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The role of the military in political transitions: from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present day

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Volume I





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### DUPLICITY AND AMBIVALENCE: BRITISH OFFICIALS AND OFFICERS REACTIONS TO FIRST REPUBLIC COUPS

Jesse PYLES (USA)

The Anglo-Portuguese Alliance, the longest in European history, formally dates to the 14th century. The Alliance was based on common interests of seagoing nations, and as England and Portugal had common enemies, it included arrangements for mutual defense. Spanish ascendency during the 16th century relegated Portugal to the status of a lesser power in Europe. In 1580, Spain invaded and conquered Portugal. Spanish decline during the 17th century allowed Portugal to recover a fragile independence. Portugal possessed a global empire but was likely unable to defend its Continental territory against major threats. Thus, during the mid-seventeenth century, Portugal agreed to allow English navy and merchant vessels access to many of its ports in exchange for England's guarantee of Portugal's sovereignty. The Alliance became a cornerstone of Portugal's nationhood, "an unalterable pillar of its foreign policy."(1) British protection required high tariffs. Portugal's rulers quickly learned that "refusal to join with London could invite devastating reprisals" and Portugal could not endure "British vengeance for refusing to play the role of client-state."(2) However odious this situation was for Portuguese rulers; their choices were limited to an alliance of subordination to Britain or probable annexation by Spain.

<sup>1.</sup> Gabrielle Paquette, Imperial Portugal in the Age of Atlantic Revolutions: The Luso-Brazilian World, c.1770-1850 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 212.

<sup>2.</sup> Jeremy Adelman, Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 102.

Many works of history written by native English speakers overlook the Alliance's centrality to Anglo-Portuguese relations. Other than occasional references to 'our ancient ally', the same holds true of many memoirs penned by British officials. The trend is especially noticeable in works written by military historians and officers. Why have native Anglophone authors, contemporaneous and modern, consistently disregarded the Alliance? Conversely, many works of history written by native Portuguese speakers understate the Alliance's centrality to Portugal's sovereignty and Anglo-Portuguese relations. A reason for this seems evident. Lusophone historians tend to sidestep the fact that to avoid Spanish subjugation, successive Portuguese rulers surrendered essential features of sovereignty to British interests. Many Anglophone and Lusophone authors seem content to perpetuate both trends.

A notable curiosity of Anglophone and Lusophone evasion of the Alliance's dynamics merits consideration. Chauvinistic Anglophone readings of Portugal's history, people, and culture appear frequently. Indeed, one need not read far into them to find assertions of Portuguese cultural and racial inferiority and British "pretentions to racial or cultural superiority." (3) As examples, in the early 18th century, a Briton described the Portuguese as "a degenerate race of people, well stocked with cunning and deceit." (4) On 29 September 1850, in an address to the House of Commons, Lord Palmerston declared:

These half-civilized Governments such as those of China, Portugal, Spanish America, all require a dressing down every eight or ten years to keep them in order. Their minds are too shallow to receive an impression that will last longer than some such period and warning is of little use. They care little for words and they must not only see the stick but actually feel it on their shoulders before they yield to that argument which brings conviction.<sup>(5)</sup>

Palmerston also asserted, "The plain truth is that the Portuguese are of all European nations the lowest in the moral scale." (6) Moreover, imperial school curricula alleged that "Portuguese ugliness and intellectual laziness were the result of an infusion of Negro blood." (7)

British soldiers and officers also wrote scathingly about the Portuguese. A soldier who served in the Peninsular War described the Portuguese as "an ignorant superstitious,

<sup>3.</sup> Robert Tombs, The English and Their History (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 784.

<sup>4.</sup> Marjorie Shaffer, Pepper: A History of the World's Most Influential Spice (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2013), 47-48.

<sup>5.</sup> Quoted in John DeWitt, Early Globalization and the Economic Development of the United States and Brazil (Westport: Praeger, 2002), 12.

