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THE BRITISH OCCUPATION OF GOA (1799 - 1815)

The Peninsular War had curious and not well known side effects on overseas Portugal. One was the British take-over of Madeira between 1807-1808. Here there was an effective interruption of Portuguese sovereignty, for all official acts were made in the name of King George III. Beresford¹ was the local commander and governor. It was his first experience in Portugal and where he learned Portuguese.

There was also a problem in Macau. British troops tried to land in 1802, alleging a French danger, but the Governor José Manuel Pinto refused, telling the ship captain "you can help the port but I can defend inside because I have sufficient men". There was a long correspondence with Admiral Drury, who commanded the Navy in China, and much pressure was endured over the next few years. Troops finally landed without the Governor's specific permission only in October 1808, though the local government had agreed in September. The British troops left in 1811.

Another case was Goa. By the end of the XVIII century the once powerful Portuguese empire of the East had fallen on hard times. Stagnation and decline had set in and the small Portuguese coastal settlements were prey to the continuous wars going on in the sub-continent. Great Britain and France fought over their imperial rivalry in India and both sides sought alliances with local princes.

Pombal's rule had introduced a number of radical measures in Goa. He attacked racial prejudice and told the Portuguese Viceroy "to dispose matters in such a way that the ownership of land, the sacred ministry of

¹ William Carr Beresford (1768-1854). General in the British Army commanded the Portuguese Army during the Peninsular War. He received (1811) the title of Marquês de Campo Maior.

parishes, the exercise of public affairs and even military posts, should be conferred mostly on natives of the soil or on their sons and grandsons not taking into consideration whether they be white or black". But economic decline prevented reforms from taking root. Earlier in the century the Province of the North had been lost to the Marathas and the British were accused of English gunners taking service with the enemy, though in fact they were deserters. During this period British rule in India was through the East India Company and tension with the Portuguese was constant. Portuguese priests had been expelled from Bombay (part of the dowry of Catherine of Braganza) in 1720 and been replaced by more amenable Italians. The Viceroy, Marquis of Alorna², in 1750, complained of the arrogance of certain English naval officers and he accused them of forcibly incorporating São Tomé de Meliapor, an old Portuguese settlement, in the growing Madras.

Indeed by the end of the XVIII century the "State of India" was reduced to Goa, Damão and Diu which remained Portuguese until India's invasion in 1961.

Yet if Portugal's effective power was greatly reduced, its influence in cultural terms was still considerable. Clive, addressing the native troops before the battle of Plassey and confronted with many regional languages and dialects, chose the language they all understood - Portuguese.

As stated, British-French rivalry used many sporadic and local alliances with native princes to further their objectives.

Napoleon had landed in Egypt and conquered. Many thought that, like Alexander, India was his objective. On the west coast of that subcontinent Goa was by far the best natural harbour, and was coveted by both the British and the French. But in Europe Napoleon's star began to rise.

In the constant inter-cine wars in India a prince of Mysore Haidar Ali who hated the marathas (supported by the British) became involved in fighting the British and was eventually beaten. He continued a guerrilla warfare until his death in 1782. His son Tipu Sultan wished to avenge his father's memory and allied himself with the French. One of the plans was to conquer Goa together and thus obtain an important harbour for the French so as to better fight the British. Indeed various intelligence sources (mainly missionaries) suggested that such a plan had been submitted and approved by Versailles. The Portuguese Governor Francisco Cunha e Menezes³

² Pedro Miguel de Almeida Portugal (1688-1756), 1st Marquês de Alorna and 4th Conde de Assumar, Viceroy of India (1744-1750).

³ Governor and Captain General of India (1785-1788).

warned Lisbon on February 1st 1788 and later in the month brought together all his forces in Goa. One must remember that in those days India was "long in distance and heard very late" and a letter and its reply took typically about two years! Goa was five thousand leagues away from Lisbon.

Lisbon in 1789 replied to the Governor, stating that the news they had received from Paris seemed to confirm these intentions. Tipu sent emissaries to France but by the time they arrived France was in the midst of Revolution and little of substance was agreed upon. They only sent 150 men, mostly native troops, to Mysore and not much more was heard of these plans.

In Portugal fear of French intentions was also becoming a dominant political issue.

