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USA – Portugal Relations: Foreign Policy and Ideology

Relações EUA – Portugal: Política Externa e Ideologia

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Abstract

Foreign policy strategies are often the product of a delicate balance between ideology and pragmatism. Through the analysis of three moments of critical juncture — the clash between the Kennedy Administration and the Estado Novo Regime, the eventful early years of the Portuguese democratic transition and the 2003 Lajes Summit which preceded the invasion of Iraq — this paper explores the balance between idealism and pragmatism which characterizes contemporary US – Portugal relations. The analysis of these three moments suggests that while both nations have resorted to ideological, sometimes messianic, claims (as evidenced by the idea of American exceptionalism of Portugal's "universal vocation") as narratives of legitimation, the pragmatic approach has eventually prevailed.

Keywords: Portugal, US, foreign policy, ideology, pragmatism.

Resumo

As estratégias de política externa resultam de um equilíbrio, nem sempre fácil de encontrar, entre ideologia e pragmatismo. Através da análise de três momentos-chave nas relações entre os Estados Unidos e Portugal — o embate entre a Administração Kennedy e o regime do Estado Novo, o atribulado arranque do processo de democratização português e a Cimeira das Lages, que antecedeu a invasão do Iraque — este artigo explora o equilíbrio entre idealismo e pragmatismo que tem caracterizado a relação entre os EUA e Portugal. A análise destes três momentos sugere que embora os elementos ideológicos, e até messiânicos (como a ideia do excepcionalismo americano ou da "vocação universal" de Portugal) tenham desempenhado um papel importante, inclusive como narrativas de legitimação, as abordagens pragmáticas acabaram por prevalecer.

Palavras-Chave: Portugal, Estados Unidos, política externa, ideologia, pragmatismo.

Post-Cold War optimism gave rise to the hegemony of international liberalism, which was anchored in the paradigm of the end of history and paved the way for a period of hyper-globalization. However, recent events suggest that history, after all, did not end. The war in Ukraine and the discursive frameworks adopted by President Volodymyr Zelensky and Vladimir Putin seem to have confirmed that we entered a new period, characterized by uncertainty and power competition between multiple geopolitical blocks. And that geography and ideology still matter. As President Zelensky referred, this is a war between two different, and irreconcilable, world views, involved in a struggle that goes far beyond the military battlefield.

In fact, history suggests that foreign policy strategies are often the product of a difficult balance between ideology and pragmatism. This balance is reflected in USA – Portugal relations in three periods of critical juncture: when the Estado Novo regime coexisted with the Kennedy administration; during the eventful Portuguese democratic transition, and in the first decade of the twenty-first century, when a coalition created and led by the United States overthrew the regime of Saddam Hussein. USA – Portugal relations are particularly interesting because, throughout history, ideology and myths have played an important role in the legitimation of the American and the Portuguese foreign policies, as reflected in the ideas of American exceptionalism, or of a Portuguese "universal vocation". These three periods, however, suggest that, despite ideological divergences, foreign policy remained the art of the possible. In all cases, pragmatism has prevailed and geography, more than convictions, played a decisive role.

Foreign policy: Myths and ideology

Ideology, i.e., a particular set of ideas and beliefs often equipped with specific myths or narratives, is not an exclusive feature of authoritarian regimes: whether more concealed, or more implicit, it is also present in democratic settings, where it remains a crucial instrument for political mobilization and power justification. More specifically, political myths are present in the foundation of every nation. They act as guarantors of shared meanings, which may be produced and reproduced at several levels across time, thus contributing to shape the nation both in its discourses and practices (Bottici, 2007; Esch, 2010).

Myths are particularly salient in the foundation of America, as well as in its foreign policy. For its leading figures, the foundation of America represented the birth of a nation that was exceptional: a democratic republic, meant to be the promised land for all those who loved liberty and wanted to escape the persecution of an old, corrupt, and decayed order. But America, since its foundation, was also seen as a beacon of light, destined to play a unique and leading role in the world (Hunt, 1987: 20).

