

# British Military Planning on Portugal in the Second World War

Juan José Díaz Benítez<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This article aims to provide an overview of British military planning for Portugal during the Second World War. To this end, various documentary collections from the United Kingdom National Archives have been consulted, particularly the War Cabinet and the Joint Planning Staff series. Among the main conclusions, the evolution of the strategic situation and Spanish non-belligerence are highlighted as the main factors driving this planning, limiting, or qualifying both the traditional Anglo-Portuguese alliance and the rapprochement between the Salazar and Franco regimes.

## Keywords

Portuguese neutrality, Second World War, British military planning, Spanish non-belligerency

## Resumo

Este artigo pretende oferecer uma visão geral no planeamento militar britânico com respeito a Portugal durante a Segunda Guerra Mundial. Com esse objetivo, diversas coleções documentais dos National Archives do Reino Unido foram consultadas, entre os quais se destaca o War Cabinet e a série do Joint Planning Staff. Entre suas principais conclusões se destacarem a evolução da situação estratégica e a não beligerância espanhola como os principais fatores que impulsionaram este planeamento militar, que limita ou qualifica tanto a tradicional aliança anglo-portuguesa como a reaproximação entre os regimes de Salazar e Franco.

## Palavras-chave

Neutralidade portuguesa, Segunda Guerra Mundial, planificação militar britânica, não beligerância espanhola

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<sup>1</sup> Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, ULPGC, Las Palmas, Spain. This article is financed by the Ministry of Science and Innovation of Spain within the Project HAR2017-87441-P. *E-mail:* [juanjose.diaz@ulpgc.es](mailto:juanjose.diaz@ulpgc.es)

Portuguese foreign policy in the Second World War has been extensively studied in Portuguese historiography, of which António José Telo's masterful books on this topic (1987 and 1991) and on the strategic importance of the Azores from the end of the nineteenth century until the founding of NATO (1993) stand out. In addition to the synthesis of Fernando Rosas on the evolution of Portuguese neutrality during the conflict (2002) and the contributions of Luís Andrade (1995), many historians, Portuguese and non-Portuguese, have paid attention to more specific issues, some of which are mentioned below. J. K. Sweeney (1974) and Douglas L. Wheeler (1986) were two of the first to address the export of tungsten to the Third Reich as well as the Anglo-American response. Christian Leitz has also researched the economic relations between Portugal and the Third Reich within the framework of European neutrality (2000) and those between the Third Reich and the Iberian Peninsula and Latin America (2003). Espionage was dealt with by Wheeler (1983) and Neville Wylie (2001), among other authors. From the diplomatic perspective, works on the Anglo-Portuguese alliance during the war (Stone 1975; Costa Leite 1998), the vulnerability of Timor (Tarling 1996), and the allied pressures on the Portuguese government (Moreli Rocha 2009) can be found. There is also research on the Atlantic islands, especially the Azores (Andrade 1988; Grave 2001; Rodrigues 2005), throughout the war.

The history of Portugal during the Second World War is therefore known, but it has not been exhausted. One of the aspects that has received less attention outside of Telo's investigations is British military planning with respect to Portugal, which resulted in unimplemented plans that help to define its role in British strategy. Consequently, it is necessary to present an updated overview of this matter from the British perspective with two objectives. The first objective is to define the limits of the secular Anglo-Portuguese alliance, as defensive collaboration in the face of the threat of a German or Spanish attack did not prevent Great Britain from considering the occupation of the Portuguese Atlantic islands, even without the consent of the Portuguese government. The second objective is to characterize the Hispano-Portuguese diplomatic rapprochement, vital to the dictatorships of Franco and Salazar, without ignoring the latter's fear of a Spanish invasion or Spain's plans to invade.

This research does not pretend to work with Portuguese primary sources widely studied by other researchers, but rather to contribute to this subject by a deeper approach in military planning from the British perspective. Thus, the primary sources used in this article come principally from The National Archives (TNA) of the United Kingdom. Notable among them are the War Cabinet (CAB) records and, in particular, the series of studies

conducted by the Joint Planning Staff (JPS). The CAB records have been complemented with others, such as the War Office (WO), the Ministry of Air (AIR), and the Prime Minister's documentation (PREM). These sources have been completed with other sources from Portugal, Spain, and Germany. Portuguese diplomatic and military primary sources have been widely studied by António José Telo (1987, 1991, and 1993), among other authors, and they reveal the other side of this history, so these works have been consulted to comprehend the Portuguese responses to British actions. It is necessary to know if Portuguese concerns about a Spanish or German invasion were right, so German military plans on the Iberian Peninsula have been consulted in Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (BA-MA). It is not possible to access all Spanish military sources for the Second World War, as the one known Spanish plan to invade Portugal was consulted by Manuel Ros Agudo (2008) only after receiving special permission in 2005. There is a serious lack of Spanish diplomatic sources addressing some of the main questions about Spanish non-belligerency, such as the negotiations to go to war on the Axis side, but they have been studied by Spanish and foreign researchers using a wider range of primary sources. Therefore, it has been necessary to consult the main secondary sources about Spanish non-belligerency to understand the Spanish military and diplomatic perspective.

From British primary sources and following the course of the war, it is possible to distinguish at least three periods. The first began in May 1940 and continued until the end of that year, accompanied by British fears of possible Spanish belligerence and preparations for the occupation of the Portuguese Atlantic islands in response. The second period extended throughout 1941 until the execution of Operation "Torch" in November 1942, in which the plans against the Atlantic islands were updated in parallel with the Anglo-Portuguese talks for the defense of the Iberian country against a German or Spanish invasion. Finally, the third period stretched from 1943 to the end of the war, in which the growing British interest in the Azores culminated in the installation of bases in agreement with the Portuguese government and a defense plan against a possible Spanish attack, as well as the consideration in 1943 and 1945 of Portugal's participation in the war.

