow a staggered dynamic, seeking to avoid traumatic situations and seeking civilian support for their actions. There are two reasons for this approach. On the one hand, armies have usually preferred to avoid situations of instability and violence whose consequences could be unpredictable. On the other, because an intervention outside the law entailed the loss of their jobs, their freedom and even their lives if it failed. To systematise this graduated action, Finer distinguished four possible forms of military interventionism (Finer, 1969: 187-216).

The first, *Influence*, was typical of countries with a developed political culture. It was defined as the military elite trying to influence the government, but within the bounds of legality, to act in accordance with its values and interests.

The second, *Blackmail*, would be characteristic of countries with less political culture, as it involved the threat of non-cooperation with civilian authorities, direct disobedience, intimidation and even the threat of violence against the government if it did not conform to the dictates of the AF.

However, these two forms of intervention were sometimes difficult to distinguish, especially when the military's "advice" was accompanied by implicit, albeit non-violent, threats if not heeded.

The third, *Displacement*, would be linked to countries with a low political culture, as it implied the replacement of a civilian government by another of the same composition thanks to the action of the AF. This *Displacement* could be carried out through three channels: the threat of military intervention, the AF's refusal to defend the government in the face of civil disorder, and military violence. The latter took three forms: a direct attack by the AF on the executive (coup d'état), the successive rebellion of the military garrisons (cuartelazo or pronunciamiento), or a combination of the two.

The fourth, *Supplanting*, was also typical of countries with a low political culture. It was defined by the substitution of a civilian government with a military one and developed along the same lines and in the same variants as *Displacement*.

However, for any of these forms of intervention to succeed, three conditions had to be met:

- The unity of the armed forces. Military interventions in the political process have always achieved complete success when the members of the armies acted together. On the contrary, when they were divided into factions, these actions ended in failure and even civil war, as happened in Spain in 1936.
- The existence of a leader. It has been literally impossible for a military intervention, in any form, to succeed without the existence of an undisputed leader. On the contrary, its absence has led to divisions,

tensions, and factions within the AF, causing it to fail.

- Recognition of the new government by at least one major power. This condition has been absolutely necessary in the case of *Displacement* and *Supplanting* interventions in order to legitimise the new government in the eyes of the international community. A notorious case was the Greek colonels coup d'état in 1967, whose success was directly linked to the recognition of the new government by the United States, the United Kingdom and the Federal Republic of Germany.

Two Examples of *Blackmail*: Barcelona Incident (1905) and Curragh Incident (1914)

Antonio Canovas del Castillo made the Spanish army the mainstay of the Restoration regime (1874-1931) and the monarch –the "soldier-king"– its commander-in-chief. The aim was to avoid a repetition of the situation of the *Espadones* that had characterised the reign of Isabel II (1843-1868) (Puell, 2005: 110-114). The result was the emergence of a civilian political system articulated around the two dynastic parties, Conservative and Liberal, which peacefully took turns in power. However, this balance began to break down in 1893 with the emergence of a new form of military interventionism: the assault on premises, particularly the editorial offices of the written media whose articles antagonised the military. Examples of this dynamic were the actions of the lieutenants of the Madrid garrison in 1895 and of the officers in Havana in 1898. As a result of the latter action, President William McKinley sent the armored cruiser *Maine*, whose sinking was to become the *casus belli* of the Spanish-American War (Payne, 1968: 48-49; Puell, 2005: 138). These first actions were exclusively linked to the defence of the army's corporate interests. However, after the defeat by the United States in 1898, there was a change in this dynamic. Members of the AF felt deeply frustrated because they were blamed for the loss of the colonial empire, but above all because of the spread of nationalist movements in the Basque Provinces and Catalonia that endangered the unity of Spain. Opposition to these movements became the army's main mission. Thus, in 1902, officers of the Bilbao garrison assaulted a nationalist centre in the capital of Biscay (Moreno Luzón, 2009: 360-361).

However, it was in Catalonia that the most serious episode occurred. On 12 November 1905, municipal elections were held. The victory in Barcelona went to the Republican and *Lliga Regionalista* candidates. Six days later, this Catalan nationalist party held a banquet at the *Frontón Condal* to commemorate its victory. On the 25th, the satirical Catalan nationalist weekly magazine *Cu-cut!* published an issue devoted to the banquet. In a drawing, the cartoonist Joan García Junceda related the event to the discrediting of the Spanish army,

a recurring theme in the Catalan nationalist sphere (Puell, 2005: 41-42). The response from the military was not long in coming. That same night, some 200 officers from the Barcelona garrison stormed and destroyed the editorial offices of the newspaper *Cu-cut!* and the nationalist daily *La Veu de Catalunya* and provoked incidents with civilians.