In India the future Duke of Wellington's elder brother, Richard Wellesley, Earl of Mornington, later Marquis of Wellesley, had arrived in 1798 as the new Governor General of Bengal and he soon learned of Tipu and the French intentions regarding Goa. In July 1798 he wrote to General Shore: "By the last news received from Europe it seems certain that the French will soon conquer Portugal and will make them sign a shameful peace treaty, striving in such case, for the French to obtain possession of Goa." Stuart answered promptly~ stating that it was urgent that Goa be defended by British troops and that it would not be too difficult to obtain authorization from the Portuguese Governor to install a small British garrison. At the time, however, no progress to this plan occurred. But in May 1799 Tipu was killed when the British took Seringapatam (where Sir Arthur Wellesley commanded a division) and among his papers proof was found of a secret alliance with the French Directory to fight the British and divide the Portuguese territories. Mornington therefore sent a special envoy Joshua Uthoff to Goa.

Not long before, the British Admiral Rayner had suggested directly to the Portuguese governor Veiga Cabral⁴ that it would be advantageous if English naval vessels were present in Goa, and without waiting for an answer appeared in Goa with the ships "Suffolk" and "Arrogant" (74 guns each). Veiga Cabral was greatly indignant and protested. After 12 days of trying to convince the Governor, Rayner was forced to leave. This greatly irritated Mornington.

⁴ Francisco António da Veiga Cabral da Camara Pimentel (1734-1810). He was put in charge of the government of India in 1793. In 1800 he was formally appointed Governor. He left India in 1807 and went to Rio de Janeiro where the Royal Family were living. He was made (1810) Visconde de Mirandela. He was a bachelor.

A story appeared in the English gazettes - the only ones to arrive and circulate in India - that a large French fleet had left Brest with troops on board and was on its way to India. Mornington then dispatched troops to Goa which arrived on September 6th 1799, and installed themselves in Cabo, Gaspar Dias and Santa Rosália.

Veiga Cabral writes on September 12th to Lisbon curiously justifying this action by the British based on the alarming news of the French fleet and stating that they would pay for all the expenses of defense. He would continue with his own jurisdiction and stated that he could use the British troops as he felt necessary, for defense purposes. It must be said that the Governor was receiving instructions from Lisbon stressing the importance of the alliance between England and Portugal and the danger posed by the French.

The famous French fleet from Brest in fact never existed!

The British troops which disembarked in Goa were commanded by Colonel Sir William Clarke Bt. and consisted of a European battalion of the 84th Regiment and a detachment from the 77th, an Artillery Regiment plus two battalions of native troops totaling about one thousand men. Clarke had been a comrade-in-arms of the Duke of York and knew how to flatter and keep the local Governor happy. He made sure his troops were well behaved and extended every courtesy and honor to Veiga Cabral. He was getting on in years and rather vain, so he much appreciated these attentions and the appearance of power.

In his report to Lisbon of January 1800 he states that the British troops had come "to the rescue". Portuguese troops at the time in Goa numbered 2300 men.

But Mornington was not content with this theoretical subordination to Portuguese sovereignty. In 1799 he was writing to Henry Dundas, President of the East India Company about trying to exchange Goa for Malaca or the Spice Islands. In 1800 Lord Greenville proposed to the Portuguese Minister in London a territorial or cash compensation for Diu, which was indignantly refused.

Sir Arthur Wellesley writes to Sir William in 1801 also expressing his worries about French intentions in Portugal and the consequences for Goa. He also stresses the importance of good supplies, should Clark have to stay there against the will of the local government!

But the war in Europe was quieting down and the preliminary peace talks started in October 1801, which culminated in the Peace of Amiens in March 1802. Before this date during 1801, Veiga Cabral was writing to the Marquis of Wellesley suggesting that he had news from Europe that the

French threat had receded and therefore the British troops could leave. Wellesley considered such news incorrect and on his own initiative, and with no prior consultation, disembarked more troops in Goa. Five ships arrived on the last day of 1801 with the 77th Regiment, a battalion of native grenadiers which had been in Seringapatam, two battalions of native troops and 100 European men who were part of the Bengal Artillery.

