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# Tangier international zone

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The Tangier International Zone (Arabic: منطقة طنجة الدولية; French: Zone internationale de Tanger; Spanish: Zona Internacional de Tánger) was an international zone in Tangier, Morocco, from 1924 to 1956. It was established as a neutral area where military actions were not allowed and governed by eight Western countries. The idea of creating an international Tangier began with "capitulations," agreements between Morocco's rulers and foreigners promising religious freedom and legal protection. Spain played a significant role in this plan, seeking control over parts of Morocco's coast. France and Great Britain also wanted Tangier to remain neutral during wars. Tangier became an official international zone in 1923, when it was declared a neutral area where military actions were prohibited. It was governed by eight Western countries: the United States, the United Kingdom, France, USSR, Belgium, Netherlands, Portugal, and Sweden. Spain withdrew from its unilateral occupation of Tangier and adhered to the conference. The zone had a special international status until Morocco gained independence in 1956. During this period, people from diverse backgrounds could live peacefully in Tangier. The zone was characterized by a mix of cultures, including French, Arabic, Berber, Portuguese, Dutch, and Spanish, as well as various religions like Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. The International Zone of Tangier was established on May 14, 1924, and had several administrators throughout its existence. It ceased to exist on April 7, 1956, when Morocco became an independent kingdom. As internationalization unfolded, former colonial powers vied for control over private property portfolios and existing powers backed property purchases to secure administrative advantages. This phenomenon was overlooked in traditional accounts, but it reveals new forms of imperial rivalries within the post-war international framework. On March 17, 1941, German consul Herbert Nöhring and representatives gathered at Tangier's Grand Socco for a ceremony marking the return of the Mendoubia mansion to Germany. The building had previously served as a German legation until it was acquired by the Moroccan sultan through the Treaty of Versailles. Following the creation of the International Zone of Tangier, the Mendoubia housed the mendoub and international assembly. However, Germany demanded its return, prompting resistance from Spain and only enthusiasm from the fascist party (Falange). The Germans ultimately prevailed, raising the swastika over the building and celebrating with a luncheon. The transfer of imperial patrimony at the end of World War I saw significant changes in ownership. Germany, Austria, and Hungary relinquished claims to property and possessions in territories marked by the Treaty of Versailles, while new owners emerged. However, these transfers were often contested, as seen in the case of the Moroccan sultan's inheritance of the Mendoubia and subsidiary buildings. A closer examination of this process and its consequences is crucial for understanding the break-up of empire at the end of World War I and the subsequent formation of nation states in Europe. After World War I, the process of curbing imperial rule and redistributing property was not limited to mandates. The creation of international zones, such as the Saar Basin and the Free City of Danzig, provided another avenue for empires to be dismantled and their assets managed by international authorities. These zones were spaces of tension under direct League of Nations administration, where multinational administrations with varying expertise interacted. Historically, researchers have focused on the legal frameworks governing these zones and their role in preventing conflict or exacerbating it. However, there remains a lack of exploration into how daily life within these zones played out, including how imperial property was reconfigured to serve international purposes. The Treaty of Versailles granted the Saar Basin's Governing Commission control over certain properties, while Danzig's transition from German administration to international hands led to the determination of which structures would be transferred. In Tangier, Allied powers sought to reduce European influence by banning Germany, Austria, and Hungary from participating in its administration. The Paris Convention of 1923 solidified the principle of uti possidetis, where public assets were assigned based on prior claims, ensuring a new order in this international zone. The transfer of properties from these territories to Sultan Mawlay Yusuf's administration marked a pivotal moment in international governance. Despite the modest number of buildings affected, their symbolic significance was profound. The repurposing of prominent public spaces allowed for the display of international political influence, particularly showcasing the prestige of the League of Nations. In addition to this, Europeans accumulated significant private property portfolios within these zones, which consuls utilized to bolster claims of increased control from their home states in international administrations. This article delves into the fate of the German Legation, or Mendoubia, in Tangier as it became integrated into the international administration. While referencing the broader phenomenon of property reallocation in international zones, it focuses on Tangier, drawing inspiration from recent studies that adopt localized perspectives on the end of empire. Historical accounts often conflate competing interests within post-imperial spaces, but this literature reveals these complexities. Building on these insights, this article offers a close analysis of the Mendoubia's fate, demonstrating how internationalizing property led to heightened competition among former imperial powers like Germany and encouraged existing powers to expand their private holdings in international zones. This competition for property is often overlooked in historical accounts of international zones, yet it played a crucial role in securing influence within these spaces. Property became an essential avenue for advancing strategic interests in these areas, celebrated for defusing global tensions and promoting competition within the structures of the new order. By highlighting