

CONFLICTS THAT DIDN'T DESTROY AN ALLIANCE

Rafael Borges

Portuguese-English history is, most of all, a history of friendship. It's a tale of two clever nations that, since the XIV century, are well aware both of their maritime choice and of their need to cooperate. Together, Portuguese and English learnt how to fight for their common interests, needs and objectives.

Even before the Treaty of Windsor, Portugal and England were already close nations. Indeed, when attacked by the French-Castilian fleets of Fernando Sánchez de Tovar – and above all after La Rochelle, in which Admiral Boccanegra inflicted a severe defeat on the English navy – Edward III of England turned to Portugal's King Ferdinand for help. The Iberian nation answered with a fleet that would patrol the Channel and protect the English homeland for years. Later, when Ferdinand of Portugal himself saw his country invaded by Castile and France, it was his turn to ask for help. However, despite Edward's prompt response, this would lead to some of the first severe problems between the two countries, as England's badly paid mercenary army would sack and burn a significant part of the Alentejo and make most of the Portuguese sceptical on any approximation towards the insular kingdom.

Afterwards, though, pragmatism would make the two monarchies overcome their problems and start what today is the world's oldest alliance still in effect. The diplomatic relations between the two friendly countries haven't always been healthy, though. A particularly interesting example of unease between them was the sinking in a storm of the large Portuguese galleon, the *Santo António*, or Saint Anthony as she was known in England. Transporting an amazingly valuable cargo that included personal property of John III of Portugal and the dowry of Catherine of Austria, the sinking of the ship prompted a severe crisis between the two nations and nearly led to a war between

them. Indeed, while John III demanded the immediate retribution of the carrack's cargo – worth over 4,000 times a man's annual wage – the English who had salvaged some of it wanted to keep what they had found. Unwilling to further annoy the Portuguese, Henry VIII agreed to establish a Star Chamber Court that eventually recognized Portugal's rights over the shipwreck. John retrieved his treasure, and a war between the two allies was successfully averted.

Later on, during the period of personal union between the Portuguese Kingdom and the Habsburg crown, Portugal would eventually declare war on England after a series of English pirate attacks disrupted the country's trading fleets. The English, taking advantage of Portugal's multiple wars – particularly the one against the United Provinces – would cause heavy troubles to the Portuguese Empire. In 1592, English privateers led by George Clifford, Earl of Cumberland, attacked and captured the Portuguese carrack *Madre de Deus*, which was three times bigger than England's largest vessel and alone had a cargo estimated at half a million pounds (nearly half the size of England's treasury). The English were so surprised with the size of the ship that they took it to London to show the massive vessel to thousands of curious people. Another interesting event was the English attack on *As Cinco Chagas*, a Portuguese carrack known as the richest vessel on earth. Although the ship exploded before any of its cargo could be captured, the brutal treatment given by the privateers to Portuguese men, women and children achieved significant notoriety.

While English privateers made it tough for their old allies in the Atlantic, the English East India Company successfully tried to establish itself in India at Portugal's expense. In 1612, Thomas Best's 4 galleons defeated 4 Portuguese *naus* at Suvali (or Swally), in what would become a turning point in history. Indeed, Swally marked the beginning of the Company's emergence as a major player in the East and of the progressive destruction of Portugal's Indian monopoly, not because of the battle itself but because of England's ability to be favoured by the Mughal

Emperor, who preferred them to the staunchly anti-Islamic Portuguese. This, together with other factors – especially Portugal's war on the United Provinces – would determine Lisbon's loss of status as a major world power.