### **Beginning of British Military Planning for Portugal, May–December 1940**

The history of Spain and Portugal in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries followed parallel paths with important nuances and differences. Thus, the dictatorships of Salazar and Franco, which emerged after the crisis of the liberal system in Portugal and Spain,

respectively, collaborated during the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War, although they presented notable differences in their nature, legality, repression, and evolution in the international context (Torre Gómez 2000: 11–20). In fact, 1936–1943 constituted a period of fascism in both Iberian dictatorships, marked by their origin in military *pronunciamentos*, their antiliberal character, the coalition of social forces on which they relied, the tendency toward incomplete institutionalizations, and their contradictory and not always systematic ideology and expansionism, visible in the Franco regime during the first years of the Second World War (Loff 2000: 125–161).

The Portuguese intervention in the Spanish conflict had been driven by the Salazar regime's fear of the creation of a Spanish revolutionary republic and as a way to achieve greater autonomy from Great Britain, although the rapprochement between the two Iberian countries from 1939 until 1945 did not result in complete mutual trust (Jiménez Redondo 2000: 278–281). The Treaty of Friendship and Non-Aggression between Spain and Portugal of March 17, 1939, reinforced by the Additional Protocol of July 1940 (Torre Gómez and Sánchez Cervelló 2005: 291–293), contributed to neutralizing the Iberian Peninsula and was well received by Great Britain and the Third Reich (Gómez de las Heras Hernández 1994: 165–179). However, these treaties were not as significant as was considered by the Estado Novo, since their signature did not imply an authentic will to comply with them on the part of the Franco regime: “Madrid did not hesitate to do one thing and say something very different to its friends in Lisbon” (Telo 2003: 131).

In fact, the Spanish belligerent temptation resulted in the deterioration of relations between the two Iberian dictatorships that reached its lowest point in 1941 and improved throughout 1942, first with the meeting between Franco and Salazar in February and finally with the formation of the Iberian Block at the end of that same year through which they tried to guarantee their survival after the war (Jiménez Redondo 1994: 186–199). As with the 1940 protocol, the meeting of the two dictators in 1942 was well received by the Third Reich and Great Britain, although the versions conveyed to them by Spain and Portugal presented notable differences (Rezola 2008: 5–7). The Iberian Peninsula was kept out of the conflict, although with three important differences regarding the neutralization practiced during the Great War. They were as follows: political stability and the Spanish rapprochement to the Axis; weak weapons and strategic raw materials; and the development of aviation and submarines that strategically revalued the peninsula and its Atlantic archipelagos (Telo and Torre Gómez 2003: 340–341).

This rapprochement between the two dictatorships was conditioned by the differences in their foreign policies during the war. In the case of Portugal, its alliance with Great Britain significantly influenced its foreign policy. Although London had questioned since 1910 the advisability of maintaining such an alliance, in the end, it considered this alliance the only means to prevent the Atlantic islands and the Portuguese colonies from falling into the hands of other great powers (Stone 1975: 729–743). However, Great Britain was not interested in making Portugal go to war by her side, but to maintain a benevolent Portuguese neutrality. From a wider point of view, Portuguese neutrality safeguarded British economic interests in the Portuguese Empire (Stone 1975: 743), made British imports of Portuguese goods grow through the war, especially in pre-emptive purchases of wolfram, which left a huge British war debt (Abreu 2014: 539–545; Amaral 2018: 801–811), and, after December 1941, resulted useful for Great Britain in the Far East, due to the protection given in Macao to thousands of war refugees.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the most important advantage of Portuguese neutrality for British strategy was to keep Spain out of the war and the Atlantic islands away from the Third Reich.

For the Salazar regime, the alliance was also useful because it protected the Portuguese colonies against other powers, provided a defensive guarantee against Spain, and supported the dictatorship against the opposition. Consequently, the evolution of Portuguese foreign policy during the Second World War oscillated between the initial “collaborative neutrality” in favor of Great Britain, the “geometric neutrality” from June 1940 in which, without renouncing the British alliance, Portugal made concessions to the Third Reich, and a return to “collaborative neutrality” from November 1942, with the course of the war clearly favorable to the Allies (Rosas 2002: 268–279). The “geometric neutrality” phase did not respond to an alignment with the Axis Powers but rather served to avoid a German or Spanish invasion (Torre Gómez 2006: 200–203). Therefore, Portuguese foreign policy oscillated between strict neutrality and collaboration with its traditional ally, manifested above all in the installation of British bases in the Azores in 1943 (Andrade 1995: 330–331).

Conversely, Spanish foreign policy had been more oriented toward the Third Reich and fascist Italy since the Civil War, when the aid provided by both powers was vital for the rebels’ triumph over the republican government. However, when the Second World War began, Spain was not able to enter the war alongside the Third Reich; therefore, it was forced to declare itself neutral. The German victories in May 1940 and the belligerence of Italy in the following month caused Franco to proclaim non-belligerence and offer Hitler his

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<sup>1</sup> Report JP (45) 34 (Final), February 11, 1945. In TNA, CAB 84/69.

participation in the war in exchange for a series of territorial claims. However, the decline of the economic situation, the uncertainty about an early Axis victory, as well as the lack of guarantees for its territorial ambitions, dictated the postponement of Spanish belligerence, which turned into “moral belligerence” with the dispatch of a unit of volunteers to fight against the Soviet Union. Finally, a serious political crisis in the Spanish government in August 1942 and the change during the war in favor of the Allies influenced a slow return to neutrality (Hernández-Sandoica and Moradiellos 2002: 241–267).