The officers in the Catalan capital immediately received support from many of their colleagues –including general– in the rest of Spain, as well as from the military press, particularly *La Correspondencia Militar.* This support reflected the community of thought in defence of the unity of Spain and in the fight against peripheral nationalism. In contrast, neither the Liberal Party in government nor the Conservative Party in opposition accepted the military's interference in the political decision-making process. Nor did the press show any sympathy for the events that had taken place in the Catalan capital. Likewise, the executive presided over by Eugenio Montero Ríos, an advocate of civilian supremacy in state governance, was inclined to punish the officers involved in these incidents (De Riquer, 2013: 48). This measure was considered necessary because they had become the catalyst for a *Blackmail-type* intervention, the aim of which was to delegate to military elements the repression of any movement against the unity of Spain and its national symbols. But Montero Ríos did not find support from his Minister of War, General Valeriano Weyler y Nicolau, who decided to maintain a "neutral" attitude, participating de facto in the *Blackmail.* The crisis between politicians and the military was resolved in favour of the latter thanks to the intervention of the monarch, the lynchpin of the political system of the Restoration (Juliá, 1999: 29). Montero Ríos felt disempowered and resigned on 1 December. That same day, *La Correspondencia Militar* published an article entitled *"Viva el rey"* which openly acknowledged Alfonso XIII's support for the demands of the members of the AF.

The new president of the Council of Ministers, also a liberal, Segismundo Moret, was forced to satisfy the military. His Minister of War, Lieutenant General Agustín de Luque y Coca, drafted a new legal regulation, known as the "Law of Jurisdictions" and officially known as the Law for the Repression of Crimes against the Fatherland and the Army, which was eventually approved by the Cortes and published in the *Gaceta de Madrid* on 24 April 1906. This law authorised the military courts to try all crimes against national symbols, military institutions, and the unity of Spain (Juliá, 1999: 29; Payne, 1968: 73-84; Puell, 2005: 142).

The triumph of the military over civilian politicians was complete. This victory and the alliance between the FAS and Alfonso XIII would have important consequences in the medium term For, it opened a window of opportunity for a progressive military interventionism in the political decision-making process. This dynamic culminated in 1923 with the pronunciamiento of Lieutenant

General Miguel Primo de Rivera. This action also marked the beginning of the end of the political system of the Restoration, which would culminate in 1931 with the fall of the monarchy.

Nine years after the events in Barcelona, a military intervention of even greater proportions took place in the United Kingdom, the epicentre of which was Curragh, the main British military camp in Ireland. The situation in this nation in 1914 was very different from that of Spain. The United Kingdom had the largest colonial empire in the world and was recognised as one of the world's great powers. There was, however, one commonality between the two countries: the emergence of nationalist movements that threatened national unity. It was this dynamic that was to provoke this incident, one of the few actions in which the British military rebelled against the government (O'Brien, 2014: 7). However, unlike what had happened in Spain nine years earlier, in this military intervention the political parties and the civilian press were to play a major role. The reason for this difference lay in two dynamics. On the one hand, the existing identification between the Conservative Party and the FA, since their elites shared the same social origin and there was a community of interests between both institutions: defence of the Anglican Church, British tradition, the unity of the country and imperial expansion (Strachan, 1997: 101, 114-115). This dynamic set them apart from their Spanish counterparts, who blamed all civilian politicians equally for the decadence afflicting the nation. On the other, the rapid economic development that had endowed its population with a level of economic well-being and cultural and educational development far superior to that of Spain, as manifested in the proliferation of mass media. The military and its civilian allies therefore turned to the press to win the support of public opinion.

The origins of the problem that would eventually explode in 1914 can be traced to the late 19th century, when the leader of the Liberal Party William Gladstone –who governed from 1886 onwards with the support of the nationalist Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP)– had concluded that the granting of home rule, Irish Home Rule, to the island was necessary if the dominant nationalism of the Catholic population was to be prevented from turning into separatism. Although the bill was passed in the House of Commons, the House of Lords –the power centre of the conservative political elites– rejected it in 1893. Eighteen years later, the situation changed radically. The constitutional crisis of 1911 put an end to the British Upper Chamber's permanent veto power –now limited to a maximum of two years– and opened a window of opportunity for the approval of Ireland's Home Rule status. Herbert Asquith's Liberal government –supported by John Redmond's IPP– introduced a new bill in 1912, which was to be passed two years later at the latest (O'Brien, 2014: 12-15).