After Portugal's December Revolution in 1640, the Portuguese monarchy was restored, and in 1661 the alliance with England was officially re-established with the marriage between Charles II of England and Catherine of Braganza. Both nations seemed to be eager to bring back the relations of friendship that had once existed between them, above all after Charles' restoration. However, before that, Anglo-Portuguese relations had been anything but easy, even leading to what was possibly the last military encounter between the Portuguese and their (nearly) all-time allies: a relatively small battle at Cascais between a Parliamentarian naval detachment of 16 vessels, commanded by Robert Blake, and the Portuguese navy. Indeed, John IV, the Restorer King, had taken part in the English Civil War by supporting the royalists and giving shelter to a monarchist fleet commanded by Prince Rupert of the Rhine. To Cromwell and the Parliament, Lisbon had become the Crown's lair. Taking that into consideration, Blake blockaded the city, in an attempt to convince John IV to hand over Rupert. The Portuguese monarch, refusing to break his word given to the English Prince, refused Blake's demands, while additional parliamentarian ships, with orders to wage war on Portugal, arrived and a small battle ended the blockade. Robert Blake's ships captured 7 Portuguese vessels, but retreated immediately after the engagement. No sources mention England's losses, which were presumably significant as Blake sailed away for Cadiz. As for Rupert of the Rhine, he would eventually be defeated by Blake near Málaga, which secured Parliament's supremacy at sea and proved to be a major victory for Cromwell.

One hundred and fifty years later, the Alliance would, once again, degenerate into conflict, tension and unease. Indeed, at the very start of the XIX century, the world, and particularly Europe, had to face the threat of revolutionary France. Portugal, due to its

alliance with the UK, was no exception. French armies, commanded first by General Andoche Junot and later by Marshals Soult and Masséna, invaded Portugal, forcing the nation's Royal Family to move to Brazil and make it the headquarters of the Portuguese Empire. Britain's behaviour during the war would, however, greatly displease her peninsular allies on three occasions.

Firstly, Lisbon, or rather Rio de Janeiro, would be appalled by reports that the allied British Armies had allowed the French to go back to their country with the full spoils of their campaign in Portugal: tons of treasures of all kinds, pieces stolen from the Kingdom's palaces, cathedrals and convents that were taken away never to be returned. Secondly, the Portuguese would be displeased with Britain's very limited efforts to make Spain give back the small border towns of Tálaga and Olivenza. These had been occupied by the Franco-Spanish armies thirteen years before the Congress of Vienna, during the Oranges War, and ceded to Spain by the Treaty of Badajoz. Indeed, after Napoleon's defeat, Spain agreed to give back what it had annexed from Portugal in 1801, but the agreement of the Congress of Vienna did not materialize, and, without the promised British support to Portugal, Spain has managed to keep that territory until the present day.

Lastly, but surely not least, the brutal post-war occupation of Portugal by the British would make the men who came as allies be seen as oppressors. Preferring to stay in Portuguese Brazil, where he was far more loved by the populace, King John VI gave political power over the Mainland to William Carr Beresford, 1st Viscount Beresford, whose atrocious governance made him as hated as the French he had fought to expel. When officers of the Portuguese army conspired to rebel against the *de facto* English regent of Portugal in 1817, Beresford ordered the death of the 12 leaders of the conspiracy, most notably of Gomes Freire de Andrade. After that, Beresford went to Brazil with the purpose of requesting additional powers from John VI, who promptly granted them. However, when he came back in 1820, he was unable to land as

the country had rebelled against his rule. The events that followed would lead to the return of the King to Lisbon and the independence of Brazil in 1822. Recognition, though, would only come in 1825 with Britain's mediation and after the brief Brazilian Independence War, in which the Independentist Navy was, curiously enough, commanded by a Briton: Lord Thomas Cochrane, 10th Earl of Dundonald.

But if the Napoleonic Wars were the cause of a number of problems and hard feelings between the two old allies, a yet more relevant episode was the well-known British Ultimatum of 1890. Portugal had been involved in the exploration of the African continent since 1336, when Portuguese sailors discovered the Canary Islands. From then on, Portugal established a successful colonial empire that existed from 1415 to 1975.