<sup>6.</sup> Quoted in Ronald Hyam, Britain's Imperial Century, 1815-1914: A Study of Empire and Expansion (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 77.

<sup>7.</sup> Colin McGeorge, "Race, Empire and the Maori in the New Zealand Primary School Curriculum 1880-1940," in *The Imperial Curriculum: Racial Images and Education in the British Colonial Experience*, ed. J.A. Mangan (London: Routledge, 2012), 67.

priest-ridden, dirty, lousy set of poor Devils."(\*\*) Another solider of that war wrote that the Portuguese were "the most indolent and filthy portion of the human race which I have ever formed an acquaintance."(\*\*) Still another opined, "The men are well enough, very obedient, very willing and patient, but are naturally dirty and careless of their persons, dreadfully sickly and they have a natural softness, or want of fortitude....The officers, for the most part, are detestable, mean, ignorant and self-sufficient."(\*\*10\*) In 1809, Wellington wrote to Viscount Castlereagh of Portuguese conscripts, "I fear that the animal is not of the description to bear up against what is required of him."(\*\*11\*) In 1918, Field Marshal Douglas Haig wrote, "the Portuguese troops with their Portuguese officers are useless."(\*\*12\*) Also in 1918, Haig's subordinate, General Henry Horne, declared the Portuguese "only fit for digging."(\*\*13\*) Brigadier-General F.P. Crozier later wrote of battlefield events in 1918, "The failure of our allies, the Portuguese, on April 9th, 1918, came near to losing much ground for us, and because of that I ordered the shooting, by machine-gun and rifle fire of many Portuguese, in order to stem the tide."(\*\*14\*)

Modern native Anglophone historians and writers seem tone deaf to such declarations about the Portuguese. Modern Lusophone historians seemingly ignore them, similarly to how Anglophone authors neglect the Alliance. What seems particularly striking, however, is that Lusophone historians tend to assign validity to Anglophone judgments of the Portuguese, while reading past the specific language that underpins them. (15) This tendency is particularly confounding given that military officers who scorned the Portuguese have low standing among many Anglophone military historians. (16)

<sup>8.</sup> Quoted in Gavin Daly, "A Dirty, Indolent, Priest-Ridden City: British Soldiers in Lisbon during the Peninsular War, 1808–1813," *History* 94, no. 4 (October 2009): 467-468.

<sup>9.</sup> Quoted in Daly, "A Dirty, Indolent, Priest-Ridden City," 471.

<sup>10.</sup> Quoted in Michael Glover, The Peninsular War 1807-1814: A Concise Military History (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 91.

<sup>11.</sup> Wellington to Viscount Castlereagh, Merida, 25 August 1809, in Wellington, Arthur Wellesley, Duke of, The Dispatches of Field Marshal the Duke of Wellington, During his Various Campaigns in India, Denmark, Portugal, Spain, the Low Countries, and France, from 1799 to 1818, comp. Lt.-Col. John Gurwood (London: John Murray; 1837), 5:88.

<sup>12.</sup> The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA), Douglas Haig, typescript diary, 9 April 1918, WO 256/29.

 $<sup>13.</sup> Simon Robbins, \textit{British Generalship during the Great War: The \textit{Military Career of Sir Henry Horne} \ (1861-1929) \ (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 274.$ 

<sup>14.</sup> Frank Percy Crozier, The Men I Killed (London: Michael Joseph, 1937), 49.

<sup>15.</sup> Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses, "Anglo-Portuguese relations on the Western Front: The Portuguese Expeditionary Corps and the British High Command (part I)," First World War Studies 8 nos. 2-3 (2017): 173-187; Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses, "The Portuguese Expeditionary Corps in France (1917-18) and the Long Shadow of the Peninsular War against Napoleon," e-Journal of Portuguese History 16, no. 2 (December 2018): 1-23; Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses, "All of Us are Looking Forward to Leaving': The Censored Correspondence of the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps in France, 1917–18," European History Quarterly 30, no. 3 (2000): 335.