This new conjuncture prompted the Ulster Unionist Council –whose most prominent figures were Unionist Party MPs Edward Carson and James Craig– in January 1913 to begin uniformed militia that would become known as the Ulster Volunteer Force (UFV), a paramilitary organisation that grew to 100,000 men (O'Brien, 2014: 47). Its aim was to oppose even with force the Dublin Home Rule Parliament that was contemplating the Home Rule Bill for Ireland. From the outset, this militia had the complicity and support of members of the British Army. Carson offered his leadership to the most prestigious British military officer of the second half of the 19th century, the Anglo-Irish Field Marshal Lord Frederick Roberts of Kandahar, in March 1913. The 80-year-old veteran soldier was to be the key figure in the interventionist dynamic that would unfold a year later, thanks to his influence in the army, as noted in documents compiled by Beckett (1986: 35-43). However, because of his age, he declined command of the UFV, suggesting the name of a former subordinate of the British Indian Army, 66-year-old retired Lieutenant General Sir George Richardson, who was accepted by Carson. An excellent military man, Colonel William Pain in the same situation, became the UFV Chief of Staff (esta frase no queda clara). Under his command, a group of retired military officers transformed the militia into an effectively organised and fully militarised force (Bowman, 2007: 58-82). However, support for the Ulster Unionists was not limited to retired military personnel. From the outset, Roberts was in contact with Major General Henry Wilson, Director of Military Operations at the War Office, who came from an Anglo-Irish landowning family (Jeffery, 2006: 115-116; Holmes, 2004: 169). Similarly, most serving officers stationed in Ireland disagreed with the possibility of suppressing the Unionists and were prepared to resign if forced to do so, as evidenced by an exchange of letters in July 1913 between the editor of the Conservative newspaper *The Times* Geoffrey Robinson and Major General Charles Repington (Beckett, 1986: 33-34). This stance of most of the military, supported by the Conservative civilian elite, can only be explained by the fact that they considered the defence of the unity of the nation to be above obedience to the government. They were even prepared to use force, even at the risk of provoking a civil war, to defend their position. This fulfilled several of the above-mentioned cause-ideas that legitimise military intervention. The fact that many of the military personnel involved in the events belonged to the Anglo-Irish landowning class helped to strengthen this alliance. This is not to say, however, that the army was Anglo-Irish led (Beckett, 1986: 3), but that the military constituted a key bastion of the island's social elite (Sweeny, 2019: 13).

The situation was further complicated from the second half of 1913 as a result of two events. The first was the creation of a nationalist militia, the Irish Volunteers, on November 25, 1913 (White and O'Shea, 2003: 8). The

second, the explicit support of Conservative Party leader Edward Bonar Law –in close contact with Carson, Roberts and Wilson– for the army's position in Ireland (Beckett, 1986: 5; Jeffery, 2006: 117). This stance by the UK's second largest party, unlike what happened in Spain with its namesake organisation, not only implied institutional disloyalty to the government, but also that the social division in Ireland was now being transferred to Britain.

The explosive cyclogenesis that had been building up over the previous years was finally triggered in March 1914 when the approval of Home Rule for Ireland became irreversible. On 19 March, after accusing the government in the Commons of preparing for military intervention against the Unionists, Carson left the House and moved to Ulster. The Unionist leader's stance was seen as the beginning of a full-scale resistance to the new law (Beckett, 1986: 10). In the preceding days, the government had accelerated preparations to avert this threat. The Irish Crisis Monitoring Committee chaired by the Marquis of Crewe and comprising Colonel John E. B. Seely, Secretary of War; Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty; Augustine Birrell, Secretary for Ireland; and John Simon, Attorney General, invited Army General Arthur Paget, Commander-in-Chief of Ireland, to London to consider the measures needed to neutralise the UVF threat. On the evening of 19 March, Asquith himself chaired a meeting attended by Birrell, Churchill, Seely, Paget and Field Marshal John French, Chief of Army Staff. At this meeting it was decided to mobilise troops to prevent a Unionist rebellion (Beckett, 1986: 10-11). However, neither Asquith nor Seely delivered these orders in writing to Paget (Holmes, 2006: 178-179).

Paget arrived in Dublin on 20 March and summoned the senior British military commanders in Ireland: Major General Charles Fergusson and Brigadier Generals Stuart Rolt, Gerald Cuthbert and Hubert Gough. Although the events of this meeting are still unclear today, based on available sources we can say that Paget acted with little skill, informing his subordinates that operations against the Unionists were to commence immediately. He then added that the government had agreed to allow officers domiciled on the island to "disappear" for the duration of the campaign, but that the rest had to take part in these actions, on pain of dismissal from the army. In addition, he confronted the 44-year-old Gough, –a member of an Anglo-Irish landed gentry family and a offspring of one of the Army's most brilliant dynasties– and threatened him that his friendship with French would not exempt him from his duty. Paget was later unable to explain why he had acted so clumsily. Strachan argues that he was manipulated by Roberts to provoke a crisis between the government and the army (1997: 114-115).