Although the Portuguese Empire in Africa was mostly coastal based until the second half of the XIX century, there are reports of previous expeditions, including the one of Francisco Barreto to Mutapa, in modern day Zimbabwe. In 1629, the Portuguese overthrew the country's sovereign and established a pro-Portuguese ruler, who made Mutapa a Portuguese client state and ceded the territory's gold mines to Portugal. Later, during the reign of Maria I, the Portuguese went from Angola to Mozambique through the interior of the African mainland, an achievement that they would repeat in the late XIX century, with the major expedition of Roberto Ivens and Hermenegildo Capelo. Basing themselves on their historical rights in the African continent, the Portuguese State presented a somewhat ambitious expansion proposal to the other delegates at the Berlin Conference, proposing that Portugal annex a huge area between modern day Angola and Mozambique. The British, however, fearful of seeing their project of a railway between Cairo and Cape Town ruined by Portuguese ambitions, vehemently opposed their attempts and, to the shock of their old allies, demanded that Lisbon order all her troops to retreat from the areas of modern day Malawi, Zimbabwe and Botswana. If Lisbon were to refuse, the Royal Navy would send the ships it had in Galicia to Portugal and, presumably,

attack it. The Portuguese reacted furiously, but accepted. Indeed, the Ultimatum ended in a victory for British interests, and also to Portuguese anglophobes: only a few decades later, the anti-British Portuguese Republican Party would oust the Monarchy and establish a Republic – Portugal's first.

Later on, before the onset of World War I, Britain once again showed itself ready to oppose Lisbon's interests by offering to divide Portugal's colonies between Imperial Germany and itself. Lisbon eventually was pragmatic enough to realize that the only way to secure Portugal's overseas empire was to appear on the victors' side once the conflict was over. Hence, Portugal marched to war with 200,000 men, of whom over 10,000 were left dead on the fields of Flanders, France, Angola and Mozambique. This was Portugal's price to keep Africa, and the nation paid it gladly.

The interwar period – which saw both the collapse of the Portuguese state and then its revival due to Dr. Oliveira Salazar's intervention, along with the rise of Nazi Germany under Hitler – wasn't any easier for the two old allies. While the Alliance remained a popular word in the relations between the two countries, British scepticism over Portugal's ability – and right – to, as Portugal itself put it, *be* in Africa, led London to try to appease Hitler with the offer of Portugal's colonies. The idea was well received in the Reichkanzlei and deserved some serious discussion between the two countries, but was dropped when an overambitious Fuhrer extended his demands. Once again, Portugal appreciated that neither side would have problems in dividing the country's colonies between them. It was this fundamental fact that Oliveira Salazar always took into account when maintaining relations with both Germany and the United Kingdom.

This leads us to a particularly interesting case that, regardless of the well-known neutrality of Lisbon in the world conflict, shows well the main concerns of the Portuguese leadership at the time. During the War, Portugal lived a period of relative prosperity. Free from the destruction inflicted by the march of machines of war and

by Hitler's millions and Stalin's minions, Portugal could both avert destruction and stimulate its economy by exporting its own products to both sides in the conflict. Among these products, the most important was certainly wolfram, that was used to equip both Britain's and Germany's war machines. In exchange, the Portuguese saw their central bank receive hundreds of tons of pure gold.

However, despite such economic prosperity, one of the most serious problems between Portugal and the United Kingdom during the conflict occurred when London instructed its Portuguese ally – which had already ceded it the Lajes Air Base when Britain invoked the Alliance – to immediately stop selling its precious wolfram to Hitler. Salazar, who thought that such a decision would be dishonourable and incompatible with Portugal's neutrality, agreed to halt further shipments to Germany – but also to Britain. By that time, Germany was on the brink of defeat and, while exports to the central European nation had sharply decreased, shipments to the Allies had increased exponentially. No convenient motive – economic, political or military – existed for Salazar to act in the way he did, only his sense of national dignity. Britain didn't like Salazar's attitude, but Churchill eventually understood it.

After the Second World War, the two Atlantic nations followed paths that couldn't have been more different: while an exhausted and devastated Britain accepted her new allies' intention to create a colonialism-free world and retreated from her colonies all over the world, Portugal went in the opposite direction. By vowing to keep its overseas empire, Portugal consciously accepted a war while the rest of Europe was just getting back on its feet after the drama of the Second World War. And while Salazar never expected the British to openly side with Lisbon in its controversial colonial policy, Portuguese policy-makers did believe that their old British friends and allies wouldn't ignore the old *Aliança Inglesa*.