<sup>16.</sup> On Douglas Haig, note 12, see: Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History, Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 73-80; Stephen Heathorn, *Haig and Kitchener in Twentieth-Century Britain: Remembrance, Representation and Appropriation* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 181; Jesse Pyles, "Douglas Haig's Reports about the Battle of the Lys: A Critical Analysis," *Nuova Antologia Militare* 4, no. 16 (November 2023): 381-382; On Henry Horne, note 13, see: Ian Beckett, Timothy Bowman, and Mark Connelly, *The British Army and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 50; J.P. Harris, *Douglas Haig and the First World* 

British officials' and officers' responses to the Lisbon Regicide and First Republic coups reveal noteworthy duplicity and ambivalence toward the Portuguese. Yet, in all cases, the Alliance remained in place. The British government needed access to Portugal's ports and commerce as much as the Portuguese government needed the British government's guarantee of independence. When considering British disdain of the Portuguese, it seems appropriate to bear in mind that Britain's "military aggression [in] distant parts of the world... hardly constitutes a morally superior position" over any other nation. (17)

On 1 February 1908, gunmen killed King Carlos I and his heir, Prince Royal Luís Filipe, as they rode in an open carriage in Lisbon. The English and Portuguese royal families had enjoyed friendly relations and Edward VII and Carlos shared Saxe-Coburg and Gotha blood. Carlos had spent time in England and "was strongly attached to the English people." The press denounced the Lisbon Regicide as a barbarous act. London's *The Spectator* proclaimed, "The civilised world has been filled with horror and pity by a detestable crime." British diplomat, George Young, later wrote of the assassination:

In a word, it lost to the Portuguese renascence the sympathy and support of its only ally at a time when the Anglo Portuguese alliance was more than ever indispensable to the independence of Portugal and the integrity of its possessions. We simply added regicide to repudiation as another count in the indictment already drawn up by our public opinion against Portugal. Fortunately, there is as yet no bar of a world parliament before which peccant peoples can be summoned, or it would have gone hard with the Portuguese in 1908.<sup>(20)</sup>

The king's younger son, eighteen-year-old Manuel—who suffered an arm wound during the attack—was proclaimed King Manuel II the day after the assassination. British diplomatic correspondence reveals varied opinions about the assassination. On 6 February 1908, Charles Hardinge wrote to Francis Villiers:

It has been an awful tragedy and it is a wonder that all four occupants of the carriage were not killed. It looks very much as though there must have been a very general state of exasperation over Franco's administration and that the plot was known to a good many. The King with whom I had an interview of more than an hour was dreadfully upset and felt deeply the horror of it all.<sup>(21)</sup>

War (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 301; Jesse Pyles, "The Battle of the Lys: The Uncovered History," Nuova Antologia Militare 12, no. 3 (2022): 99, 121; On Frank Percy Crozier, note 14, see: Michael Anthony Taylor, No Bad Soldiers: 119 Infantry Brigade and Brigadier-General Frank Percy Crozier in the Great War (Warwick, EN: Helion & Company, 2022), xviii; Jesse Pyles, "The Battle of the Lys: Understanding How and Why its History is Distorted," Journal of Anglo-Portuguese Studies 31 (2022): 288.

<sup>17.</sup> Randall Stevenson, Literature and the Great War, 1914-1918 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 199.

<sup>18. &</sup>quot;The Assassination of the King of Portugal," The Spectator (London), February 8, 1908.

<sup>19. &</sup>quot;The Assassination of the King of Portugal," The Spectator (London), February 8, 1908.

<sup>20.</sup> George Young, Portugal Old and Young: An Historical Study (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1917), 273.

<sup>21.</sup> TNA, Charles Hardinge to Francis Villiers, 6 February 1908, FO 800/24/01.

