

## Six Centuries of Iberian Rivalry; Portugal in the Shadow of Spain

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### Portugal as the "Little Brother"

What accounts for the individuality of Portugal and its success at maintaining an independent state? Many historians and geographers have sought explanations in the rugged terrain and scarce population density along the frontier but that begs the question. Were these the causes of this success? Portugal's more westerly maritime exposure to the Atlantic and the prevalence of Celtic and Germanic influences from the period following the fall of the Roman Empire are often cited as conducive to the country's long policy of friendship and protection in alliances with Great Britain as a counterweight to Madrid's expansionist policies.

### Birot and Martins

Two scholars who have dealt with this question at length find both cultural and geographic factors at work. Pierre Birot put it this way: *"Thus, the typical characteristics that so gracefully distinguish the Portuguese soul from its peninsular neighbors, were able to ripen in the shelter of frontiers which are the oldest in Europe On one side, a proud and exalted people, the Spaniards, ready for all kinds of sacrifice and fort all the violent acts that inspire them to be concerned with their dignity; on the other hand, amore melancholy and indecisive people (the Portuguese), more sensitive to the charm of women and children, possessing a real humanity in which one can recognize one of the most precious treasures of the patrimony of our old Europe."*<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps Birot was listening to a stirring performance of Flamenco music followed by a sad Fado while writing this! Oliveira Martins, long considered the 'Dean of Portuguese historians' wrote in a similar vein...*"There is in the Portuguese genius something of the vague and fugitive that contrasts with the Castilian categorical affirmative; there is in the Lusitanian heroism, a nobility that differs from the fury of our neighbors; there is in our writing and out thought a profound or sentimental ironic or meek note...Always tragic and ardent, Spanish history differs from the Portuguese which is more authentically epic and the differences of history are translated into differences in character."*<sup>2</sup>

There is a shared common heritage embracing all the peoples of the Iberian peninsula, but it was the Portuguese who first achieved independence and national unity and then established a far flung colonial empire only to lose out later, in large part to Spain, resulting in a prolonged feeling towards its neighbor as an upstart and arrogant Big Brother. It was the great successes of Portugal's explorers, seamen, and mapmakers that made such heroic achievements in the Age of Discovery possible and cemented the essential feelings of national distinctiveness that made separation from Spain a matter of national pride. Portuguese is hardly more different from Spanish than the regional languages of Andalucía, Leon, Murcia, Asturias, and even Galicia (region to the North of Portugal where the vernacular known as Gallego more closely resembles Portuguese) yet these regions remained firmly within the national orbit of the central government's control from Madrid. For almost six centuries, the regimes in power in Portugal

and Spain have nervously eyed each other with a combination of suspicion, envy and a kind of sibling rivalry.

Some Portuguese love to reassert their great imperial past which outlasted Spain's even though the final remnants eventually disappeared after World War II (Mozambique, Angola, and the Cape Verde islands in Africa; Goa in India; Macao in China; and East Timor in the Pacific) and with the final disappearance of the 40 year old authoritarian regime of Antonio Salazar. They take pride that Portuguese, like Spanish is a world language spoken on four continents with more than 220,000,000 native speakers (compared to 400,000,000 for Spanish) that long ago surpassed French.

### **The Dispute over "Who Discovered America"**

Any visitor to Lisbon will undoubtedly visit the great monuments to the early Portuguese explorers, seaman, and cartographers, but may not have read the monument on the Avenida da Liberdade stating that João Vaz Corte is the real "Discoverer of America." Portuguese resentment of Spanish claims to Columbus' greatness has even encouraged considerable speculation by serious Portuguese scholars that Columbus was a Portuguese spy<sup>3</sup> who purposely misled the Spanish throne before his journey, well-aware that the route westward would not lead to a "short-cut" to the Indies but would rather drain Spanish resources.

Portugal had already established itself as the sole European commercial maritime power in the Orient and could only benefit from this tactic. None of Columbus' written work and notes are in Italian (strange if he were born in Genoa), and his Castilian Spanish is full of the type of mistakes a Portuguese speaker would make; also his wife was a Portuguese noblewoman.

Whenever either side feels aggrieved, they both refer to the diplomatic maneuvering which allowed the Portuguese to alter the original line of division granting them possessions in the "New World" from 100 leagues west of the Cape Verde islands (1493) to 270 leagues (1494 Treaty of Tordesillas negotiated with the Pope), thereby enabling them to take control of Brazil while ceding the Canary Islands to Spain. Spain maintains that this was due to deception, while Portugal claims it was due to its more advanced cartographic skills (largely because of Jewish astronomers and cartographers<sup>4</sup>). This famous division of "undiscovered lands" beyond Christian Europe between the two Iberian nations gave them an unprecedented prestigious status and contributed to the sense of rivalry between them.

According to Barreto, Columbus was a Portuguese nobleman of partly Jewish origin whose real name was Salvador Fernandes Zarco and whose mission was to convince the Spanish "Catholic monarchs" to sign the Treaty of Tordesillas, thereby leading the Spaniards on a wild goose chase.

