

Intelligence archives: Britain bribed Spain to stay out of Second World War

Britain paid millions of pounds to military and political leaders in Spain to ensure they remained neutral during the Second World War, secret files reveal.



Despite the money, intelligence officers later suspected General Franco of ordering his officials to pass on secrets to the Germans Photo: Getty Images

By Tom Whitehead, Security Editor

7:00AM BST 23 May 2013

Some \$10 million was paid to one double agent alone to distribute to key individuals, including General Franco's brother Nicholas, in the hope they would not enter the conflict.

But despite the money, intelligence officers later suspected General Franco of ordering his officials to pass on secrets to the Germans.

The effective bribes also sparked a row with the US after the Americans froze the money planned for Britain's "friends in Spain".

The \$10 million were to be paid to Juan March, a contact who had served as a double agent for Britain during the First World War, according to the intelligence papers released by the National Archives.

The money was to be distributed to five key figures, including Nicholas Franco, who Britain hoped

could ensure General Franco kept Spain out of the war.

The fear was that in 1940 and 1941 Spain, which did remain neutral, was “on the edge of war”.

The plan was to prop up a suitable opposition to joining the war on the side of Germany.

But the plan was nearly scuppered after America froze some of the money held by a Swiss bank in New York.

The Foreign Office desperately wired its Washington office telling them to apply pressure to have the accounts freed up as soon as possible.

One note read: “When their dollars were frozen our friends were greatly perturbed and suspicious that we were conniving at baulking them of their reward.

“This might have unfavourable political repercussions.”

Another note said that their “friend” in Spain “points out that any suggestion of breach of faith might well be fatal at this juncture”.

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