The official declaration of neutrality at the beginning of the war did not prevent the Franco regime from repeatedly failing to fulfill its obligations as neutral. The supplying of German submarines in Spanish ports, espionage, German propaganda, and the collaboration in other areas, such as the police, raised serious doubts about Spanish neutrality long before the declaration of non-belligerence (Ros Agudo 2002: 72–301). Therefore, it is not surprising that, in April 1940, coinciding with the German invasion of Denmark and Norway, rumors arose of a possible occupation of the Balearic Islands by Italy and even Spain’s involvement in the war, with the consequent attack against Gibraltar. However, even in those circumstances, the Joint Planning Sub-Committee (JPSC) recommended the maintenance of Portugal’s neutrality.<sup>2</sup> The JPSC did not explain this recommendation but considered it again shortly after the start of the German offensive in the west in May 1940, when the JPSC studied the possibility of Italy and Spain go to war alongside the Third Reich. The threats that this situation could pose included the Spanish invasion of Portugal. Considered unlikely, although not impossible, it would force the dispatch of five British infantry divisions to prevent it and a previous occupation that could extend the war to the western Mediterranean. At that moment it was impossible to spare five divisions to defend Portugal, and the advantages of Portuguese neutrality for the Third Reich, as meteorological information and transit facilities for subjects and valuables, were not enough to make Portugal go to war. Therefore, the JPSC concluded that the best course for the Allies was for Portugal to maintain its neutrality.<sup>3</sup>

More importantly, Spain remained neutral, a goal for which Great Britain spared no effort. In addition to sending Sir Samuel Hoare as ambassador on a special mission to Madrid, London also exercised a policy of controlled economic aid, visible in the tripartite agreement of July 24, 1940, with Portuguese participation, and the agreement of September 6, 1940 on the supply of oil to Spain (Moradiellos 2005: 134–170). As a reinforcement of this

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<sup>2</sup> Report JP (40) 107 (S) Draft, April 26, 1940. In TNA, CAB 84/12.

<sup>3</sup> Note JP (40) 116, May 13, 1940. In TNA, CAB 84/12.

policy of economic appeasement, a major bribery operation was also undertaken by the Spanish military leadership to influence Franco to keep out of the war (Viñas 2016: 75–113). The Spanish belligerent intention was not new, as its antecedents dated back to 1807 and 1914. However, in 1940, it arose with greater intensity than during the Great War, although only until it was discouraged by the lack of guarantees on the Spanish territorial claims and the lengthening of the war (Torre Gómez 2003: 273–275).

Despite British efforts to avoid Spanish belligerence, the risk of Franco entering the war persisted, which would entail the loss or disablement of Gibraltar. An alternative to Gibraltar was necessary, which seemed to lie in the Portuguese Atlantic archipelagos, whose occupation was being studied by the JPSC since May.<sup>4</sup> The Chiefs of Staff (COS) preferred to take the Canaries, whose ports had greater capacity but were also better defended, which made the operation more dangerous.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the development of the plans against the Azores and the Cape Verdean islands, approved on July 22, continued, although they were not executed until Spanish belligerence was imminent (Telo 1993: 308–315). However, Winston Churchill considered ordering the occupation of the Azores without prior notice to put an end to the threat that the risk of Spain go to war posed to Gibraltar. Fortunately, Lord Halifax, the Foreign Office (FO) Secretary, managed to convince him that the measures to maintain Spanish neutrality made the immediate occupation of the Portuguese islands unnecessary.<sup>6</sup> The Portuguese government did not know about British plans against the Azores and Cape Verde, but the Portuguese ambassador in London, Armindo Monteiro, sent several telegrams on May 20 to Lisbon about the British fear of a German occupation of these islands (Telo 1987: 170–171). However, the first Portuguese reinforcements for the Azores were sent in October of 1940 and the military measures to defend the Atlantic islands were developed in 1941 (Telo 1987: 309, 321).

The postponement of the operation posed the risk that the Third Reich would advance against the Portuguese Atlantic islands. In fact, between September and November 1940, the German Naval War Command (*Seekriegsleitung*, Skl) considered occupying them (Goda 1998: 115–121), which was to be completed before the German attack against Gibraltar, known as Operation Felix, to prevent the British from taking these islands as an alternative naval base to Gibraltar. The Skl prepared a detailed study about the seizure of the Atlantic islands, known as Operation *Dwarsläufer*, but advised against it because of the risks,

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<sup>4</sup> Note JP (40) 2 (ISPS), June 8, 1940. In TNA, CAB 84/93.

<sup>5</sup> Report JP (40) 291, June 28, 1940. In TNA, CAB 84/15.