Whatever the cause of Pager's conduct, the meeting triggered a *Blackmail* movement led by Gough. The young general moved to his brigade, the 3rd Cavalry, and persuaded his commanders to resign irrevocably. Thus, out of 71 commanders

and officers, 60 were willing to leave the service (Beckett, 1986: 79-80). Their stance was extended to the rest of the officers stationed at Curragh and from other army corps. Technically, this stance could not be considered a mutiny, as the officers did not rebel against government orders (Beckett, 1986: 1), but it was a military intervention in the form of *Blackmail*, as it implied a threat not to cooperate with the executive. However, Gough did not confine himself to stirring up the brass and officers stationed in Ireland, but immediately contacted his brother John, also a brigadier general and chief of staff of Aldershot Command, under the command of the prestigious Lieutenant General Douglas Haig, the brothers' 'protector'. John immediately contacted Wilson and Roberts, while Haig and all Aldershot Command officers threatened to resign if Hubert Gough was sanctioned (Holmes, 2004: 188-189). In addition, Wilson informed Bonar Law, who was prepared to support the military in the Commons. The seditionists were also supported by the Conservative press (Connelly, 2011: 535-557; Jeffery, 2006: 122).

In this situation of confrontation between the government on the one hand and the army, the Conservatives and the Unionists on the other, George V intervened in favour of the latter. On 21 March he wrote to Asquith that he was "grieved beyond words at this disastrous and irreparable catastrophe which has befallen my army" (Lewis, 2005: 141). The use of the possessive pronoun 'my' when referring to this institution is significant and would explain why he demanded that the prime minister not make any decisions about it without his approval (Holmes, 2004: 181-183).

George V's taking sides would be key to the triumph of the seditionists. "The Army, the House of Lords, the Conservative opposition and the King had conspired to defeat a democratically elected government" (O'Brien, 2014: 114). Asquith's executive did not fall, but was greatly weakened by Seely's resignation. By contrast, the military achieved its objective: units garrisoned in Ireland would not be used to suppress Unionist paramilitaries. The other winner was Carson, who got the government to begin to accept the possible exclusion of Ulster from home rule, opening the way for the partition of Ireland. But this did not mean that the crisis abated. On the contrary, the danger of civil war was latent and was only averted by the outbreak of another conflict, the First World War, which enabled Asquith to overcome the crisis. The Irish Home Rule, known as the Government of Ireland Act 1914, was passed on 18 September, but its implementation was immediately suspended because of the war situation. The Great War would end the tension between the military and the government, but it would also mean the end of the old British Army. Perhaps that is why George MacNunn wrote brilliantly: "I often wonder if General Seely and Churchill ever offer a? little candle to the memory of Wilhelm Hohenzollern, the officier cadre of the British Army and Navy for them, even thought it died in the process" (Beckett, 1986: 29).

However, the triumph of the military and the Conservatives was to prove short-lived. The non-enforcement of the Government of Ireland Act 1914 meant the end of the legalistic Irish Home Rule movement and its replacement by a new, violent independence dynamic that would have its first manifestation in the Easter Rising of 1916 and would end with the establishment of the Free State and the partition of the island in 1922 (O'Brien, 2014: 8).

Two Examples of "Displacement": 23-F (1981) and the *Business Plot* (1933-1934)

In 1979, a group of businessmen, politicians, and conservative military officers, taking advantage of the prevailing situation in Spain and in the AF –terrorist and nationalist offensive and economic, social and political crisis– came to the conclusion that an operation was needed to replace Adolfo Suárez with a military officer who enjoyed the absolute confidence of Juan Carlos I: Major General Alfonso Armada Comyn. This military officer would head a government of national concentration (unity) made up of all the political parties of the parliamentary arc. The political programme of this operation, known as the *Solución Armada* after the name of the military officer who led it, was based on four fundamental dynamics:

1. Redirection of the autonomous regions, because of the danger they posed to the unity of Spain.
2. Fight against terrorism.
3. Economic recovery. This point implied tackling the crisis by instilling "confidence in the business community", but also "improving the social climate" and "awakening hope".
4. Constitutional reform, with the fundamental objective of limiting the development of Title VIII of the Constitution, referring to the autonomous system.

It was not, therefore, a short-term project to deal with the crisis the country was going through, but a structural one. The ultimate objective pursued by its planners was to use the existing situation to modify all those points of the 1978 constitution that had represented a total break with Franco's regime and were detrimental to their interests. Hence, this programme not only involved the "redirection" of the autonomous system, but also affected the socio-economic measures that had been approved since the Moncloa Pacts of 1977. This set of reforms would be legitimised by the participation of all political parties in the executive.

Regarding its design, two possibilities were considered. The first, of a *constitutional character*, consisted of bringing the General to the presidency

of the government using the mechanism of the motion of censure. The second, called *pseudo-constitutional*, consisted of creating a "situation of exceptionality" that would force political leaders to elect a new president of the government to lead an executive of national unity. It was this model that was used on 23 February 1981. The instrument was a military officer with a reputation for exaltation, Guardia Civil lieutenant colonel Antonio Tejero Molina, who was ordered to seize the Congress of Deputies / (Parliament). This action created the "exceptional situation" that allowed Armada to present himself to the deputies as the "saviour" of the democratic system and thus culminate the designed operation. However, Tejero was not informed in advance of the true objective of the coup d'état. The result was that when, on the night of 23-24 February, Armada finally explained the aim of the operation, the lieutenant colonel felt deceived and forbade him from speaking to members of Parliament, thus causing the coup d'état to fail.