Veiga Cabral writes to Lisbon in May 1802 stating he could do nothing about it as he could hardly go to war against his "only, powerful and experienced allies". He was then forced to agree to British troops entering Damão and Diu. Before that the Marquis of Wellesley had written to him stating that "Portuguese dominions in India should immediately be placed under the authority of British power ...". He also demanded the "pacific" handing over of the civil government to Sir William Clark.

Veiga Cabral however resisted and Clark then proposed that the British and Portuguese troops should merge under the same command and that he be promoted to a Major General in the Portuguese army. With considerable reluctance the Governor agreed.

All this was done without instructions from either Government. When, after enormous delays, the Portuguese Government reacted, we find instructions being sent (1804) to the Minister in Paris and London explaining that British troops had entered Goa without permission and requesting the Minister in London to make strong recommendations to the British Government for the troops to be evacuated. Indeed after the Peace of Amiens in 1802 the French threat had surely disappeared. Preliminary orders to the effect were sent and the new British envoy in Goa, Dillon, informed the Governor. Veiga Cabral informed Lisbon in February 1803.

But with the collapse of peace more troops were sent (September 1803) under the command of Colonel Spray. The Marquis of Wellesley writes to Lord Hobart in November 1803 stating "I have the honour of informing Your Excellency that a British garrison has occupied the important fort of Goa with complete agreement of the local Portuguese government".

This doesn't seem to be so. General Sir Arthur Wellesley wrote in November 1804 to Sir William Clark saying "The Governor of Goa is not disposed to allow that they should continue to stay there." He goes on to say that he must explain the situation to the Governor and that "... after the conclusion of the war with France, the British will give back these dominions intact."

Veiga Cabral was old and frail but continued to survive and the ambiguous position continued. Lisbon instructed the Governor not to seek confrontations with the British!

He was replaced in May 1807 by the Conde of Sarzedas⁵ who arrived with the title of Viceroy. The local British commander was now Lieut. Colonel Alexander Adams and the local envoy was Courtland Schuyler. He excused himself to Lisbon (February 1808) with the existing "modus vivendi" with his predecessor. But he goes on to say that the British pay for everything punctually and for "the best price".

The Governor General of Bengal was now Sir George Barlow and it must be remembered that in 1807 the Portuguese Royal Family had left for Brazil and although there was a Regency Council in Lisbon, British influence in Portugal was paramount.

The new Governor-General of India was Lord Minto who wrote to the Viceroy in April 1808 giving him the information of the Royal Family's departure to Brasil and also about Madeira being placed under the protection of the British government!

There was an incident with a Portuguese merchant ship "Robusto" which was not allowed to disembark its cargo at Goa by a Captain John Ferrier of the Royal Navy ship "Albion". The Viceroy protested to Sir Edward Pelew who excused himself with the ambiguity of news arriving from Europe regarding the conduct of the Portuguese government.

In May 1808 the envoy Schuyler signed a Convention ("Articles of Convention for greater security of the Portuguese Dominions in Asia against the French") with the Viceroy with a number of articles which in effect gave the British complete military control of the Portuguese territories in India. One article states that if any public servant expresses "... hostility towards the British nation, its government or its interests ..." would be dismissed from the Portuguese service "... the moment the British resident so requires"!

Article 10 was not accepted whereby the civil government would also be handed over to the British if such a situation "... becomes indispensable in the opinion of the British Government ..." in such a way as "... the same British Government assumes possession of these dominions in the name of His Majesty." Apparently negotiations took some time but all the Viceroy achieved was the elimination of the said Article 10.

The Viceroy justified himself to Lisbon in May 1809 in a letter to the Minister for the Navy and Overseas, the Visconde of Anadia⁶. In it he says

⁵ D. Bernardo José Maria da Silveira e Lorena, 5th Conde de Sarzedas (1756-1818). Viceroy of India (1807-1816). He abolished the Inquisition in Goa. Died in Rio de Janeiro.

⁶ João Rodrigues de Sá e Melo, 1st Visconde and Conde de Anadia.

he had received a letter from the Portuguese Minister in London, D. Domingos de Sousa Coutinho⁷ who was concerned that "... the same had occurred here as in Madeira ..."! he of course stressed that, at least formally, and the civil government remained Portuguese.