<sup>6</sup> Minute from Winston Churchill to Lord Halifax, July 24, 1940, and minute from Lord Halifax to Winston Churchill, July 31, 1940. In TNA, PREM 3/361/1.

the enormous commitments of naval forces, and the limited strategic value of these islands.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the Joint Planning Staff (the new name of the JPSC since August 29) studied the conquest of the Azores on the assumption that they had been previously taken by German forces (Operation Paradox/Fanweise).<sup>8</sup> Another issue that caused the postponement of the planned operations against the Azores (Brisk and Truck) and the Cape Verdean islands (Shrapnell) was the retention of forces necessary in other war scenarios. However, executing both operations before Spanish belligerence would cause the loss of Gibraltar; therefore, the Defense Committee (DC) considered that it was better not to rush.<sup>9</sup> Subsequently, at the end of December 1940, the COS decided that the occupation of the Azores should wait until the Third Reich entered the Peninsula, especially as there was a possibility that the Spanish Army would face the German forces.<sup>10</sup>

### **Between Collaboration and Military Invasion, 1941–1942**

British hopes that Spain would oppose the entry of German troops into the Peninsula to attack Gibraltar rested on the contacts that Sir Samuel Hoare and Allan Hillgarth, the British naval attaché in Madrid, had maintained with the Spanish royalist military. The JPS even studied several operations designed to collaborate with the Spanish Army in maintaining its protectorate in Morocco and in the south of the Peninsula, but their viability decreased over time (Sánchez-Gijón 1984: 67–88). Before completely discarding the planned operations, the British government decided to agree to initiate staff conversations about the defense of Portugal in the event of a German invasion, as it had promised in December 1940 (Telo 1987: 325).

In November of 1940, Hitler ordered Instruction 18 on Operation Felix against Gibraltar.<sup>11</sup> The German High Command of the Armed Forces (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, OKW) thought that one of the British reactions would be to land in the Iberian Peninsula, especially in Portugal. Thus, one of the purposes of Felix was to drive British forces out of this country, and Instruction 19 insisted on this task by the end of that month (Hubatsch 1962: 67–71, 74–77). The operation was not carried out because of the postponement of the Spanish belligerency, but in December, there was a Spanish plan to invade Portugal. Since

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<sup>7</sup> Considerations on the occupation of the Atlantic islands, without date. In BA-MA, RM 7/1002.

<sup>8</sup> Report JP (40) 679, November 19, 1940. In TNA, CAB 84/21.

<sup>9</sup> Extract of DO (40) 46th Meeting (Mtg.), November 26, 1940. In TNA, CAB 121/477.

<sup>10</sup> Report COS (40) 54 (O), December 27, 1940. In TNA, CAB 121/477.

<sup>11</sup> Hitler's instruction 18, November 12, 1940. In BA-MA, RW 4/v.519.

1939, the Spanish High Command had studied an operation against Gibraltar only by Spanish armed forces and had also considered a British landing in Portugal as reaction to this attack. For this reason, the Spanish High General Staff (Alto Estado Mayor, AEM) prepared Operations Plan 1 (34) (*Plan de Campaña número -1-(34)*), to occupy Portugal before the British landing. The plan was made in the middle of December, after Franco's decision to postpone Spanish belligerency, so it was not carried out (Ros Agudo 2008: 269–280). Therefore, before the beginning of Anglo-Portuguese staff conversations, the risk of a German or Spanish invasion of Portugal was real, but not imminent.

In preparing instructions for the British delegation in charge of participating in these talks, the JPS had suggested not to send forces to defend peninsular Portugal but to send them to the Atlantic islands without giving details about the British intentions regarding them.<sup>12</sup> A month later, these instructions were revised. The objective of the British delegation was to ensure the greatest Portuguese opposition to a German attack and coordinate defensive measures to repel it, without forgetting that the most important goal was to prevent the German occupation of the Atlantic islands. The JPS also insisted on not disclosing the British intentions on these islands nor assuming commitments that would imply the dispatch of forces for the defense of peninsular Portugal, in addition to trying to include Spain in the defense of the peninsula.<sup>13</sup>

The Portuguese delegation made a positive impression on the British. The JPS stressed that the British delegation should not assume commitments for the defense of the Peninsula and should not mention the subject of the Atlantic islands.<sup>14</sup> Salazar was informed by Monteiro about the development of these conversations and instructed the Portuguese delegation to keep the objective of getting British assistance against an invasion. The opposite objectives for British and Portuguese delegations made these conversations difficult and strained (Telo 1987: 325–329). However, ultimately, there were only two options: help to defend peninsular Portugal or do nothing. The latter option meant that there would be no Portuguese resistance against a German attack. Therefore, at Churchill's initiative, the Executive Planning Staff (EPS) contemplated sending two Royal Air Force (RAF) squadrons and one army corps with two infantry divisions and one armored brigade—in total, about 80,000 men and 12,000 vehicles. If Spain resisted the entry of German forces into the Peninsula, these would take two weeks to reach Portugal. However, the first British troops

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<sup>12</sup> Report JP (41) 27, January 1, 1941. In TNA, CAB 84/26.

<sup>13</sup> Note JP (41) 126, February 17, 1941. In TNA, CAB 84/27.

<sup>14</sup> Note JP (41) 164, February 28, 1941. In TNA, CAB 84/28.

would need three weeks to reach Lisbon and two months to complete the landing of the army corps. In short, it was necessary for the Portuguese government to invite the presence of British forces before the Third Reich crossed the Pyrenees.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the outlook offered by the British delegation to the Portuguese was much more optimistic. The first British forces would reach Portugal in less than a week and would grow considerably in less than three, while no German attack was expected for a month after the troops of the Third Reich crossed the Pyrenees. Both delegations agreed to limit the defense in Lisbon (Telo 1987: 328).