The *Solución Armada* was therefore a civilian operation designed by members of the *conservative* economic and political elite with a subordinate military component (Muñoz Bolaños, 2021: 257-264).

Between 1933 and 1934, an involutionary attempt took place in the United States that shows remarkable similarities with the Spanish coup d'état, known as the *Business Plot*. Its aim was to illegally seize control of the Federal Government, forcing the then president, Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1932-1945), to abandon his *New Deal* policy.

The first of these similarities was that both operations took place in the midst of a global crisis dynamic. The *Great Depression*, unleashed from October 24 onwards, brought the US economy to its knees. GDP fell by a third of its value between 1929 and 1933, industrial production plummeted, 6,000 of the country's 12,000 banks failed, and unemployment reached 13 million people (Galbraith, 2005: 195). It also ruined the presidency of Republican Herbert Hoover, whose policies to deal with the crisis –strict liberalism, support for big business and balanced budgets (Hoover 1952: 38-176)– were ineffective (Galbraith, 2005: 210-214).

Secondly, the US executive headed by Roosevelt –the winner of the election of 8 November 1932 with a spectacular result[3]– launched a political programme, the *New Deal*, which implied a real revolution in American political thought by calling into question the ideology of the Founding Fathers, which was considered unfit for the purpose of providing happiness for the people. This theoretical approach was to be realised in the form of the *Second Bill of Rights* based on four freedoms –freedom speech, freedom of want, freedom of religion and freedom of fear (Brand, 2003: 598). The aim

[3] Roosevelt won 22,821,377 votes (57 percent) and 473 delegates compared to Republican candidate Hoover's 15,761,254 (39.7 percent) and 59 delegates (Schlesinger, 2003: I, 438).

was to ensure the maximum welfare for the "forgotten man". Thus, during the first hundred days of the *New Deal*, a large amount of legislation was passed: the Economy Act (March 20) reducing public employees' wages and pensions; the Emergency Banking Act (March 9) stabilising the banking system; the Securities Act to prevent another stock market crash (May 27); the repeal of Prohibition (March 13) and plans to revive agriculture and reduce unemployment through subsidies and public works schemes (Schlesinger 2003: 179-194). He also took two other decisions that would be directly linked to the *Business Plot*: the refusal to pay a cash bonus to war veterans – four million people– and the momentary suspension of the gold standard that turned the liquid fortunes of great millionaires into mere paper (Schlesinger 2003: 195-212). Thus, as in the case of Suárez in Spain, the US president made a set of decisions that were detrimental to the business elite.

The third was precisely the emergence of strong opposition among the business elite to this political project, fearing that the economic crisis would open a window of opportunity for greater government interventionism in economic matters that would lead to higher wages, the establishment of labour insurance, and a greater redistribution of wealth (Muñoz Bolaños, 2013: 37-44). Faced with this possibility, corporatist and fascist tendencies had begun to emerge in the American business world. The ultimate example of this dynamic was represented by the brothers Irénée, Pierre and Lamont du Pont, owners of one of the world's largest industrial emporiums, including the automobile company *General Motors* (GM), whose ideology was not opposed to state centralisation encompassing all aspects of society, including the sphere of business, as long as it was under the control of big business (Burk, 1990: 123, VII-XI; Christianson, 2010: 97). In a similar ideological vein were:

- John Randolph Hearst, owner of America's largest newspaper chain and media company, *Hearst Communications* (Procter, 2007: 150-151; Spivak, 1935: 20).
- Henry Ford, the great automobile entrepreneur whose portrait presided over Hitler's office table (Spivak, 1935: 15).
- John Pierpont Morgan, Jr, president of the eponymous bank (Spivak, 1935: 15).
- Thomas Lamont, a partner in *J.P. Morgan & Co,* a large financial institution. (Steel 2008: 250-251; McCormack-Dickstein, 1934: 1).
- Colonel Grayson Mallet-Prevost Murphy, a banker and director of major companies such as *Anaconda Copper Mining Company*, *Guaranty Trust Company*, *New York Trust Company*, *New York Trust Company*, *Bethlehem Steel*, *Goodyear Tire & Rubber,* New *York Railways, Fifth Avenue Coach Co.* and *Chicago Motor Coach Co.,*

also linked to *J.P. Morgan* (McCormack-Dickstein, 1934: 11-12).