In a letter to Villiers on 2 April 1908, Hardinge expressed duplicity towards Manuel's government. He wrote, "so as long as this Government [Manuel's] or a Monarchical Government remains in office." Then, the King,

is very keenly interested in the situation in Lisbon and in the welfare of the young King....After the events which have taken place at Lisbon it is necessary to try to govern the country in a normal manner, and, after all, even if there were a military dictatorship it would eventually become necessary to revert to a constitutional form of government, and it seems to me better that the attempt should be made now than later. The only really satisfactory point in the situation at Lisbon seems to be the absolute loyalty of the army. As long as this continues the young King's position should be secure.<sup>(22)</sup>

Hardinge wrote to Villiers on 12 April of the possibility of Edward VII hosting Manuel II:

"The question cropped up, I do not know how, a few days ago of King Manoel paying the King a visit in the autumn, but the King wrote to me that although he would always be pleased to receive the King of Portugal as his guest he does not consider that he ought to have Portugal for at least a year after the tragedy." (23)

What of the Alliance in diplomatic upheaval that followed the assassination? A Foreign Office Memorandum of 11 November 1908 listed Portugal as one of three countries that "Great Britain is bound by Treaty to afford armed assistance in case of necessity." The document reads: "Portugal, under the provisions of ancient Treaties which were, by a secret exchange of notes in 1899, declared to be still in force."<sup>(24)</sup>

Manuel II did not possess sufficient clout to govern effectively and during his reign republicans gained momentum. On the evening of 3 October 1910, republican leaders staged a successful coup. They proclaimed the First Portuguese Republic on 5 October. The king promptly left Portugal for exile in Britain. Thus, the centuries-long Portuguese monarchy ended.

Then Home Secretary, Winston Churchill, thought the assassins and republicans indistinguishable. He was also opposed to official recognition of the First Republic. In a letter to his wife, he declared: "I must say I do not see why we should be in a hurry to recognize this provisional Republic. Their leaders still condone and glorify the murder of King Carlos." (25) Another letter to her reads: "I wrote at [great] length to Grey about

<sup>22.</sup> TNA, Charles Hardinge to Francis Villiers, 2 April 1908, FO 800/24.

<sup>23.</sup> TNA, Charles Hardinge to Francis Villiers, 12 April 1908, FO 800/24.

<sup>24.</sup> TNA, Foreign Office Memorandum, 11 November 1908, FO 800/92.

<sup>25.</sup> R.S. Churchill, Winston Spencer Churchill: Young Statesman 1901-1914, Vol. 2 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), 341.

Portugal and made out a [very] strong case for non-recognition of those sanguinary swine." (26)

Anglo-Portuguese diplomatic relations were soured by the coup, but business and investments in Portugal remained a focus of British foreign policy. Grey wrote to Villiers on 28 November 1910 of a businessman's dealings:

All Williams' interest and influence having been with the Monarchical people in Portugal, he now wants to stand well with the new people in power.... but a good deal of British capital has been invested and some of it by people who I know to be of good standing. You need have no hesitation in giving all the support, which you would ordinarily give to an enterprise in which good British capital is embarked.<sup>(27)</sup>

Grey wrote to Villiers on 21 March 1911, of British investments and Anglo-Portuguese relations. The interests of the Lobito Bay Railway:

"should of course receive, when our support is asked, such support as they are entitled to from the point of view of British interests generally. I do not wish to throw cold water upon this. But if you have any reason to suppose that Williams' Agent has produced up the Portuguese Minister of Foreign Affair the impression that the attitude of the British Government towards Portugal can be affected by private interests, you should correct the impression." (28)

The British government recognized the Portuguese Republic on 11 September 1911. Relations between the allies, however, remained tenuous over the next three years. Moreover, although the Alliance remained in force, the British government did not want the Portuguese to invoke it. On 6 March 1912, Grey wrote to Hardinge:

"We should not use any argument which directly or indirectly lays us under a fresh obligation to the Alliance. The Alliance exists, and everything that has been said about it is on record and must be adhered to: but the Alliance is not an argument which I wish to use with Portugal whenever it is possible to avoid using it.W<sup>(29)</sup>

Hardinge replied to Grey on 19 March:

"The Portuguese lose no opportunity of dragging it [the Alliance] in.... All I could say that it was my personal belief, and I thought yours too, that the change of government here had not invalidated it, but that such an opinion had clearly not the same weight as a formal instrument, and that I had had no instructions to express it in any official manner." (30)

<sup>26.</sup> Churchill, Winston Spencer Churchill, 344.