This idea of a predestined nation has been a decisive feature of the country's foreign police, in both its rhetorical and in practical dimensions, from the foundational moment until today. Its origins can be traced back to the famous sermon "A model of Christian Charity" delivered by John Winthrop when his fleet settled in Massachusetts in the summer of 1630, evoking the biblical idea of a "shining city upon a hill". It lived on in the disruptive pamphlet "Common Sense" (1776) in which Thomas Paine, the most revolutionary of the founding fathers, declared that America had the power to "begin the world all over again". Exceptionalism was also present in the claims of the Monroe doctrine; in John O'Sullivan's (1845) reference to a "manifest destiny" according to which Americans were to overspread the continent allotted to them by Providence itself; in Woodrow Wilson's idealism; in Ronald Reagan's denounce of an "evil empire" to be defeated by the United States so that freedom could flourish in the world; in George W. Blush's speeches after 9/11 and in his justification of preemptive war and regime change, and in Barack Obama's justification to intervene in Libya and in Syria.

To be sure, this has not been a constant, nor uniform or consensual process. Throughout times, the idea of America's exceptionalism has been expressed in different forms and put at the service of distinct political inclinations and strategies. Differences can be traced back to the opposition between Hamiltonian realism and its calls for greatness and Jefferson idealism and its calls for liberty, or the permanent tensions between isolationism and interventionism (Hunt, 1987: 29–31). And it is important to note that among those who saw America as the promised land, there were fears regarding this idea of changing the world. In a letter addressed to John Taylor in 1814, John Adams warned against the risks of imperial temptations: "We may boast that we are the chosen people; we may even thank God that we are not like other men; but it will be but ... the delusion, the self-deceit of the Pharisee" (Song, 2015: 245). Whereas, across time and space, many voices would repeat Adam`s concerns (Tucker and Hendrickson, 1992; Hoffman and Bozo, 2004; Musgrave and Nexon, 2016), there were several critical moments in which this idea that the energy and vision of America were too great to be confined within fixed domestic bounds has prevailed (Hunt, 1987: 41).

In Portugal, Europe's oldest nation-state, myths also played a critical role, working as the building blocks of a common imaginary (Durand, 2008). Like in America, myths have also shaped the country's domestic and foreign policy and their legitimation frameworks throughout times, in a dynamical cycle of production and reproduction. It is important to note that myths are not entirely fiction: they are the product of real life and historical events, which cement a common identity connecting past, present and future (Vecchio, 2015).

And like in the case of America, in Portugal it is also possible to establish a line of continuity stretching from the foundational moment until the present. It dates back to the history of the brave Viriato, the chief of the Lusitanos who was only

defeated by treason (Guerra and Fabião, 1992). It lives on in the miracle of the Ourique battle narrated in the Crónica de 1419; the national epic by Luís de Camões in the Lusíadas; the prophetic verses of Bandarra (Suárez, 1992); the promise of a Fifth Empire in Padre António Vieira's History of the Future; Fernando Pessoa's Mensagem, or Gilberto Freyre's lusotropicalism. They all evoke myths and facts and contributed to cement the idea of a Portuguese exceptionalism and exemplarism, a grand narrative which is activated from times to times, either to justify expansionism, or to provide hope and meaning in times of desolation (Song, 2015; Zúquete, 2015; Vecchio, 2016).

Proudly but not so lonely: the clash between Kennedy and Salazar

As the winds of change blew across Europe and Africa, the Portuguese Estado Novo regime started a war to save its empire. It was a war which, like all wars, transcended the battlefield and involved other arms and theaters of operations. Legal instruments, diplomacy as well as old and new myths were all part of the regime's strategy to maintain a colonial empire in those times of accelerated change.

In the 1950s and 1960s the regime was confronted with important shifts in the international environment. The winds of change blowing across Europe and Africa forced London to replace the empire with the commonwealth, and France to implement its policy of "*partir pour mieux rester*". The United Nations put decolonization at the top of the agenda and in the United States, in 1961, John F. Kennedy was elected President. The new administration's commitment to decolonization was translated into a cautious support to liberation movements, including the establishment of direct contacts with African leaders, and a timid critique of colonialism. This new approach provoked a direct clash not only with minority rule regimes in South Africa and Rhodesia, but also with the Portuguese regime. However, Washington's commitment was compromised by the perception, amid the Cold War context and under the effects of the Berlin and Cuba crisis, that independence was not without risks, and that Africa could become a fertile land for communism, and a geopolitical asset to the Soviet Union (Hunt, 1987: 164; Muehlenbeck, 2012).