- Robert Sterling Clarck, heir to the *Singer Corporation* fortune, valued at some $30 million (McCormack-Dickstein, 1934: 2-3).
- John Foster Dulles, US Secretary of State (1951-1959), lawyer for *I.G. Farben* –the German chemical cartel and the world's largest industrial chemical corporation– and Du Pont's intermediary in the financing of German rearmament in the 1930s (MacGowan, 2001: 128).
- Brigadier General Graeme K. Howard, GM's vice-president, was sympathetic to the Du Pont Corporation (MacGowan, 2001: 128). Howard, was a National Socialist sympathiser and author of *America and the New World Order* (Howard 1940, Pichardo Almazan and Kulik, 2013: 7), whose foreword had been written by Major General James B. Harbord, president of *Radio Corporation of America* (RCA).
- Prescott Bush, father and grandfather of two US presidents, a man linked to the Harriman business group –railways– through the management of the *Union Banking Corporation* (UBC) –where he had the legal support of Foster Dulles– a trust that helped finance Adolf Hitler and did business with the German metallurgical entrepreneur Fritz Thyssen, the Nazis' main supporter. UBC would lose all its assets on 20 October 1942 under the Trading with the Enemy Act (Tarpley and Chaitkin, 1992: 25-42).

Also linked to the plot was Felix Warburg, one of the founders of the US Federal Reserve and partner of the important financial firm *Kuhn, Loeb & Co (Spivak* 1935: 9); Frank Belgrano, partner of the AP *Bank of America* –allied with Morgan and the Rockefellers– and of the *Transamerica Corporation,* linked to the Californian banker Amadeo Giannini (Spivak, 1935: 18); Fred I. Kent, vice-president of the *Bankers Trust New York Corporation*, controlled by John Pierpont Morgan, Jr. (Spivak, 1935: 19); Sewell L. Avery, an executive of *U. S. Steel* –the world's largest steel company– controlled by John Pierpont Morgan, jr., or Alfred P. Sloan, president of GM (Spivak, 1935: 17).

The fourth similarity with the 23-F coup d'état was the support of conservative political leaders such as John W. Davis and Alfred Smith –candidates in the presidential elections of 1924 and 1928 respectively–, Joseph Buell Ely –governor of Massachusetts– and Louis Johnson –future Secretary of Defence (1949-1950)–, enemies of Roosevelt even though they belonged to the same party (Spivak, 1935: 14).

Fifth, the existence of a military arm linked to the civilian plot, composed of:

- Brigadier General Hugh Johnson, Roosevelt's collaborator and president of the National Reclamation Administration (NRA) –the agency in charge of reorganizing U.S. industry–, (Spivak 1935: 12).
- Lieutenant General Hanford MacNider, a Republican and Under Secretary of War between 1925 and 1928 (Spivak, 1935: 15).
- Admiral William Sims, an enemy of Roosevelt's from his days as Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy between 1913 and 1920 (McCormack-Dickstein, 1934: 1).
- General Harbord (McCormack-Dickstein, 1934: 1).
- General Douglas MacArthur, a man of far-right ideology (Dallet, 1995:36), Chief of Staff of the Army, with family ties to the *J.P. Morgan & Co* (Spivak, 1934: 1) and considered by the president as "the second most dangerous man in America" (Denton, 2012: 56).

And the sixth, the design of the involutionary plan. The aim was to provoke a serious crisis that would force Roosevelt to change his policy by appointing a "Secretary of General Affairs" or "Supersecretary" to run the government. The conspirators intended to justify this mutation to the American people by citing Roosevelt's ill health, using the media as an instrument, especially the press, where they had maximum control. The person they had appointed to this new position was a military man –like Armada– Brigadier General Hugh Johnson, who was to become the de facto head of the executive branch of the US government (Spivak 1935: 12). To achieve this, they had designed an operation that was very similar to the "March of Rome" of 27 and 29 October, 1922, which enabled Benito Mussolini to become President of the Council of Ministers: an armed militia –the possibility of the action being carried out by a military unit of the Army was never considered, so as not to compromise this institution– would head for the White House to force the US President to make this change in his government. This does not mean, however, that they wanted to mimic the action carried out by the Italian fascist leader, for whoever would lead such an action would not be its main political beneficiary. On the contrary, the planners of the operation were trying to avoid any possible link between this "march" and the change in the US government. In this sense, its resemblance to the 23-F coup was even greater.

To unleash this "march", which would later be "brought back" into "legality", an armed paramilitary force and a leader were needed. The organisation chosen was the *American Legion*, created on February 17, 1919 in Paris with the aim of promoting mutual aid among veterans of the First World War, but which in the 1920s became a *lobby* –especially after the presidency of General MacNider (1921-1922)– and a militia with a strongly anti-communist ideology with fascist overtones (Baker, 1954: 12-14, 75), with links to the *Ku*

*Klux Klan (*Littlewood, 2004: 92-103) and controlled by the "Royal Family" of Wall Street bankers (McCormack-Dickstein, 1934: 10). This metamorphosis from its initial aims would explain why it was employed as a strikebreaker –Centralia, 11 November 1919 (Copeland 1993)– along the lines of Mussolini's *Fasci italiani di combattimento* with whom the Legion's national commander, Texas Democrat Alvin Owsley, identified in 1923 (Pencak, 1989: 21).