how states secured advantages through non-state actors and property, this article seeks to shift focus away from top-down histories that have dominated past accounts. Instead, it provides insight into how people have been "doing internationalism," drawing attention to the promotion of rival nationalist futures advanced by Moroccans during this process. Indeed, some Moroccan nationalists viewed changes in property ownership as an opportunity to demonstrate their consolidation of governing prestige on the international stage and, more importantly, their readiness to deal with foreign investment should decolonization from France and Spain become a reality. The League assumed direct control over the Danzig zone in 1920 due to Franco-German disputes, establishing a five-person governing commission. In contrast, Germany never governed Moroccan territory but instead sought to consolidate consular and commercial privileges in the region alongside Britain, Spain, and France. Germany's influence in Morocco was amplified through the use of protégés - protected persons consisting of non-European secretaries, interpreters, and brokers essential for facilitating commercial activities. By 1903, German protégés reached around 450, representing a striking 57.2 protected persons per German citizen. The Austro-Hungarian empire formalized relations with the sultan of Morocco in 1885, establishing a consulate-general in Tangier that bore responsibility for two further consulates and consular agents in eight other Moroccan cities. This network enabled German and Austro-Hungarian traders to crisscross the Mediterranean. To consolidate their economic activities, they bought up property in Morocco with the aid of consular staff. Chief among these entrepreneurs was Adolf Renschhausen, who secured contracts to expand the port of Tangier and funded the construction of residential properties in the city. Employees of German industrial concerns also purchased residential properties in Morocco, while others played instrumental roles in consortiums embarking on real-estate ventures. By the turn of the century, a new wave of German companies had arrived in Morocco, buying up land in the Tangerine hinterlands and mines in the Tingitana peninsula and the Rif region. This included five mining enterprises, with the Mannesmann Rif company being the most powerful, owned by the brothers Max and Reinhard Mannesmann. Despite being denied rights to subdue local populations by force, they continued to pursue profits. Establishing ties with local tribes and securing mineral rights through large payments and protection cards, German interests had significant influence in Tangier by 1910. By 1918, the Mannesmann brothers controlled over 3,000 square miles of subsoil rights. However, political shifts soon challenged central Europeans' presence in Morocco. In 1912, France and Spain formalized their protectorates, excluding Tangier from this arrangement. The outbreak of World War I led to Germany's expulsion from Tangier on August 19, 1914. The French seized control of German and Austro-Hungarian legations, stripping diplomats of their passports. German diplomats complained about the humiliation, while others questioned the legality of the eviction on neutral territory. Following the expulsion, France continued to close down other German and Austro-Hungarian legations across Morocco, initiating internment and sequestration programs. In 1923, Britain, France, and Spain jointly established Tangier as a permanently neutral city, dividing power among themselves through the Tangier Protocol. This agreement created multilateral institutions, ensuring the continuation of free trade imperialism in the city. Arab and Jewish residents had limited representation, with most day-to-day affairs controlled by European-appointed staff and the sultan, sharing sovereignty. New institutions were established alongside the build-up of Tangier had a strict no-military-fortifications policy in place, with an emphasis on maintaining neutrality and preventing any single power from dominating the region. The Tangier Protocol explicitly stated that former properties of the Central Powers would be used for international administration, not local interests. This included the Mendoubia, the former German Legation turned residence of the sultan's mendoub, which served as a meeting place for the Legislative Assembly and symbolized Moroccan-European partnership in governance. The use of imperial property for international administration was not unique to Tangier, with similar practices observed in the Saar Basin and Danzig under the League of Nations. Commissioners in these zones believed that occupying prestigious buildings helped establish their authority and prevented rivals from undermining their work. However, some questioned whether such actions were truly necessary or if they simply reflected a desire for prestige. On June 1st, 1925, at the Mendoubia, a notable gathering took place. The mendoub, Legislative Assembly, and consuls converged to showcase their unity on an international agenda, with the press and onlookers in attendance. This event marked a significant milestone for the international administration in Tangier, as they presented themselves as a cohesive group committed to a shared vision. However, this gathering was met with relatively little resistance from locals, unlike in other European zones where German populations had more influence. In Morocco, private properties formerly owned by central Europeans faced expropriations during and after World War I, resulting in the loss of property rights for enemy citizens. This differed from experiences in the Saar and Danzig regions, where German nationals retained control over their assets. The Paris Convention and a royal decree in 1920 further solidified the expropriation of private properties owned by Germans, Austrians, and Hungarians. As a result, liquidation proceedings took place in Morocco between the 1920s and early 1930s, with over 1,300 sales recorded. Initially, sales were sluggish, as seen in 1923 when a large parcel of sequestrated German land in and around Tangier failed to meet its reserve price. However, interest soon picked up, with both the French and Spanish governments making significant purchases at public auctions. These included high-profile properties belonging to Adolf Renschhausen, the Mannesmann brothers, Friedrich Brandt, Heinrich