

Secret Agents in the Azores during the Second World War and the Impact of Espionage on Portuguese-British Relations

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Abstract : In 1942, at the height of the Second World War, Roosevelt and Churchill planned to occupy the Azores to establish air and naval bases. The islands' privileged position in the middle of the Atlantic made them a strategic location for both the Axis and the Allies. For the Germans, the occupation of the island was also a strategic place to launch an attack on the United States of America, and for the British and Americans, the islands were the perfect spot to counterattack the German sinking of British boats and submarines. Salazar avoided the concession of the islands until 1943, claiming, on the one hand, the policy of neutrality, a decision made in agreement with England, and on the other hand, the reaffirmation of Portuguese sovereignty over the territory. Aware of the constant changes and supported by a network of informers on the islands, the German and British spies played a crucial role in the negotiations between Portugal and the Allies and the ceding of the bases by Salazar, which prevented their forced occupation. The espionage caused several diplomatic tensions, and the large number of German spies denounced by the British, operating on the islands under the watchful eye of the PVDE and Salazar, weakened the Portuguese-British alliance. Using primary source documents in the Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros (MNE) archives, this paper introduces the spies that operated on the islands, their missions and motives, organizations, and modus operandi. As a chess game, any move was careful thinking and the spies were valuable assets to control and use information that could lead to the occupation of the islands and, ultimately, change the tide of the war.

Keywords : espionage, Azores, WWI, neutrality

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