<sup>27.</sup> TNA, Edward Grey to Francis Villiers, 28 November 1910, FO 800/71.

<sup>28.</sup> TNA, Edward Grey to Francis Villiers, 21 March 1911, FO 800/71.

 $<sup>29\,.</sup>$  TNA, Edward Grey to Charles Hardinge, 6 March 1912, FO 800/71.

<sup>30.</sup> TNA, Charles Hardinge to Edward Grey, 19 March 1912, FO 800/71.

The British government still needed access to Portugal's ports, as shown in December 1912, memorandum issued by the Admiralty:

We should make it a cardinal point of our subsequent policy to see that no maritime power, such as France or Germany, replaces us, and thus obtains the right to use the Cape Verde Islands, the Azores or Portuguese Guinea, either as a sovereign power or as an ally of Portugal. We should prevent at all costs the transfer of these particular possessions to any strong naval power.<sup>(31)</sup>

The outbreak of World War I led Britain and Portugal to increase their collaboration. Once the British government invited the Portuguese government to fight in France, both nations agreed to establish a Military Mission to Portugal. The Mission helped to ease frictions between the allies throughout the thirty-two months that they engaged in coalition warfare. Major-General N.W. Barnardiston headed the Mission. He arrived in Lisbon on 30 August 1916 and held the post until the war ended. He facilitated the Portuguese government's requests because his office possessed considerable clout with the War Office and the Foreign Office. An extensive collection of archival documents indicates that Barnardiston worked well with Portuguese officials and officers.

A letter to Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General R.D. Whigham, a British official writing from Lisbon—probably Barnardiston—attests to British perceptions of the Portuguese:

In dealing with the Portuguese one has to remember their vanity and extreme sensitiveness with regard to anything affecting their sovereignty, if one may use the expression with regard to a Republic. This accounts for their jealousy in matters affecting in the least degree their control over their own men. We think it absurd, perhaps, that so small a country should stand to such an extent on its dignity, but it is so, just as a small man is nearly always very touchy.<sup>(32)</sup>

The author's disdain for Portuguese sovereignty and national pride seems astonishing.

A military coup led by Sidónio Pais—a reserve army major and a former Ambassador to Berlin—overthrew the sitting government during the first week of December 1917. Compared to the coup of 1910, this one appears to have made little impression on British officials. Their reactions might be described as indifferent.

Barnardiston wrote from Lisbon: "There have been reports that some of the Troops were induced to join the Revolutionary Party by promises that they would not have to go to France." (33) On 11 January, however, Barnardiston noted: "the rumors that Sidónio Paes

<sup>31.</sup> Quoted in Glyn A. Stone, "The Official British Attitude to the Anglo-Portuguese Alliance, 1910-45," *Journal of Contemporary History* 10, no. 4 (1975): 730.

<sup>32.</sup> TNA, addressed to General R.D. Whigham, Lisbon, 11 December 1916, WO 158/709.