Amid these talks, Britain continued to study the occupation of the Portuguese Atlantic islands. The JPS proposed to infiltrate the British military in plain clothes in the Azores and the Cape Verde Islands. The COS rejected the proposal as unfeasible, but in March and April 1941, the JPS insisted again, as it would facilitate the British assault against both archipelagos.<sup>16</sup> Simultaneously, the JPS recommended responding to the Portuguese government that the British government welcomed the news of the reinforcement of its Atlantic archipelagos but also recognized that it would make the British conquest of these islands more difficult.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, the possibility of the Third Reich advancing the occupation of the Azores was once again studied, especially in a context marked by its victories in the Mediterranean and uncertainty about Spanish non-belligerence.<sup>18</sup> However, the relative importance of the Portuguese islands had decreased with respect to the Canary Islands because, by the end of April, the JPS suggested that this archipelago should be taken before the Portuguese, as it was considered the best alternative to the possible loss of Gibraltar.<sup>19</sup>

The Anglo-Portuguese talks in February and March revealed the differences between the two sides. On May 1, the FO reminded the British ambassador in Lisbon that he should not give Salazar hope about possible British support for the defense of the Peninsula. Instead, he had to recognize that British aid would not arrive on time; therefore, the evacuation of the Portuguese government to the Atlantic islands was preferable in case of a German invasion.<sup>20</sup> For its part, Portugal did not believe that Spain would resist the entry of German troops and that a German attack would begin earlier than planned and would need more British and Portuguese forces to be repelled. The Portuguese also claimed that they were

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<sup>15</sup> Note JP (41) 193 (E), March 9, 1941, and Note JP (41) 194 (E), March 10, 1941. In TNA, CAB 84/28.

<sup>16</sup> Report JIC (41) 31 (Final), January 21, 1941, and report JP (41) 257, April 5, 1941. In TNA, CAB 84/28.

<sup>17</sup> Report JP (41) 260, April 5, 1941. In TNA, CAB 84/28.

<sup>18</sup> Report JP (41) 281 (E), April 9, 1941. In TNA, CAB 84/29.

<sup>19</sup> Report JP (41) 313, April 23, 1941. TNA, CAB 84/29.

<sup>20</sup> Note JP (41) 403 (S), May 23, 1941. In TNA, CAB 84/31.

reinforcing the defense of the Atlantic islands, where more antiaircraft artillery was needed.<sup>21</sup> The JPS again accepted that the reinforcement of these islands would make it difficult for British troops to occupy them; however, in the event of a German threat, it could facilitate British entry into them. That is why they recommended that the British government be honest with the Portuguese ambassador that as there was no certainty about the Spanish resistance, it would not be possible to send sufficient British forces to Portugal in time, nor to send more arms. However, Britain would help this country if its government withdrew to the Atlantic islands in the event of a German attack.<sup>22</sup>

The JPS suggestions came shortly after preparation began for other operations to occupy the Azores (Thruster) and Madeira (Springboard) through negotiations and even with the threat of a naval bombardment.<sup>23</sup> Simultaneously, the British government committed itself to send arms to reinforce the defense of the Atlantic islands and their naval and air infrastructures, obviously without mentioning these operations to the Portuguese government (Telo 1987: 347–348). The resumption of the Anglo-Portuguese General Staff talks in the last quarter of 1941 focused on the evacuation of the Portuguese government to the Azores and the consequent need to reinforce the infrastructure of these islands (Telo 1991: 82; Telo 1993: 348). The JPS showed less interest in the Portuguese request to discuss plans for the defense of the Cape Verdean islands, whose occupation it had also prepared.<sup>24</sup>

In May 1941, the United States was also studying the occupation of the Azores (Gray), which was finally postponed by the German invasion of the Soviet Union (Rodrigues 2005: 23–33; Telo 1993: 339–340). Throughout 1941, the Portuguese government reinforced the garrison of these islands because of the concern about the risk of an American seizure of these islands. Therefore, defensive measures were against both a German occupation and an American landing (Telo 1991: 82–83). Portuguese concerns about an American threat on the Azores were encouraged in April and May 1941 by news from the American press and a discussion in the American Senate. American guarantees were not enough to appease Portuguese worries about the Azores, especially after American belligerency and the occupation of East Timor by Australian and Dutch forces in December 1941 (Rodrigues 2005: 20–43).

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<sup>21</sup> Note JP (41) 401 (S), May 23, 1941. In TNA, CAB 84/31.

<sup>22</sup> Report JP (41) 407, May 25, 1941. In TNA, CAB 84/31.

<sup>23</sup> Report JP (41) 353, May 4, 1941, and note COS (41) 108 (O), June 18, 1941. In TNA, CAB 121/477.

<sup>24</sup> Note JP (42) 930, November 3, 1942. In TNA, CAB 84/50.

The new front established by the Third Reich in the Soviet Union made it increasingly difficult for German forces to enter the Peninsula to attack Gibraltar. However, German concern about a British landing in the Iberian Peninsula was the origin of a new operation in this area. Codenamed Isabella, it was intended to drive British forces out the Peninsula. Therefore, German forces would have to occupy Portugal. This task was assigned to the German High Command of the Seventh Army (*Armeekorpskommando 7*, AOK-7), which started to study the operation before German attack on the Soviet Union.<sup>25</sup> A Spanish defensive role against the landing of British forces in the Iberian Peninsula was expected, but in November, the AOK-7 considered Spanish participation in the invasion of Portugal.<sup>26</sup> As it happened with Operation Felix and the Spanish plan to invade Portugal at the end of 1940, Isabella was not carried out, but only studied in advance of a British landing in the Iberian Peninsula.