Fulfilling the promise that the US would no longer abstain from voting on colonial issues in the UN, nor trade votes for gains or prevent subjugated peoples from being heard, the United States voted in favor of UN resolutions urging Portugal to introduce the necessary reforms to comply with the anti-colonial declarations and condemning the politics of repression in Angola (Silva, 1995; Rodrigues, 2004; Oliveira, 2017). These decisions have further fragilized bilateral relations, already shaken by the hijack of the Santa Maria and the Botelho Moniz's attempted coup (Costa-Pinto, 2001).

Aware of its fragilities in the new international context, the Salazar regime had prepared itself for the clash. One decade before, in 1951, a Constitutional

amendment was introduced establishing that Portugal had no colonies, but overseas provinces: a single nation, ranging from Minho to Timor. Since provinces are not colonies and thus not expected to claim self-determination, calls for decolonization represented an attack to Portuguese sovereignty. This semantical change, which became crucial for Portugal's attempts to legitimize late colonialism (Costa-Pinto, 2001), was combined with lusotropicalism. According to this thesis developed by the Brazilian writer Gilberto Freye (1940), the Portuguese way of being in the world was exceptional. The Portuguese people, with its unique identity, was responsible for creating the first modern civilization in the tropics. This idea that the Portuguese have a special vocation for the encounter with the other, determined not by the will to exploit but rather by a natural empathy, contributed to legitimize Portuguese colonialism, portrayed as "benign". In the official rhetoric of the regime, the claims of lusotropicalism were combined with other arguments such as the explicit association, by Salazar, between independent movements and communism. Addressing the country in august 1963, and certainly hoping that his words would be heard beyond borders, Salazar made clear that the concept of nation, in the Portuguese case, was inseparable from the idea of a "civilizing mission". This was, according to the President of the Council of Ministers, "our way of being in the world" (Salazar, 1963).

But while the claims of Freyre's lusotropicalism presented in the official rhetoric of the late period of the Estado Novo were (and remain) accepted by large sectors of the population (Freixo, 2015; Zúquete, 2015), it was Portugal's advantageous geographic position in the context of the Cold War that ultimately protected the regime from American pressures for decolonization (Pinto, 2001; Oliveira, 2017). Salazar, who was not an enthusiastic of the emergence of the United States as the new maritime superpower, had accepted with reluctance the entry of Portugal in the North Atlantic Allegiance in 1949 (Teixeira, 2004). In a circular letter sent to the Portuguese embassies and delegations in 1953, the president of the council of ministers stated that, for the Portuguese people, the idea of a European federation was repealing, and that the maritime expansion was the vocation and most salient trait of the nation which, in Europe, had no interests other than peace, freedom and the Christian civilization (MNE, 1953).

It was also reluctantly that the Kennedy administration changed its discourse on decolonization and its approach to the Portuguese exception. Within the state department, the commitment of the "Africanists" to the self-determination of African peoples was defeated by the concerns of the "Europeanists", who claimed that NATO was the epicenter of America's foreign policy, and that Washington could not afford to lose the Lajes airbase. Salazar had been able to pass on the message that it would be "manifestly impossible for the US to be an ally of Portugal in Europe, and an enemy of Portugal in Africa" (Rodrigues, 2001). In Washington, geographical imperatives prevailed and for Lisbon, the unique and strategic position of the Lajes

airbase worked as a "protective shield", preventing the country from being *de facto* isolated in the international scene (Pinto, 2001; Oliveira, 2014; Rodrigues, 2015). While the Estado Novo regime would not last longer, the outcome of this clash with the Kennedy administration allowed Salazar to reinforce the official discourse on colonialism, including the myth of a pluricontinental nation, stretching from Minho to Timor, while presenting Portugal as a nation that would proudly stand, even if alone, in defense of its integrity.