<sup>33.</sup> TNA, N.W. Barnardiston to R.D. Whigham, 29 December 1917, WO 106/551.

had induced troops to join him in the Revolution of 5th December last by the promise that they would not be sent to France were without foundation."<sup>(34)</sup>

In summer 1917, with the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps serving in the trenches of French Flanders, British officials and officers attempted to revoke the Corps' independent status and subordinate Portuguese troops to direct British command. They failed. On 19 December, Major-General Barnardiston broached the same topic with Sidónio. (35) Barnardiston claimed that Sidónio agreed to cancel the Corps' status and reorganize it, but he refused to allow British officers to command Portuguese troops. (36) Sidónio may have agreed to the first request because Barnardiston told him it, "might to a great extent relieve the Portuguese Government from the necessity of sending such large reinforcements as were at present required." (37)

British officers congratulated Barnardiston for securing this concession from Sidónio. However, in a letter addressed to R.D. Whigham, dated 11 January 1918, Barnardiston was compelled to clarify a "misunderstanding" that he thought he had reached with Sidónio:

There were one or two points on which Major Sidónio Paes was not quite clear... He was at first quite inclined to abolish the Corps organization altogether and revert to the one Division Commander for the whole force, but on further consideration he has decided that he cannot do it. If the Portuguese Corps in France is not maintained at all events in name (and under the arrangement which has been arrived at it will be a Corps only in name) the effect on public opinion here would be bad. Portuguese sentiment would be wounded....I have accordingly dropped the suggestion as to the abolition of Corps Headquarters.

It is possible that Sidónio never agreed to remove the Corps' status, but only to restructure it. Attempting to explain Sidónio's agreement to reorganize the Corps, Barnardiston wrote:

I think that experience in France and the late disasters in East Africa have brought the Portuguese to a frame of mind in which they are willing to admit their imperfections and are ready to remedy them even at the cost of the sacrifice of some "amour propre". They are, I feel sure, thoroughly alarmed by the state of affairs in East Africa. (38)

Barnardiston's remark reveals much about British perceptions of Portuguese "self love." The Portuguese Corps remained independent until April 1918.

<sup>34.</sup> TNA, N.W. Barnardiston to R.D. Whigham, 11 January 1918, WO 106/553.

<sup>35.</sup> TNA, N.W. Barnardiston to R.D. Whigham, 19 December 1917, WO 106/551.

<sup>36.</sup> TNA, N.W. Barnardiston to R.D. Whigham, 29 December 1917, WO 106/551.

<sup>37.</sup> TNA, N.W. Barnardiston to R.D. Whigham, 19 December 1917, WO 106/551.

<sup>38.</sup> TNA, N.W. Barnardiston to R.D. Whigham, 11 January 1918, WO 106/553.

British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, later speculate about the impact of Sidónio's coup on the morale of Portuguese troops in France:

The Portuguese contingent had suffered recently from the effects of political changes in their own country. The Ministry that had brought Portugal into the War had been overthrown. Their successors were not overzealous in its prosecution. The result was that the little Portuguese Army in France had been let down during the past few months.<sup>(39)</sup>

Most Portuguese enlisted men were peasant farmers, many were illiterate, with little knowledge of politics. (40) They were rugged men, accustomed to hard work, deprivation, and a traditional expectation of military service. Many Portuguese governments had fallen or been overthrown since October 1910, and it is unlikely that Sidónio's coup concerned most Portuguese soldiers. Indeed, the Corps' combat performances during January through March 1918 challenges contentions that it was a spent force. Thus, it appears that Lloyd George only repeated British officers' assertions about the Portuguese.

This paper surveyed British officials and officers' varied reactions to the regicide, the coup that overthrew the monarchy, and Sidónio's coup that overthrew the sitting government. It also questioned the veracity of their perceptions of these events. British reactions to the regicide and First Republic coups bore upon the Anglo-Portuguese Alliance. Its veiled complexities are crucial to understanding why.

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<sup>39.</sup> David Lloyd George, War Memoirs of David Lloyd George, vol. 6 (Boston: Little, Brown, & Company, 1937), 28.

<sup>40.</sup> Isabel Pestana Marques, Das Trincheiras com Saudade: A Vida Quotidiana dos Militares Portugueses na Primeira Guerra Mundial (Lisbon: A Esfera dos Livros, 2008), 21.

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