

A BALANCING ACT

BRITISH INTELLIGENCE IN SPAIN
DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR



Emilio Grandío Seoane

Sussex Studies in
SPANISH HISTORY

“The book addresses the critical issue as to how the British strove to keep Spain out of the war, which drew not only on trade deals and the payment of substantial bribes to leading Generals, but also the threat of military intervention. The upshot is a multi-faceted reconstruction of the British policy of containment which delineates both its successes and its failures.”

Nigel Townson, Series Editor, Sussex Studies in Spanish History

This book reveals the development, strategy and extraordinary success of Britain's secret services in Franco's Spain during the Second World War. The main claim of this study is that British pressure, exercised above all through their intelligence services, led Franco to distance himself from the Axis cause and eventually embrace that of the Allies. Starting from a virtually non-existent base, the British rapidly built up a complex intelligence network in Spain that stretched from La Coruña to Barcelona and from Bilbao to Gibraltar. As Spain was a non-belligerent, spy networks – including those of the Germans, Italians, Portuguese and British – proliferated in the Iberian Peninsula. Double-agents abounded within these networks; each one knew what the others were up to.

The British exploited this two-way traffic to let Franco know that if he did not accede to their demands, they would back a restoration of the Bourbon monarchy under Don Juan. This pressure culminated in the meeting of 1943 between Franco and the British Ambassador, Sir Samuel Hoare, at the dictator's country retreat in Galicia, the British underlining their purpose by flying warplanes close by the estate. Following this meeting, Franco almost immediately began to move away from the Axis powers and towards the Allies. The British swiftly dismantled their intelligence networks given that they had achieved their aim. Franco's expulsion of the German naval forces from Spanish ports and the denazification of the regime explains the benevolent attitude of the Allies towards the Spanish dictatorship after the war. Throughout this whole process, the British secret service, as this extensively researched study uncovers, played a crucial role.

Emilio Grandío Seoane is a specialist in the history of the Second Republic and the Civil War. His research and publications are detailed on an Author's page within the book.

*Cover illustration: Winston Churchill and Sir Samuel Hoare,
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