The transition seen from abroad

Whereas myths are important building blocks of national identities, foreign policy options are often determined by constraints that are beyond the control of the states. International circumstances and external actors played a decisive role in the Portuguese transitional process (Costa-Pinto, 2001; Rato, 2008; Gomes and Moreira de Sá, 2011).

While European actors were crucial in the outcome of the transitional process, Washington also played a leading role, if more discrete, role in this history and the United States were a critical source of external influence (Gomes and Moreira de Sá, 2011). The American efforts, including diplomatic diligences, threats of aid suspension and pressure through NATO, reflected the fears regarding a possible (and irreversible) radicalization of the regime in Portugal after Spínola's fiasco in September 28, in an international context marked by the failure of the détente efforts and instability in Southern Europe. While improbable in hindsight, for the external actors following and involved in the Portuguese transition, all the options were considered possible during the eventful 1974–76 period.

And like in the 60s, Portugal was a source of divergence among those responsible for drafting the American foreign policy and strategy. For then secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Portugal — which was described as "an old friend and ally" — seemed a lost case. The secretary of state considered the idea of isolating the country in order to avoid contagion effects, and so that it would become a cautionary tale for other Southern European countries going through transitional processes. In a conversation with Mário Soares, Kissinger told him he was a Kerensky, destined to be defeated by those on the radical left (Szulc, 1975:3). This more drastic and pessimistic approach, however, was contested by Frank Carlucci, who became the American ambassador in Lisbon in 1975 and developed a close relationship with Soares (Gomes and Moreira de Sá, 2011). Carlucci believed that Portugal, being a country with a strong catholic tradition, lacked the features required for radicalization and that the desirable outcome could be reached through diplomacy and incentives, without the need to resort to radical or hostile measures.

Carlucci was eventually right. Events in the country signaled, in Washington, that it was possible to defeat communism without direct intervention or drastic

measures (Szulc, 1975). Of course, Moscow's lack of enthusiasm regarding Portugal was determinant for this outcome as it confronted the Communist Party with a weak structure of opportunities on the international scene. After the revolutionary fracture of 1874–76, Portugal committed unequivocally to a Western style model of liberal democracy, maintained its Atlanticist orientation and adapted its foreign policy to the imperatives of European integration (Teixeira, 2004).

It is important to note, however, that despite the changes in Portuguese foreign policy enacted by the transition, the myths used to legitimize colonialism during the Estado Novo lived on in the Portuguese imaginary. The idea imbedded in Freyre's lusotropicalism of the Portuguese as a "mediator" between Europe and the tropics and the quasi-generalized consensus of a unique Portuguese vocation and "way of being in the world" remained important features of the Portuguese foreign policy and discourse, especially in times of crisis and disenchantment (Freixo, 2015; Zúquete, 2015). The urge to look beyond Europe and into the "Lusophony", as well as the country's vocation as a "mediator" would return to the Portuguese strategic concept and foreign policy agenda in the twenty-first century.

Choosing between "good" and "evil"

In 2003, the American and Portuguese foreign policies converged once more. Two years before, the 9/11 attacks had triggered seismic changes in the American National Security Policy, igniting a strong and enthusiastic revival of the idea of American exceptionalism. Neo-conservatives, who held key posts within the Bush administration, played a key role in this revival through a set of ideas and beliefs which were opposed to realist approaches, combining the universalism of liberal principles, with Wilsonian normativism, and the confidence that America was the only country that truly embodied those principles, while having the power to disseminate them throughout the world (Acharya, 2006; Cooper, 2010). Power, in this case, was understood in its soft and, specially, in its hard dimension. Ultimately, America had the power to disseminate freedom in the world imposing it, if necessary, by force.