The lack of an imminent German menace on Gibraltar or the Atlantic islands did not prevent the JPS from continuing to study the occupation of the Azores and Madeira throughout 1942 or even considering different operations so that the occupation could be conducted in summer (Brisk and Ripper) or winter (Ringcraft and Pressgang).<sup>27</sup> However, since May 1942, there was a significant change in the Portuguese foreign policy because of Salazar's belief in the Allied final victory. As consequence, Salazar accepted the defensive plan arranged in 1941 and the British government approved a considerable Portuguese order for weapons. In the same way, Salazar had to guarantee the survival of his regime after the allied victory. Therefore, an approach to the future victors was necessary (Telo 1991: 88–92). This move led to the end of “geometric neutrality” and the return to the “collaborative neutrality” in November 1942.

Operation Torch—the name assigned to the allied invasion of French North Africa—made Portuguese concerns about the Atlantic islands grow, but the immediate American guarantees reassured the Portuguese government (Rodrigues 2005: 44). There was a possibility that this operation could provoke retaliation from the Axis, for which contingency in October 1942 the JPS recommended assigning commanders and forces to the planned operations against the Portuguese Atlantic islands. They did not anticipate Portuguese resistance to its occupation by British forces, which would be by invitation and, in the case of the Azores, had already been studied with the Portuguese.<sup>28</sup> However, as time

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<sup>25</sup> AOK-7, order 1 for Isabella, June 20, 1941, In BA-MA, RM 24-80/30.

<sup>26</sup> AOK-7, answer to *Fall Rot*, November 25, 1941. In BA-MA, RH 20-7/45.

<sup>27</sup> Report JP (42) 343 (E) (Revised Draft), April 19, 1942. In TNA, WO 106/3060.

<sup>28</sup> Report JP (42) 855, October 1, 1942. In TNA, CAB 84/49, and AIR 9/333.

passed, after the landings on November 8, the threat of a German invasion of the Peninsula gradually diminished. In fact, in 1942, the lack of forces for Operation Isabella led to the creation of a less ambitious plan, Ilona (later Gisela), by the German High Command of the First Army (AOK-1) and focused only on the northern Spanish harbors.<sup>29</sup> For the rest of the war, there was not another German or Spanish plan against Portugal. In addition, French West Africa had joined the Allies; therefore, the JPS did not believe it was necessary to initiate new general staff talks with Portugal, although they insisted that the threat was not over.<sup>30</sup>

### **On the Limits of Neutrality, 1943–1945**

Prior to Operation Torch, Great Britain feared the risk that the Third Reich would attack Gibraltar or advance by occupying the Atlantic islands, which was the main objective, although this was not admitted in the General Staff talks with Portugal. After Torch, the JPS highlighted the importance that the Azores could have for the Battle of the Atlantic. The FO, conversely, pointed out that the German threat was not over and that the Allies had committed to respecting Portuguese neutrality. However, for the JPS, the use of the Azores by Great Britain would also allow Portugal to fulfill its obligations within the Anglo-Portuguese alliance.<sup>31</sup> The JPS's interest in using the Azores to protect allied ships against U-boat attacks was reinforced by the reports from the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) on the repercussions that the allied presence would have on the Portuguese archipelago. In a series of reports from April and June 1943, the JIC insisted that a German invasion of the Peninsula was unlikely. This was because the Third Reich could not withdraw sufficient forces from the Eastern Front and did not believe in the belligerence of Spain, which was not in a position to face a new fight. If the German troops crossed the Pyrenees, against all odds, it would take them between ten days and seven weeks to reach Portugal, depending on whether Spain allowed them entry.<sup>32</sup>

In parallel, the JPS continued to update the plans to occupy the Azores and Madeira, in view of a Portuguese invitation (Sparklet and Springboard)<sup>33</sup> and the occupation of the islands by force (Brisk and Repper).<sup>34</sup> Regarding the Azores, the JPS also considered the

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<sup>29</sup> AOK-1, July 24, 1942. In BA-MA, RH 20-1/123.

<sup>30</sup> Note JP (42) 975, November 24, 1942. In TNA, CAB 84/50.

<sup>31</sup> Note JP (42) 987 (S) Draft, December 4, 1942. In TNA, CAB 119/29.

<sup>32</sup> Reports JIC (43) 149 (O) (Revise), April 4, 1943, JIC (43) 267 (O) (Final), June 26, 1943, and JIC (43) 268 (O) (Final), June 26, 1943. In TNA, CAB 119/49.

<sup>33</sup> Note JP (42) 1034, January 3, 1943. In TNA, AIR 9/335.

<sup>34</sup> Report JP (43) 137 (Final), May 21, 1943. In TNA, CAB 84/53.

possibility of taking the island of São Miguel through deception, without any prior diplomatic approach to the Portuguese government. This latest operation, called Lifebelt, raised important questions, such as the suitability of sending an ultimatum to the Salazar regime, although that did not prevent the directives for the operation's commanders from being approved on June 18.<sup>35</sup> That same day, and after an intense debate in the War Cabinet, London requested Lisbon to install bases in the Azores. Currently, there were several reasons for a Portuguese receptive answer to British request. The favorable balance of forces for the Allies, the signs of Axis weakening, the failure of the Spanish peace initiative, the restless political and social situation in Portugal and Spain, and the future of the Portuguese regime after the war convinced Salazar of the necessity of a new approach to the Allies (Telo 1991: 148–154; Rodrigues 2005: 51–53).