Tensions rose when, during the Conservative Government of Churchill's former political protégé, Harold Macmillan, India's

Nehru, ordered the invasion of Portugal's Indian possessions. The Indian military intervention was the end of a period of border clashes and of unfriendly diplomatic relations between Lisbon and Delhi, during which neither side really wanted to negotiate: where Portugal didn't even want to talk about the status of what it regarded as its own sovereign territory, India merely wanted to negotiate the date of Portugal's withdrawal.

Salazar, though determined to keep Portuguese India, believed Nehru wouldn't throw his fame as a pacifist away, a fame which had been crucial for the foreign affairs of India, just for the sake of taking Goa. Hence, in late 1960, Portugal reduced its military contingent in Portuguese India from 12,000 men to a mere 3,500. Despite the lack of importance given by Lisbon to the possibility of a military invasion, the Portuguese in Goa prepared as much as possible – and while suffering from desperate shortage of equipment – for an Indian military invasion they knew they couldn't defeat. Portugal, however, remained determined in keeping its centuries-old empire intact, and its position was admirably explained by Henry Kissinger:

“A Nation assumes its responsibilities not only because it possesses material resources, but because it has a certain vision of its own destiny. For most of its history, until World War Two, the United States possessed the resources but not the philosophy to assume a global role. Today, the poorest country of Western Europe – Portugal – has the heaviest compromises outside Europe because its own historical image is connected to its overseas possessions.”

When, on the 18th December 1961, 45,000 Indian soldiers, supported by aircraft carriers, began their attack on this Eastern piece of Portugal, Salazar wrote a letter to Vassalo e Silva, the Governor-General of Portuguese India, demanding that he vow to fight to the death. Salazar hoped the Portuguese Army could resist for a week so that the Portuguese Government could make the UN force India to stop its attack. In the meantime, Salazar wrote to its old English ally, demanding London's support and reminding

Mr. MacMillan of the historic alliance between Portugal and England.

Britain, however, turned its back on its oldest ally, saying London was just as compromised to India as to Portugal, due, of course, to the Commonwealth. London offered its assistance as a mediator, but refused any specific support for the Portuguese cause. This led to, perhaps, one of the worst crises in the history of the Alliance. Salazar is quoted as saying that “the Alliance now faces a crisis it can hardly solve”.

In Lisbon, rallies showed the people’s pledge to refuse India’s unlawful annexation of Goa and, interestingly, there were even cases of Portuguese soldiers who, having fought for Britain during the Great War and received medals for their actions, gave them back. This was the case, for instance, of Army Brigadier Alexandre de Morais, who wrote a letter to the British Ambassador in Lisbon, returning the King’s Medal for Courage in the Cause of Freedom he had received in 1945.

After India, the relations between Portugal and the United Kingdom would never be the same. In 1973, the successor of Salazar as leader of the Portuguese regime, Marcelo Caetano, visited Britain, where he was dined in the Painted Hall of the Old Royal Naval College, in Greenwich. During the visit, however, major rallies made by British youths accused Portugal of being a fascist, colonialist and imperialist power. The visit was, thus, a major diplomatic failure for Lisbon, and further distanced the two Atlantic nations.

Healthy relations returned after the collapse of the regime in 1974 and the eventual establishment and consolidation of a western-style democracy in the country. In 1985, eleven years after the Carnation Revolution, HM Queen Elizabeth II visited Portugal, and a year later, the Iberian nation joined the EEC, of which Britain was already a member.

Today, the two nations share deep and sincere friendship and, together, have built one of the most successful alliances in History. The long relations between the two countries haven't always been of friendship. In different periods of history, antagonistic interests have divided the Alliance, sometimes to the extent of threatening its very existence. However, it is the existence of so many conflicts inside the Alliance, so many moments in which it could have fallen apart that proves the strength and the bonds between the two Atlantic partners. That is why Portugal and Britain couldn't provide better evidence for the motto once popularised throughout Europe by famous Marshall Plan posters, though with a little Anglo-Portuguese adaptation: "Whatever the weather, we must sail together."

Rafael Borges was a 12th year student at Raul Proença school in Caldas da Rainha when he wrote this article, directly in English. He is now in his first year reading Law at the Universidade Nova in Lisbon. He is a keen historian well versed not only in Portuguese history but in European history too. He lives with his family in Caldas da Rainha.