

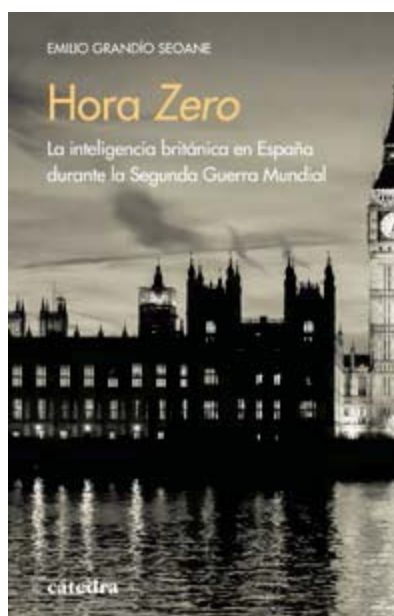
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Book Review

HORA ZERO. LA INTELIGENCIA BRITÁNICA EN ESPAÑA DURANTE LA SEGUNDA GUERRA MUNDIAL. [ZERO HOUR. BRITISH INTELLIGENCE IN SPAIN DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR.]. Emilio Grandío Seoane, Publisher: Cátedra, 2021.

ISBN: 978-84-376-4259-8 (288 pages)



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There has been no shortage of works analysing Spain's role as a theatre of espionage for decades. Among them, the prolific work of Diego Navarro Bonilla is worth mentioning, although his production has touched on such a multitude of aspects and chronologies that it would be impossible to summarise it briefly². With regards to espionage during the Spanish Civil War, until recently it has been pointed out that historiography has been somewhat forgetful about it;³ something similar could have been said about the Iberian Peninsula as the scene of the belligerents' intelligence actions during the world conflict that broke out in 1939. However, since then, many notable contributions have been made to the subject thanks, to a large extent, to the work of Emilio Grandío Seoane, professor at the University of Santiago de Compostela, who started by coordinating *War zone: la Segunda Guerra Mundial en el noroeste de la península Ibérica*. In this collective volume, Professor Grandío examined the role of British intelligence in Spain during the world conflict, and pointed out that the information networks available to British intelligence in Spain – despite their shortcomings – had their roots in a period prior to the invasion of Poland by German and Soviet troops. He continued along these lines in the monographic dossier he edited in the *Revista Universitaria de Historia Militar*: “Guerra de silencios: Redes de Inteligencia en España durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial.” In this interesting compendium of articles, Grandío himself,⁴ as well as Julio Ponce,⁵ Susana Sueiro,⁶ Javier Rodríguez⁷ and Diego Navarro,⁸ approached many of the faces of the game of mirrors that defined the actions of the Allied and Axis intelligence services during those years. Grandío focused his research on the British field, as he demonstrated in his next work:

2 We could make two recommendations: Navarro Bonilla, Diego: *Orígenes de la inteligencia en el estado moderno: tratadística militar, diplomática y política en Europa (siglos XVI-XVIII)*. Valencia, Tirant lo Blanch, 2017; Navarro Bonilla, Diego: *Inteligencia y análisis retrospectivo: lecciones de historia y lecturas recomendadas*. Valencia, Tirant lo Blanch, 2014.

3 Ros Agudo, Manuel, “El espionaje en España en la guerra civil y la segunda guerra mundial: una visión general”, *Diacronie. Studi di Storia Contemporanea: La voce del silenzio: intelligence, spionaggio e conflitto nel XX secolo*, 28: 4, 2016, 29/12/2016,

URL:< http://www.studistorici.com/2016/12/29/ros-agudo_numero_28/ >

4 GRANDÍO SEOANE, Emilio: “No solo wolframio. Galicia, campo de juego de las redes de inteligencia durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial.” *Revista Universitaria de Historia Militar*, 4:8. 2015, pp.101-117.

5 POMCE ALBERCA, Julio: “Espionaje en Gibraltar y su campo (1936-1945).” *Revista Universitaria de Historia Militar*, 4:8. 2015, pp.35-54.

6 SUEIRO SEOANE, Susana: “La ciudad de los espías (1940-1945): Tánger español y la política británica.” *Revista Universitaria de Historia Militar*, 4:8. 2015, pp.55-74.

7 RODRÍGUEZ GONZÁLEZ, Javier: “Los servicios secretos en el Norte de España durante la II Guerra Mundial: el Abwehr alemán y el SOE inglés.” *Revista Universitaria de Historia Militar*, 4:8. 2015, pp.75-100.

8 NAVARRO BONILLA, Diego: “Intelligence in theory: manuals, regulations and instructions on doctrine and procedure (France, United Kingdom and United States, 1870-1945).” *Revista Universitaria de Historia Militar*, 4:8. 2015, pp.15-34.

A Balancing Act: British Intelligence in Spain during the Second World War,⁹ a corrected and expanded volume that now sees the light of day in Spanish under the Crítica imprint.

Hora Zero is first and foremost a product of the analysis of documentation held in the British National Archives relating to the Iberian peninsula throughout the decade 1936-1946; although the book focuses on events linked to the world war, it also deals with events immediately prior to it. Among the archives consulted, those relating to the Foreign Office and the British intelligence structure in Spain have proved to be the most decisive for the publication of this book, as the author rightly points out throughout it. At times, this analysis of British diplomatic sources is not compared with other available sources, opening windows for new contributions or future nuances. The author himself points out that much work remains to be done and that further research and confrontation of the British account with others is needed. The centrality that the author gives to British documentation of the 1936 conflict at the beginning of the book orders most of the narrative and allows us to understand the extent to which British political interests were at the centre of its external action during the Spanish conflict and its subsequent relationship with the Franco regime. Defending British interests meant assuming that neither side would be a “permanent friend or foe”, and this was the foundation stone on which all British action in Spain during World War II was subsequently built.