One of the arguments used by the FO to request bases instead of occupying them by force was that Portugal was an ally that had not taken any action to justify an attack, and that it had also helped the United Nations, which had guaranteed that they would respect its interests.<sup>36</sup> The request did not rule out the possibility of occupying these islands by force, but it required a reconsideration of British military planning regarding Portugal. On the one hand, Portugal's air defense had to be studied, which required the dispatch of antiaircraft artillery and three fighter squadrons to Lisbon and Porto at the invitation of the Portuguese government. The operation received the code name of Lemonade, and it assumed that the command of the air defenses of both cities would remain in British hands. However, this arrangement had not yet been agreed upon by the Portuguese government.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, Salazar wanted to review the Anglo-Portuguese collaboration plan. Therefore, the British delegation, called Ingot, could take advantage of the occasion to guarantee the use of the Azores by maritime reconnaissance aircrafts and allied warships. In any case, the JPS clarified that it was necessary to convince the Portuguese delegation that a German invasion was unlikely, and above all, avoid commitments to the defense of peninsular Portugal. The JPS recommended leaving the issue of the use of the Azores by the United States to the representative of the FO, although the only military base would be the British.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, it would be necessary to avoid commitments to defend the Portuguese colonies, which,

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<sup>35</sup> Note COS (43) 377 (O), June 18, 1943. In TNA, CAB 121/480.

<sup>36</sup> Minute 1 on WM (43) 74th Conclusions, May 21, 1943. In TNA, CAB 65/38.

<sup>37</sup> Reports JP (43) 227 (Final), June 28, 1943, and JP (43) 237 (Final), July 8, 1943. In TNA, CAB 119/31.

<sup>38</sup> Report JP (43) 225 (Final), June 27, 1943. In TNA, CAB 119/31.

except for East Timor, already occupied by Japan, and Macao, were not considered in danger.<sup>39</sup>

During the Anglo-Portuguese negotiations to install British bases in the Azores, the British delegation tried to convince the Portuguese that a German invasion was unlikely. However, the Portuguese delegation insisted on this possibility and on defining British military aid and the provision of the necessary equipment for a Portuguese army corps comprising three infantry divisions. The agreement, reached on August 17, 1943, linked the use of the Azores to the British commitment to defend peninsular Portugal. In fact, a protocol signed that same day stipulated that if Spain attacked Portugal, Great Britain would declare war on Spain, although the commitments Great Britain consequently assumed would depend on the strategic situation.<sup>40</sup> The lack of specificity of the British support measures for the defense of Portugal also derived from Salazar's need to enlist the support of the United Nations to preserve his postwar regime and colonies. The agreement did not include forces of the United States, which, disappointed, decided to negotiate directly with Portugal afterward without British intermediation (Telo 1991: 163–180; Rodrigues 2005: 65–66; Moreli Rocha 2009: 137–142).

Once the agreement was signed, the JPS insisted that it was better to keep Spain and Portugal out of the war and maintain a benevolent neutrality toward the Allies. They also advised against starting a campaign on the Peninsula while Germany was still fighting in the Soviet Union, as it would not provide greater advantages than a campaign in Italy or northwestern France. Although they would be able to avoid a landing on highly defended beaches, they would have to advance through a territory with precarious communications until arriving at the Pyrenees, easily defensible by the German forces. The occupation of the Peninsula would only threaten the south of France without putting the forces within reach of any vital area of the Third Reich. However, if the Soviet Union was defeated, it would not be possible to land in northwestern France, and German forces could enter the Peninsula to close the passage through the Strait of Gibraltar. In this situation, the Allies would have to go ahead with a landing in the south of the Peninsula to defend their communications in the Mediterranean.<sup>41</sup>

The use of the Azores by the British, from October 8, 1943, had been linked to the defense of peninsular Portugal. Consequently, the Portuguese and British delegations

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<sup>39</sup> Report JP (43) 281 (Final), August 13, 1943. In TNA, CAB 119/31.

<sup>40</sup> Anglo-Portuguese negotiations relating to the grant of facilities in the Azores to his Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom: memorandums, agreement and protocol, July-August, 1943. In TNA, CAB 119/31.

<sup>41</sup> Report JP (43) 245 (Final), August 23, 1943. In TNA, CAB 119/49.

continued to work on the defensive plan. The question of the supreme command was postponed until it was agreed by both governments. Meanwhile, both delegations defined the threat they would have to face. A German attack was ruled out as the commitments of the Third Reich on other fronts did not allow for the diversion of forces to attack Portugal. Spain was also not able to invade Portugal, and it was unlikely that it would receive much German aid for this. However, it was finally assumed that the possible attack would be Spanish, with seven or nine divisions and German aid. The defensive plan was that three Portuguese divisions, supported by a British brigade group, would resist the Spanish attack until a British army corps with an armored division and two infantry divisions landed. Once the landing of the British forces was completed, after 46 days, the two allies would counterattack until the Spanish forces were expelled. From the beginning of the Spanish attack, the Portuguese air forces would be reinforced by six squadrons of British fighters, while the Royal Navy guaranteed control of the sea.<sup>42</sup>

Although the JPS agreed with the plan, it suggested reinforcing the deployment against the main attack and resolving the issue of the supreme command of the Anglo-Portuguese forces before implementing the plan. They also proposed sending supplies and equipment ahead of time sufficient to maintain a bomber squadron and fifteen fighter squadrons. They did not really believe that a Spanish attack was going to take place, but they thought it would please the Portuguese.<sup>43</sup> Certainly, there was no Spanish attack nor has a preparation for one at the time been recorded, although the Spanish High General Staff studied the invasion of Portugal in December 1940, as was commented before. This was in the wake of the Spanish temptation (intention) to go to war and was mainly aimed at avoiding the presence of British forces in the neighboring country. The attack would employ eleven divisions supported by smaller units, grouped into two armies that would converge on Lisbon (Ros Agudo 2008: 269–280). This force would be greater than that anticipated by the British and Portuguese delegations, although hampered by the lack of modern equipment and fuel.