The Bush doctrine was the product of this neo-conservative approach to foreign policy. It favored a manicheist view of the world where America — like in the discourse of the founding fathers — represented a beacon of hope for those still living in darkness, and it contained an implicit idea that what was benefic for the United States was benefic for the world at large. Exceptionalism, within this doctrine, legitimized unilateralism, preemptive war, and regime change, while recovering the Jeffersonian idea that America could remake the world (Rathbun, 2008). However, though neoconservatism disdained multilateral approaches, absolute unilateralism was not possible, and the Bush administration tried to find legitimacy in the so-called "coalition of the willing". These traits are all evident in the rhetoric of the Bush administration. The harm done to America in 9/11

unleashed, according to President Bush, a "war between fear and freedom", one in which America had found "its mission and moment". And for the fulfillment of this mission, Washington was rallying the world, a world divided between good and evil, friends and foes, and where neutrality did not seem an option:

> "Great harm has been done to us. We have suffered great loss. And in our grief and anger we have found our mission and our moment. Freedom and fear are at war. The advance of human freedom -- the great achievement of our time, and the great hope of every time -- now depends on us. Our nation -- this generation -- will lift a dark threat of violence from our people and our future. We will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage. We will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail." (President George W. Bush, 2001).

However, by 2003, support for Washington's freedom crusade — which now included an intervention in Iraq — was becoming feebler. In February, one month before the launch of operation Iraqi freedom, millions across the world took to the streets to protest against the imminent war (della Porta et al., 2003). In Portugal, after decades of a generalized consensus on matters of foreign policy, the intervention in Iraq opened a cleavage between those who supported an intervention without a UN mandate (thus accepting the principles of preventive war and regime change), and those who opposed it. This cleavage reproduced the European tensions between the Franco-German axis and those who supported the American position. The later made their position public in the "letter of the eight", a manifesto claiming that Europe and America should "stand together", signed by the prime ministers of the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, and Portugal.

In Portugal tensions reached their climax ahead of the Lages Summit, hosted by the Portuguese prime minister José Manuel Durão Barroso, who received George W. Bush, José Maria Aznar, and Tony Blair four days before the invasion of Iraq (Cabrita, 2019). It was from the Lajes airbase that the three leaders issued an ultimatum to Saddam Hussein, urging him to disarm the country in 24 hours. The government which held a parliamentarian majority, faced four motions of censure authored by the Socialist Party, the Bloco de Esquerda and the Portuguese Communist Party. Years later, Durão Barroso would say that the government's decisions in that period were based on information that ultimately was not confirmed. However, considering the lines of continuity in Portugal's foreign policy and the positions adopted by London and Madrid, it is difficult to imagine an alternative approach to the appeals of the Bush administration (Lima, 2013). As the prime minister stated in the parliament in January 31, in a direct reference to the United States, the United Kingdom and Spain, Portugal — while avoiding a direct involvement in the upcoming intervention — needed to safeguard its most important, older, and closer allies (Lima, 2013: 52).

Besides the constraints imposed by external circumstances, this episode revealed, once more, that geography is the main cement of the United States — Portugal allegiance. By hosting the Lages summit and allowing the United States to use the airbase under the bilateral agreement, Portugal implicitly accepted this "coalition of the willing".

Conclusion

During the Estado Novo regime, and whereas the Kennedy administration was, in principle and in practice, committed to decolonization, the Lajes airbase in Azores provided the Salazar regime with a strong leverage on bilateral relations. In the context of the Cold War, the strategic imperatives of Atlanticists prevailed over the principles of the Africanists and the Kennedy Administration was forced to adopt a tolerant approach towards the Portuguese colonial empire.

Again, during the eventful transitional period in Portugal (1974–1976), there were ideological divergences between key political actors in Portugal and the USA. This time what concerned Washington was not colonization or imperialism, but the hypothesis of a radical shift to the left. Henry Kissinger, who was particularly pessimistic, called for the isolation of Portugal. However, no drastic measures were adopted, and, in the end, the liberal democratic solution prevailed in Portugal.

Finally, in 2003, the Portuguese Prime-Minister José Manuel Durão Barroso hosted the Lajes summit, four days before the invasion of Iraq by a US-led coalition. In Portugal, as in other latitudes, the intervention was far from consensual and gave rise to a deep political cleavage, with the centre-right government facing four motions of censure in the parliament. Despite the criticism, however, the Portuguese government supported the intervention, citing the Atlantic allegiance.

USA-Portuguese relations during these periods provide us interesting cases of a diplomacy of accommodation, where pragmatism eventually prevailed over ideological principles.

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