The large number of individuals who identify themselves as members or collaborators of the British intelligence network is evidence of the interest and effort undertaken by the United Kingdom. This network, which stretched from Vigo to Barcelona and from Bilbao to Gran Canaria, covered the entire Iberian peninsula and the African territories under Spanish sovereignty. It was, therefore, an enormous effort that required a complicated structure of control, financing and maintenance, which highlighted, as the author rightly points out, the major interest in the events south of the Pyrenees in Whitehall during the most difficult years of the world conflagration. A structure so lacking in transparency and complexity that, on some occasions, the idea was sown that the actions of some operatives could be hindering those of others without knowing it¹⁰. The relationship between the French and British intelligence services is still pending, as well as what happened to the information structure that France had in Spain before 1940 and whether it remained under the orders of Vichy or whether its assets continued the game on the side of the Allies by being integrated into the new British networks¹¹.

The book provides interesting perspectives that offer us a new vision of other conflicts and allow us to trace the genealogy of some ideas that might seem later. The *real-*

⁹ GRANDÍO SEOANE, Emilio: *British Intelligence in Spain during the Second World War*. Brighton, Sussex Academic Press, 2017.

¹⁰ P.30.

¹¹ p.49.

politik mandate and the conversion of the Franco regime into an ecosystem in which British diplomacy moved with a certain ease, as it knew its internal rules and codes, and the fact that it had managed to develop a certain capacity for direct and indirect influence meant that, during and after the world conflict, the best safeguard for its interests was the maintenance of the regime. In terms of this dimension, British *soft power* in Spain had important vectors in British businessmen with interests in Iberian countries, but it also resorted to some novel tools such as the use of the BBC, the dissemination of translated press in selected circles, or the use of the means made available by private capital, such as the International Banking Corporation; however, all these instruments were also available to other forms of direct interference¹². Naval intelligence – it seems to us more appropriate to use this expression – was an indispensable tool for the British to obtain sources of a certain quality from the crews of the German ships that frequented some peninsular ports and regularly supplied the Kriegsmarine's submarine fleet. Within the *human factor* referred to above, the role of the naval attaché at the embassy in Madrid from 1939 onwards, the mysterious Alan Hillgarth – Hugh Evans' alter ego – became an indispensable element in the coordination of the naval intelligence service with MI6 and, from 1940 onwards, with SOE. His intuition led British intelligence to focus its interest on coordinating approaches to the Spanish generalship and admiralty, seeking strategic or circumstantial allies that would hinder an irreversible Germanophile drift on the part of the state leadership. Such subtle actions did not prevent the initiation of more aggressive ones, such as zero-sum strategies that increased internal reluctance to further Spanish commitment to the Axis, some as surprising as facilitating the structuring of the anti-Francoist guerrilla movement in the Asturian mountains¹³.

In 1940 Samuel Hoare, a leading Tory militant who had been a cabinet member and a member of his country's intelligence community since World War I, was appointed ambassador to Spain; he pushed for the conversion of the British diplomatic structure in Spain into an effective tool in the service of the Allied war effort in complete symbiosis with its intelligence services. Professor Grandío's analysis of the Hillgart and Hoare correspondence is very interesting. Undoubtedly, one of the great contributions of this book is the understanding that the regime was useful to British interests insofar as it was predictable. In this sense, British *soft power* in Spain and Portugal from 1940 onwards sought a pragmatic position vis-à-vis the Iberian dictatorships.

The study of the most fascistic sectors of Spanish society and its political elite with the Third Reich, as well as its information networks during the Second World War, are also present in Grandío's work. Not surprisingly, it analyses the anti-British sentiment exacerbated by Falangist groups and instigated by the German Reich embassy. The former was as keen to exploit Spanish nationalist sentiment around the claim to sovereignty over Gibraltar as the British were to conceal any contact with anti-Franco

¹² p.42.

¹³ p.47.

forces. The aim of the latter was to try to ensure that their own actions were not seen as a threat to the survival of the regime by the generals and admirals they were trying to win over; something they did not always achieve, according to the military cases consulted by Grandío, which show that the relations between members of British intelligence in Spain and the opposition forces to the regime were pursued and known. A game in which counter-intelligence networks played a key role. Thus, the British intelligence community in Spain and Portugal had to devote enormous resources to checking rumours of all kinds, which undoubtedly responded to Spanish or German disinformation strategies. The scarcity of in-house assets capable of pre-discarding information increased the impact and usefulness of these strategies. One evidence of this lack of human resources, Grandío points out, was exemplified by the poor structure of the SOE's special operations section – SO2 – in Spain, which was unable to obtain small arms on the black market in 1940.

The author rightly points out that the Americas, and especially the Spanish emigrant colony, became a focus of interest for British intelligence activities aimed at controlling the Axis. Hoare was aware that German intelligence was especially active in Spain, but also in some parts of the Americas thanks to the collaboration of Falangist organisations abroad and the regime's own cultural activity in Latin America¹⁴.

Despite the thoroughness of the author's documentary review, we are convinced that there is still much to be said on this subject.

Review received: 31 March 2021.

Review accepted: 9 April 2021.

¹⁴ We have also made some observations on this in our recent report: Velasco Martínez, Luis: *Fascistas de ultramar. La organización de Falange en el Río de la Plata, 1936-1942*. Buenos Aires, Biblós, 2021.