The absence of a German threat on the Peninsula allowed the JPS to optimistically contemplate the possibility of Portugal going to war with Japan. After the frustrated contacts initiated by Great Britain for the joint defense of East Timor, occupied by Japan in February 1942 (Tarling 1996: 132–138), the time seemed to have come for Portugal to enter the war against the great Asian power. Great military advantages were not expected from the Portuguese belligerence against Japan, and this would even mean the loss of Macao.

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<sup>42</sup> Papers of the Anglo-Portuguese Staff Conversations, JP (43) 371, October 22, 1943. In TNA, CAB 119/31.

<sup>43</sup> Report JP (40) 370 (Final), October 28, 1943. In TNA, CAB 119/31.

However, the political advantages would be more important. It would simplify the position of the Allies in the Azores, end the Axis spy network in Portugal, and have a great propagandizing effect. The JPS also did not believe that Portugal's declaration of war against Japan would drag the Iberian country into a war against the Third Reich, as the latter was not interested in losing the supplies of Portuguese tungsten and the intelligence network that it maintained in the Portuguese colonies. If Portugal extended its aid to the Allies, however, this could cause a rupture with the Third Reich, for which the JPS recommended both the belligerence of Portugal against Japan and the expansion of the facilities granted to the Allies against the Third Reich.<sup>44</sup>

However, it was not until November 1944 that Great Britain, the United States, and Portugal agreed on the Portuguese participation in the reconquest of Timor. In February 1945, the JPS suggested accepting the Portuguese offer of a regimental combat team and waiting until the defeat of the Third Reich to decide on the support to be provided to the Portuguese force.<sup>45</sup> The JPS proposal represented a 180 degree turn regarding that of December 1943, possibly influenced by the course of the war, clearly favorable to the Allies, in which the defeat of the Third Reich was only a matter of time. In this regard, the JPS claimed that at that time the Portuguese belligerence against the Third Reich would not be significant in the fight against the Third Reich. However, it would instead increase the demand for allied resources and maritime transport. Even if Portugal came into the war, it would not involve a war against Japan, which was not in the interest of that country or Portugal. For the latter, its belligerence against Japan would endanger Macao and the 200,000 refugees who were there, while for the Asian country, it would mean the loss of its intelligence network in Lisbon.<sup>46</sup>

The Second World War ended without Portugal participating as a combatant and without Great Britain executing the operations it had planned regarding the Iberian country, except for Operation Alacrity to install bases in the Azores with the consent of the Portuguese government. However, the analysis of the unrealized plans makes it possible to clarify and better define the limits of Portugal's diplomatic relations with Great Britain and Spain. The rapprochement between the two Iberian dictatorships during the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War reflected ideological factors and common interests, such as their own survival in the international context. Nevertheless, this convergence also had its

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<sup>44</sup> Report JP (43) 413 (Revised Final), December 10, 1943. In TNA, CAB 119/31.

<sup>45</sup> Report JP (45) 14 (Final), February 7, 1945. In TNA, CAB 84/69.

<sup>46</sup> Report JP (45) 34 (Final), February 11, 1945. In TNA, CAB 84/69.

limits. For Portugal, the pact signed with Spain in 1939 and the additional protocol of the following year helped reduce the risk of being involved in war, although it did not prevent the Spanish High General Staff from considering the invasion of its Iberian neighbor in December 1940. Likewise, the interview between Franco and Salazar in 1942 and the formation of the Iberian Block at the end of that year did not prevent Portugal from continuing to fear a possible Spanish attack. In fact, the demand for British support against this threat was fundamental in the staff conversations held with Great Britain in 1943. Moreover, the defensive plan agreed upon by both countries in October 1943 had been based on the possibility of a Spanish invasion of Portugal.

British military planning regarding Portugal also indicates the limits of the traditional Anglo-Portuguese alliance, vital for the maintenance of its overseas possessions and about which the great Anglo-Saxon power had its doubts before the Second World War. The staff conversations between the two countries about the defense of Portugal and the installation of British bases in the Azores fit perfectly within this relationship. However, the British plans to occupy the Portuguese Atlantic islands without the consent or knowledge of the Portuguese government, which were even studied simultaneously with the staff conversations between the two countries, do not fit into this centuries-old relationship. The factor that drove the start of this planning was not a deterioration in the relations between London and Lisbon. It was instead the uncertainties that the evolution of the strategic situation and Spanish non-belligerence between 1940 and 1942 posed regarding Gibraltar. In this sense, what most influenced British military planning for Portugal was not the commitments derived from the alliance between the two countries but the balance of advantages and disadvantages that the realization of these plans would entail.

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### **Bionote/Nota Biográfica**

JUAN JOSÉ DÍAZ BENÍTEZ (PhD, University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain) is Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (ULPGC). His research interests are Spanish foreign policy and the international role of the Canary Islands, mainly in the Second World War.

JUAN JOSÉ DÍAZ BENÍTEZ (PhD, Universidade de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, España) é Professor de História Contemporânea na Universidade de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (ULPGC). Os seus interesses de investigação são a política externa espanhola e o papel internacional das Ilhas Canárias, principalmente na Segunda Guerra Mundial.