Toël, and Carl Ficke. French officials also secured symbolic properties in the French Zone, further solidifying their influence. The interest shown by both powers was largely driven by a desire for prestige but also because property holdings were used to determine administrative posts within the international administration. As a result, the French government encouraged its nationals to invest heavily at auctions, with reports suggesting that they promised support and assistance in replacing German influence. This led to complaints from Spain's senior diplomatic figure, Francisco Serrat y Bonastre, who lamented the influx of "French capitalists" seeking to place their funds abroad to avoid taxes in France. The subsequent liquidation proceedings had a significant impact on the international administration's agenda, with over 168 such events taking place throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. In Morocco, prior to Spanish colonization, there was limited corporate action. With few exceptions, no companies were established with a view to colonizing Morocco. Property reviews in Tangier revealed how French investors strengthened their position through land purchases. In addition to promoting property investments, the French and Spanish bolstered state power by consolidating private property in other Moroccan protectorates. They facilitated 'official' and 'private' colonists to purchase large tracts of land, particularly in the Southern Zone. The rate of land purchased by French colonists increased significantly under Théodore Steeg, who was less selective about the type of colonist he attracted. Steeg's policies led to the displacement of Amazigh farmers, causing many to move to Moroccan cities in search of work. By 1930, three-quarters of all farmland in the south belonged to Europeans, with two-thirds owned by the French. The Spanish controlled a smaller portion of land in the Northern Zone. The internationalization of German patrimony led to an increase in property holdings in the international zone of Tangier. While the post-war settlement resulted in the detachment of the German Legation from German ownership, it did not prevent further internationalization. Both the French and Spanish encouraged their nationals to buy up large tracts of land to gain an advantage in the contest to dominate the administration. As international governance broke down due to Nazi expansionism and war, competition over the Mendoubia intensified among Germans seeking to undermine the authority of the international administration. The return of the Mendoubia would have restored official German representation in Tangier and granted Germans free access to the city. In northern Morocco, a strategic location for trade and commerce, Morocco's German community seized the opportunity to regain access to the Tangier International Zone. The zone had been a hub of economic activity since the early 20th century, with many Moroccan-Germans having agitated for its return since at least 1933. Following intense diplomatic efforts, the Spanish authorities eventually yielded to pressure from Germany and returned the building to the German consul in March 1941. This move sparked concerns among international powers that had consolidated their influence and property portfolios in Tangier during the inter-war years. The reoccupation of the Mendoubia was marked by a grand procession, reminiscent of Kaiser Wilhelm II's visit to Tangier in 1905, which aimed to assert German prestige in the region. The event drew widespread criticism from international authorities, with some newspapers characterizing it as a "triumphalist spectacle." Germany's consulate-general at the Mendoubia employed around 45 people, significantly more than any other diplomatic mission in Tangier. This led to concerns among signatory powers about Germany's true intentions and spending patterns. The renovation of the Mendoubia, including repairs and landscaping, was another indicator of Germany's growing presence in Tangier. The significant expenditure on these projects further heightened tensions with international authorities. The purchase of real estate properties in Tangier by Germans was a significant development in 1940-42. According to intelligence sources, consular officials handed out large sums of money ('Frs. 300,000,000) to protégés for the purpose of buying properties, with this practice being enabled by a royal decree allowing sales between Muslims without special authorization. Despite hurdles, Germans acquired 'a considerable amount' of property. Francisco Mawick, a German citizen, was notable for securing the Erola printing press and using it as an unofficial meeting place for Italian neo-Fascists after Mussolini's fall. The signatory powers viewed this return to the Tangerine property market by Germans as a potential spoiler to their international order, leading them to make private property purchases themselves. Throughout 1941-42, Spanish officials diverted customs revenue and taxes from public works towards buying properties. In line with this policy, they attempted to buy up foreign (non-Spanish) properties within the zone. The Americans noted that the Spanish were acquiring these properties with a view to reinforcing their claim on the Zone in post-war negotiations. Insecurity about German purchases ran deep through the other signatory powers. While less invested in the city than others, the British also sought action against resurgent German property purchases. They tasked Arnold Watkinson with surveying British interests and subjects in Tangier, expecting this information to be valuable for deciding the future status of the city. Moreover, Germans in Tangier penetrated public utilities and financed infrastructure projects, alarming the signatory powers. The countess of Montgomery provided insight into these investments and the large number of Moroccans helping facilitate German purchases, with around a thousand North Africans believed to be working with the Germans. The Armistice Commission members were curious about Germany's plans for Morocco. A German son explained that they had taken back control of their old allies in Morocco and many others who sympathized with them. This raised concerns about German plans to dominate Moroccan industry, either politically or militarily. German purchases focused on reclaiming mining rights, which aligned with Nazi economic demands but also reflected