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THE PENINSULAR WAR- A PORTUGUESE PERSPECTIVE

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Many historical sources claim that the Portuguese Royal Family 'fled' to Brazil in advance of the French invasion of Portugal under General Junot in November 1807. What is perhaps less well known is that on three previous occasions in the nation's history, the Portuguese Court had in fact laid plans to move to Brazil. The first occasion was in 1580 when the possibility of a transfer of the capital was discussed at the time of the Cardinal King. The second occasion was in 1640 following the end of the Spanish Occupation of Portugal and finally King José I and the Marquis of Pombal also considered this possibility in 1762 during the Seven Years War. Thus the idea was not new for Portugal, a small nation but one with the third largest colonial empire after Great Britain and Spain.

In the case of the Peninsular War it must be recognised that Portugal was in a serious and seemingly insurmountable situation following its decision to send an expeditionary force to assist Spain in 1793 under the 1778 Treaty of Pardo to fight the revolutionary French armies on the Spanish-French border. Spain and Portugal were eventually beaten during the Roussillon Campaign (1793-95). Tragically however, Portugal was betrayed by its 'ally' who signed a peace treaty with France in Basle in 1795 without previously consulting Portugal. Portugal learnt its lesson from this unfortunate expedition and began to lay plans to reorganise its army.

Portugal, although neutral, assisted its ancient ally during this period, firstly by sending ships of its navy to form part of the Channel Squadron that patrolled the sea between France and Britain. Secondly, the Portuguese navy was also present in the

Mediterranean to support Nelson from 1798-1800. It sent a squadron under the Marquis of Niza who helped Nelson in the blockade of Malta after the defeat of the French at Aboukir Bay. Following Napoleon's anti-British campaign in Egypt and his subsequent defeat, France applied pressure on Portugal to abandon its ancient ally. Finally it forced Spain to invade Portugal in 1801 following Portugal's refusal to close off its ports to British shipping. Although Portugal defeated the invading Spanish forces in the north and south of the country, Spain did capture the territory of Olivença in the province of the Alentejo, an area that remains Spanish to this day.

France continued to apply pressure on Portugal to abandon its ancient ally. Marshal Lannes was appointed ambassador to Lisbon in 1803 and Junot succeeded him in 1805. Both tried to convince D. João, the Prince Regent, during their respective terms of office. During this period the future King D. João VI played a masterly game of delaying tactics by promising everything but delivering nothing. In reality he was walking a political tightrope. On the one hand had he obeyed France, Britain would have occupied Portugal's colonies and especially Brazil, a lucrative and important market. Britain would also have captured or destroyed Portugal's naval fleet, as it had done previously with the Dutch and Danish fleets. The Neapolitan fleet was also captured and/or destroyed by the Marquis of Niza's squadron at Nelson's orders to prevent it falling into French hands. If, on the other hand, it continued to side with Britain, Portugal risked invasion by France and the subsequent loss of its independence. But this was not the sole problem facing the Prince Regent. Internally some of the influential members of the Portuguese urban aristocracy tended to side with Napoleon and the new ideas coming from France. Thus D. João gained the reputation for being unable to take decision but, in reality, he had little alternative.

In the meantime preparations had begun for the transfer of the Court to Rio de Janeiro. There were three main reasons for the move:

- 1) To prevent the capture of the Portuguese Royal Family. By transferring Portuguese sovereignty to the New World thus avoiding the forced abdication of the monarch, the fate that was to befall the Spanish king.
- 2) To prevent the capture of the Portuguese fleet, the fifth largest in Europe. Following Trafalgar this would have been an important asset for Napoleon.
- 3) To close off Portuguese ports to British shipping and thus complete Napoleon Continental Blockade.

The preparations for the transfer had begun many months before. The final fleet of over fifty ships transported over 15,000 people and left Lisbon on 29th November 1807. The fleet included the whole machinery of state so that Portugal could function in the New World. Junot arrived a day too late to achieve Napoleon's strategy but he was however able to send some 8,000 officers and men as the Portuguese Legion to France to fight in Napoleon's Armies. He also disbanded the Portuguese army and captured all of Portugal's weapons leaving the nation virtually defenceless.

It is worthwhile remembering that without the Portuguese Army (Wellington's "fighting cocks" as he called them) to help defeat the French at Bussaco and at the remaining battles of the Peninsular War, and without the tough and hard-working Portuguese militia and rural workers to build the Lines of Torres Vedras in an incredibly short period of time, it is quite possible that Waterloo might never have taken place. However despite the fact that Portugal suffered more civilian and military casualties than any other European nation (up to 10% of her population),

she did not come out of the war very well. At the Congress of Vienna she was unable to recover Olivença and many of her claims were ignored although she was paid some reparations. Although Britain fed, clothed and armed part of the Portuguese Army (30,000) which was incorporated into the British Army, the price Portugal paid was a heavy one. It meant she had to open the lucrative Brazilian market to outsiders and thus Portuguese merchants lost business and profits.

It should be pointed out also that the army officers who had accompanied the court to Brazil, those who had followed Napoleon as well as those who had gone into exile, belonged to the aristocracy. It was therefore from the urban bourgeoisie and minor aristocracy that the new officer class was recruited. Following the war these men integrated the new political and social elite of the country alongside men of law and merchants. It was they who led the movement to clear the country of the now unpopular Regency Council and towards a new and more open society. The military revolt of 1820 paved the way to a Constitution and a liberal Cortes.

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