In all the correspondence between Lord Minto and the Viceroy the terms are very correct and polite and many mentions are made to "the old friendship and alliance". In written orders to the troops, distributed widely, by Lieut. Colonel Adams in June 1808, he stresses distinctly that the dominions belong to Portugal.

Yet Lisbon was not happy. There is an "Avizo Régio" of March 1808 stating that instructions were going to be sent to London requesting the evacuation of British troops and indeed on 10th May of the same year D. Domingos de Sousa Coutinho is requested to make "all efforts to persuade the British Government that, having all reasons ceased to conserve in Goa the troops which were sent there by the British East India Company when a French invasion was feared; and it cannot be doubted that the Portuguese forces which remain in Goa and Diu are more than sufficient for the defense of those territories, His Royal Highness⁸ has all reasons to expect that His Britanic Majesty should order the British company to evacuate, forthwith, all British troops which presently are garrisoned in Goa, Damão and Diu and if the British Government thinks that until there is a general peace it is necessary to keep the troops it sent to these Portuguese dominions at least they should make a solemn declaration that at such time all these troops will be evacuated, in such manner that this point be established beyond any doubt ...". On the same day the British Minister in Lisbon, Lord Strangford received a note along the same lines.

When news of the Convention of May 25th 1808 reached Lisbon a note was delivered on October 1809 (over a year later!) to Strangford stating that his news had surprised His Royal Highness and expressing his displeasure. Also the Minister in London was instructed to express the Portuguese Government's surprise and again to demand the evacuations requesting compensation for damage caused to Portuguese forts in India. This request was repeated in November 1811.

Meanwhile a problem had arisen in Goa regarding custom duties. Veiga Cabral had conceded that the British troops would pay no import duties.

⁷ 1st Conde and Marquês do Funchal (1760-1833). Diplomat was Minister in London for many years where he died.

⁸ Portugal was under a Regency. The future D. João VI was Regent due to his mother's (D. Maria I) madness.

This exemption had not been approved by Lisbon which by "Avizo Régio" of May 2nd 1811 determined that the British should pay for materials imported. The situation had arisen because the troops had built new houses in Cabo and had imported the materials without paying the import dues. The Viceroy consulted the Junta da Fazenda Real and told the British envoy he could not allow such exemptions except for ammunition and armament. He also complained that in the bazaar next to the barracks cloth of all qualities was sold without there being any indication that duties had been paid for them. The Envoy seems to have accepted this decision.

A short time before (December 1810) the British had landed with little opposition in the "Isle of France" (Mauritius) in the Indian Ocean and subsequently they occupied the island of Bourbon. A separate expedition had conquered, after a stiff fight, the island of Java (the Dutch were French allies). French influence in Asia was greatly weakened. In these expeditions several units from Goa were used.

All this was communicated to Lisbon by the Viceroy in April 1811.

The situation in Europe and in particular Portugal was greatly improving due to Wellington's efforts. The Conde de Sarzedas writes to Lisbon that the French threat had for all purposes disappeared. Indeed the British evacuated troops from Mormugão and Aguada. In Damão and Diu illness took their toll and practically no British presence remained. There were still troops however in Goa and Cabo. The Viceroy in December 1812 complains to Lisbon on the ruinous state in which the troops left the forts.



British Cemetery in Goa with tombs dating from British occupation

Finally Lord Minto on December 4th 1812 writes to the Viceroy saying that the time had arrived whereby the presence of a British garrison in Goa was no longer justified. Sarzedas tells Lisbon on January 24th by the ship "Ulysses". The final evacuation took place on April 9th 1813 with some ceremony. The Viceroy comments "This day experienced many tears specially from the ladies belonging to the more distinguished Goa families" although a few troops remained until the news of Waterloo arrived.

The British presence had lasted 16 years. The Conde de Sarzedas attributed the evacuation to a miracle of the glorious St. Francis Xavier! A small British cemetery remains.

Later in the century in 1839 there was a British attempt to buy Goa, Damão and Diu for £ 500,000, which was turned down.

When India invaded Goa, Damão and Diu in 1961 Portugal invoked the Alliance for Britain to authorize airport facilities in Aden for troop reinforcements to reach Goa. It was the only occasion this century that Portugal invoked the Alliance. Permission was refused.