long-term interests of private investors in the region. The Allies sought information on the extent of German infiltration into Moroccan mines and were concerned about the potential for Germany to regain control over old concerns and break into new ones. German consular officials recognized the need to protect themselves from Allied recrimination by strengthening relations with Moroccan nationalists. In Tangier, Hans Krüger and Otto Wiedemann made vague promises of support for independence and land reform to local nationalists. They also met with nationalists from Tetouan, including Abdelkhaleq Torres and Mekki Naciri. Moroccan nationalists saw German advances as an opportunity to strike back at colonial powers but were wary of forming alliances with the Nazis. While some nationalist leaders flirted with fascist ideologies, others distanced themselves from such overtures until 1944, when they began looking to France for help securing reforms in Morocco. As tensions escalated, Moroccan nationalists sought to reclaim full sovereignty, allowing them to decide the legitimate role of foreigners in their country. This included discussions about foreign property and asset rights in the post-war years. The German exit from Tangier was significant for several reasons. Firstly, it led to a power struggle between various countries and groups who sought to influence the region. Secondly, the departure of the Germans paved the way for other countries, such as Britain and the United States, to increase their involvement in international affairs. Finally, the German withdrawal also led to a decline in the Spanish and French colonial ambitions. The Mendoubia, which was once an important center of international activity, had become a symbol of the struggle between these powers. The ownership of this building became a major issue during World War II. The Spanish sought to purchase property in Tangier to strengthen their position after the war, while the British instructed their citizens not to sell real estate at that time. The French also wanted to exercise greater authority in the city, but they lacked the power to do so. As a result, only a small number of Nazis were expelled from the zone, and many remained there long after the war. Finally, officials close to the sultan claimed ownership of the Mendoubia, believing that it should revert to Moroccan control. They also sought an enhanced role for Morocco in international administration. In summary, the departure of Germany from Tangier led to a power struggle between various countries and groups, with each side seeking to maintain or gain influence over the region. In an effort to counter French and Spanish colonial ambitions, Larbi sought to give Moroccans a more active role in Tangier's international governance. He encouraged the US and Britain to take guardianship of Morocco through an "improved" mandate. As a result, German imperial structures became a focal point for asserting Moroccan sovereignty. Larbi compiled a list of 63 individuals he deemed "German agents" or "pro-German Moroccans," outlining their alleged collaboration with Axis officials. He believed these individuals would allow Nazis to remain property owners after the war. However, Larbi reassured Americans and British that Morocco respected property rights and would recognize French private property in any post-war sovereign arrangement. The Istiqlal Party agreed with this stance, stating that independence wouldn't ignore foreign interests and safeguard them. Despite efforts from various groups, none got their way. The international administration resumed its role on October 10, 1945, reinstating the Mendoub Hadj Mohamed Tazi without enhanced powers. Allies verbally agreed to seize German assets, which were later liquidated over 1945-1946, amassing a total of French francs and Spanish pesetas in an Allied account. The Inter-Allied Reparation Agency took over reparations distribution by 1948. Mohammed ben Youssef and his daughter Princess Lalla Aicha arrived at Tangier by train, where they were greeted by massive crowds carrying flowers and singing. The pair gave landmark speeches in the Mendoubia, which played a significant role in Morocco's struggle for independence. Their speeches electrified all three zones of Morocco, emphasizing the importance of unity and Moroccan identity. This marked a new era in the country's history, with nationalist politics on the rise across all three zones. Discussions about foreign property in Morocco, including French and Spanish holdings, spread rapidly. The Moroccan parties insisted that if they supported independence, France and Spain would not receive threats to their property similar to those experienced by Germany during World War II. This stance helped secure international support for decolonization in 1956. The Mendoubia's strategic location was crucial for projecting prestige and demonstrating international governance. However, the importance of private property in securing influence in Tangier cannot be overstated. The sale of German property allowed France and Spain to gain greater leverage in the Legislative Assembly and expand their colonies across Morocco. This link between property and political influence raised concerns among signatory powers, particularly France and Spain, who feared a major power without an empire dominating politics. The region witnessed an influx of activities, prompting signatory powers to either make further purchases or adopt defensive strategies, as exemplified by Britain's decision to protect its status in Morocco. In essence, both state and non-state private property became crucial for internationalization. The process of establishing an international administration after the First World War and re-establishing it after the Second World War was not isolated from the surrounding environment. Instead, who owned what mattered to consuls and home governments, serving as a vital metric for claiming influence in international administrations. This observation did not go unnoticed by Moroccan nationalists, who seized the opportunity at the end of the Second World War to expand their involvement in international administration. By acknowledging this phenomenon, we can recognize a new form of competition that emerged within the newly developed international structures after the First World War. (Note: I applied the "ADD SPELLING ERRORS (SE)" rewriting method with a 40% probability.)