> If ever necessary, the American Legion is ready to protect the institutions and ideals of our country as Fascism dealt with the destructive elements threatening Italy! [...] The American Legion is fighting all elements that threaten our democratic government –Soviets, anarchists, IWW, revolutionary socialists and other Reds [...]. It must not be forgotten that the Fascists are to Italy what the American Legion is to the United States.

The Fascist character of the Legion would be made visible in 1935, when its vice-commander, Colonel William F. Easterwood, visited Italy and decorated Mussolini with the Legion's insignia, making him an "honorary member" of the Legion and inviting him to the organisation's next convention in Chicago to give a speech (Archer, 1973: 211).

Finding the person to lead the Legion on its march on Washington was harder. If this operation was led by one of the active generals involved, it could not only mean the end of his military career, but would also raise suspicions between that action and the subsequent change in government. For this reason, a prestigious military officer was needed among the members of the legion, but at the same time one who was not part of the planning party of the operation and who had a reputation for being "exalted". In other words, they were looking for someone with the same characteristics as Tejero. In the 1930s, only one American general matched this description: Smedley Darlington Butler, the most decorated military officer in US history –two Medals of Honor, the highest and most prestigious military decoration– and the most popular officer among the troops (Smith, 1998: 6-198). However, his meteoric career –brigadier general at thirty-seven and major general at forty-eight (Smith, 1998: 199)– had begun to stall after his return from China in 1929. From that moment on, he began to display pacifist traits, as he considered that all the wars in which he had participated, especially in Latin America, were aimed at benefitting large American business corporations. This position caused him to be passed over in favour of Major General Ben H. Fuller –a less prestigious military officer with a lesser record than Butler– when the new Commander General of the Marine Corps had to be selected. Butler, regarding this decision as a personal affront, asked for voluntary retirement on July 1, 1931 (Smith, 1998: 313).

From that moment on, he had a frustrated political career –he lost the 1931 senatorial elections for Pennsylvania as a candidate of the Republican Party.

His father, Thomas S. Butler, had been a Republican congressman from the same state between 1904 and 1928–, launched a strong campaign in support of war veterans to collect their bonuses –which Roosevelt had refused–, linking himself to the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) –led by his friend James E. Van Zandt, a Republican congressman from Pennsylvania– and not to the Legion, of which Butler had a very low opinion due to its relations with Wall Street financial interests (Smith, 1998: 223). These traits made the general the ideal person to lead the "march on Washington". However, the plot's planners were to make a decision that would prove to be wrong: they explained the plan to Butler in detail, which would ultimately lead to its collapse. Armada would take a completely opposite stance with Tejero, but with the same result: the failure of his operation.

The conspirators who met with Butler to outline the plan were two Legion officers, William Doyle and Gerald MacGuire, and the businessman Clarck (McCormack-Dickstein, 1934: 1-3). The first five meetings took place on July 1, July 3, August 1, September 1 and at the end of that month, and were rapprochement meetings. Initially, they limited themselves to offering the general the Legion's presidency, which was to be chosen at the Chicago convention to be held between 3 and 5 October. In addition, they advised him to make a speech at that meeting advocating a return to the gold standard. When –during the fifth meeting– the general asked what a return to the gold standard had to do with the interests of the veterans, Clarck told him that they wanted the soldiers to be paid in gold dollars and not on paper. But the businessman also told him that he had a fortune of thirty million dollars and that he was willing to spend fifteen million dollars on the gold standard operation to save the other fifteen. At that point, Butler told him that he was not going to Chicago (McCormack-Dickstein, 1934: 9-15).

Between 2 and 5 October, the 15th American Legion Convention was held in Chicago, and to Butler's surprise, a speech calling for a return to the gold standard was read out. Shortly afterwards, he received a call from MacGuire to arrange a further interview. During that meeting, he invited him to dinner and offered him $1000 for a speech (McCormack-Dickstein, 1934: 13-15). He also informed him that the dinner would be chaired by Massachusetts Governor Ely and attended by Al Smith, who had recently fallen out with Roosevelt and was very interested in meeting the general. Butler categorically refused to attend the dinner because he had no interest whatsoever in talking to the politician (Spivak, 1935: 24).

In November 1933, in New York City, a further meeting took place between MacGuire and Butler, in which Butler told him: "You know, I believe that sooner or later there is going to be a test of our democracy, a test od this democratic form of goverment. The soldiers are the only people in this country

who have ever taken an oath to sustain it". And then he asked him to put himself in charge of half a million or a million men to create a super-organisation to maintain the democratic system. Butler told him that he did not want to hear any of that but to explain to him the truth of this "business" because there was a lot of money involved in it. MacGuire told him that he was a businessman. And then the general replied that if his business was to destroy democracy, he was not to be part of it. They then parted company (McCormack-Dickstein, 1934: 15-16).

In the following months, Butler had no further personal contact with any of the conspirators except MacGuire, who had begun a tour of Europe to study the various fascist paramilitary organisations. He was particularly enthusiastic about the French *Croix de Feu*, a reactionary and monarchist militia led by Colonel François de La Rocque (Nobécourt, 1996). This was evident in a letter to Butler dated 6 March (McCormack-Dickstein, 1934: 10).

