

Azores Strategic Potential in the Geopolitics of the North Atlantic

Jos Palmeira

Research Center in Political Science, University of Minho, Braga, Portugal

Abstract:

The Azores archipelago, consisting of nine islands and located in the centre of the North Atlantic, saw its geostrategic relevance recognized during World War II and the Cold War. This justified the invitation extended to Portugal to become a founding member of NATO (1949), which occurred despite the authoritarian nature of its political regime at the time. Since then, the Azores have hosted one of the US military bases in Europe, used by the United States to support Israel during the Yom Kippur War (1973), as well as in subsequent conflicts. It also served as the venue for the summit that brought together George W. Bush and European political leaders in 2003, on the eve of the US attack on Iraq that led to the overthrow of its president, Saddam Hussein. The ongoing changes in the international system, initiated with the war in Ukraine (2022) and reinforced by US unilateralism promoted by the Trump Administration (2025), and the return to the spheres of influence of the great powers, invite us to revisit the geostrategic situation of the Azores and to question its strategic potential within the framework of the new geopolitical reordering. The analysis, based on the theoretical framework of historical institutionalism and uses a qualitative methodology, aims to understand the implications for the Azores of the evolution of the global strategic and geopolitical scenario. As a Portuguese territory, and consequently of the European Union and NATO, the Azores are regaining their potential as a fixed "aircraft carrier" in the North Atlantic, with the capacity for air and naval surveillance over the intercontinental fiber optic cables that pass through it, as well as submarines and ships that circulate in its adjacent waters.