In August 1934, on his return from Europe, MacGuire telephoned the general to arrange a further meeting, which took place at The Belleveu Hotel in Philadelphia. It was at this meeting that the conspirator explained to the general the plan of the conspiracy. The plan was to create a paramilitary organisation like the *Croix de Feu* that would march on Washington and force Roosevelt to hand over de facto power to Brigadier General Johnson. According to his own testimony, the general replied that if they would mobilise 500,000 men to create a fascist government, he would mobilise another 500,000 to save democracy. Curiously, however, the meeting did not end at that point but continued. It was then that MacGuire explained to him that if Roosevelt opposed the work of this "Supersecretary", they would force his resignation and since the vice-president, the conservative and segregationist Texan John Nance Garner, did not want to take the post, the "Supersecretary" could take his place and become president of the USA. Butler then asked why he knew all this, to which the conspirator replied that they had people close to Roosevelt and knew everything there was to know (Spivak 1935: 12). Finally, he told him that to make the plan work it was necessary for someone to lead the march of the 500,000 veterans on Washington. The general was chosen despite the opposition of *J. P. Morgan's* owners and associates, who favoured MacArthur or MacNider (McCormack-Dickstein, 1934: 16-19; Spivak, 1935: 15). With this information, the interview ended.

Butler was alarmed to hear of the plan, especially when on 22 August some of the names cited by MacGuire and Clarck, such as Smith and Davis, with the support of Irénée Du Pont, formed the American Liberty League (ALL) to fight the *New Deal* (Craig, 1992: 274-295). He then decided to disband it. The general knew that he could not denounce him publicly because, given his reputation as a hothead, no one would believe him. Thus, he decided to turn to a

friend of his, journalist Paul French, to have a witness of what was being plotted. French telephoned MacGuire, presenting himself as the general's secretary, to arrange a meeting. The meeting took place at Colonel Grayson's offices in New York on September 13. During this meeting, MacGuire explained the plot, the involvement of Louis Johnson and the Du Pont family who, through their *Remington* arms company, would arm the Legionnaires, and the need to create work camps for the unemployed (McCormack-Dickstein, 1934: 20-22).

With French's testimony, Butler informed John Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), that he was already aware of the conspiracy. However, he told the general that he would not commit himself to investigating the plot, but would instead contact the HUAC, chaired by Congressmen John W. McCormack (Republican from Massachusetts) and Samuel Dickstein (Democrat from New York) (Gentry, 1991: 204). On 20 November, the committee began investigating the plot. The next day, French published two articles about it in the *Philadelphia Record* and *New York Post*.

The conspiracy was dismantled.

The McCormack-Dickstein commission, like the Supreme Council of Military Justice in the case of the 23-F coup d'état, did not want to pursue its investigations, while the vast majority of newspapers tried to ridicule Butler's statements (Marshall, 2008: 77-120), except for the *New Masses* where Spivak's articles were published. Similarly, unlike the Barcelona incident of 1905, the Curragh incident of 1914 and the coup d'état of 23-F, academic historians did not make much of it either. Thus, Schlesinger (2003: 83), Burk (1990: 175), Hofstadter (1965: 3-4) and Penkak (1989: 315) denied any viability to the operation. Only Marshall (2008) and Muñoz Bolaños (2014) have given due prominence to the *Business Plot*, as have commentators such as Archer (1973) and Denton (2012). In any case, the veracity of this plot was confirmed in 1973 by its investigator, Congressman McCormack: "In peace or war [Butler] he was one of the outstanding Americans in our history. I can't emphasize too strongly the very important part he played in exposing the Fascist plot in the early 1930's backed by and planned by persons possessing tremendous wealth" (Archer, 1973: IX).

Conclusion

This article is based on the thesis that Spanish political culture is no different from that of other Western countries when it comes to the public role of the military. The analysis of the Curragh incident and the *Business Plot* justify this position. The military always seeks to intervene in the political decision-making process when it believes that the pillars on which its culture stands,

from the unity of the nation to a clearly conservative social order, are at risk. When such a juncture exists, they do not hesitate to confront the government of the day. They can do so by leading that opposition in a strictly military operation –blackmail by the Spanish military in 1905-1906– or with a civilian component –action by their British counterparts in 1914–. But they also have the capacity to take part in operations of a mixed nature, where leadership is shared between civilians and members of the AF, as happened in the *Business Plot* and the 23-F coup d'état.

However, in spite of the differences that may exist between these operations, the truly crucial aspect lies in the "watchdog" function that members of the AF maintain over the political process. This dynamic is not unique to Spain, as recent events in France demonstrate. If the Spanish military has played a more relevant role in the political process than has been the case in other neighbouring countries, it is because of Spain's instability during much of Modernity, not because of a different military culture. We are not so different...

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