### **Columbus - Both Portuguese and Jewish ! ?**

There is an extensive literature, much of it quite controversial, on the origin of Columbus, but the theory advanced by Mascarenhas Barreto makes the most sense from the standpoint of the Spanish-Portuguese rivalry. The Portuguese kings of the early fourteenth century had the strongest relations with the Jewish community, who enjoyed the most far-reaching royal privileges in Europe. Columbus established friendly relations with the nobility, wealthy men, and

high church and court officials immediately upon taking up permanent residence in Spain, which was unthinkable for an immigrant Genoese sailor. Strong Portuguese-Jewish links are hinted at by Columbus setting sail with conversos such as the interpreter Luis de Torres (with a knowledge of both Hebrew and Arabic) and the doctors on the Santa Maria, and several Portuguese seamen, including the pilot of the Niña, Sancho Roiz da Gama, who was related to the Portuguese Admiral Vasco da Gama.

Even more telling is the fact that upon returning from his first voyage to America, Columbus docked at Lisbon rather than Palos or any other Spanish port. It also explains why Columbus, in spite of his belief that he had reached the "Indies" and was very near Japan, did not make a serious effort to sail further westward until after the Portuguese had reached India (1497) and Brazil (1500).

Columbus' knowledge of astronomy and cartography were obtained from the tables (in Hebrew) developed by Portuguese Jewish astronomers and cartographers and his famous mystical signature can best be understood in terms of the Kabbalah. Much of his nautical knowledge and familiarity with the sea-lanes to Madeira, the Azores, and Cape Verde were obtained from converted Jews.

Of the many contradictory theories regarding the foreign Columbus, the most difficult and antagonistic for Spaniards to swallow is that he was both Portuguese and of Jewish origin! It may seem strange that "Columbus" (Zarco) could remain so loyal to the Portuguese given their equally disgraceful behavior toward the Jews. The explanation lies partly in Zarco's family connections to the Portuguese royal house, including the fear of his great-uncle "Prince Henry the Navigator," that his sons would be deprived of their inheritance in Spain, and his mystical devotion to the "end of days" vision of a new "Promised Land" where the Jews might find refuge and "salvation."

Barreto's book is controversial. It makes a very strong case for the Jewish and Portuguese identity of Columbus.<sup>5</sup> However, even if it is never substantiated by any "final proof," it helps to understand the intense rivalry between Spain and Portugal as a result of his discoveries, the willingness of the Portuguese to offer a refuge and then a moratorium from the Inquisition and the revision of the Treaty of Tordesillas in Portugal's favor, extending and guaranteeing Portuguese control over Brazil in exchange for Portuguese recognition of the Canary Islands as Spanish territory.

### **The Political and Economic Background of the Expulsion**

The background to the expulsion and the end of the Spanish Jewish community owes much to the determined policy of Ferdinand and Isabella to achieve Spanish unification and eventually absorb Portugal, dynastic rivalries, and the perceived threat of an established, wealthy, and competitive Jewish middle class that presented an obstacle to the power of the throne. A number of Spanish historians admit that from an objective point of view, the expulsion of the Jews was an erroneous decision that wounded Spain economically.

The absolutist plans of the new monarchy in a unified Spain linking Castile, Aragon, and Navarra envisioned a new hierarchy of patronage dispensed by court and church, with the nobility subject to absolute rule. The Jewish assets seized as a result of the expulsion in 1492 - including homes, lands, goods, and money - placed a major new instrument in the hands of the state to

carry out its policies. The monarchs had previously been restricted by a powerful noble class that enjoyed traditional rights and privileges (fueros). The Jews had often been useful pawns serving either the monarch or the nobility in administration, tax collection, commerce, translations, medical treatment, and other services. Their removal and the use of the Church as an ally of the throne to weed out "heretics" and "Judaizers" tipped the balance on the side of the monarchy. The nobility dared not oppose the expulsion for fear of being labeled as allies of the Jews, a tactic encouraged by the Church to appeal to the masses and weaken the power of both monarchy and nobility.

Spanish historians such as Américo Castro and Juan Eslava Galan have concluded that in the long run, the expulsion had disastrous consequences.<sup>6</sup> Had the Jewish financiers, merchants, artisans, and bureaucrats remained in Spain during the following centuries, the gold and silver arriving from America would have been wisely invested - creating new wealth - and directed towards industry. Instead, the new wealth was disastrously wasted on extravagance, attempts to maintain Spain as the ruling power in the Holy Roman Empire and dominate the Netherlands and parts of Italy, as well as launch the "Invincible Armada" to invade and regain England for the Catholic Church.

When Portugal's King Manuel I offered the Jews refuge in Portugal, it aroused enormous resentment in Spain. The "Catholic monarchs" feared that Portugal would make use of a valuable asset provided by Spain herself. The division of Spanish society between "old Christians" and "new Christians" (the conversos - converted Jews) had already been exploited in two civil wars in which dynastic rivals accused both sides of Jewish support. The transfer of this divisive element to Spain's traditional enemy, Portugal, was unthinkable. The Jewish presence in the Iberian peninsula was the largest in Europe. More than one-third of the entire European Jewish population of the late fifteenth century lived in Spain and Portugal. Estimates place the 1492 Jewish population at 160,000 in Castile, 75,000 in Aragon, and 15,000 in Navarre. In Portugal, approximately 80,000 Jews comprised at least 5 to 8 percent of the population, and there were much more if conversos are included.<sup>7</sup>

The intended marriage of Isabel, the daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella, to King Manuel I of Portugal was meant to safeguard Spain from the possibility of a hostile neighbor, and it was forced upon Portugal at the price of compelling her rulers to copy the expulsion order, a policy to which Portugal reluctantly agreed. By this time, however, the Portuguese had reached India (1497) and opened the route to the Far East. Three years later (1500), they discovered Brazil. Many Jews posing as conversos took advantage of the opportunity to leave Portugal and help establish colonies in the new territories, notably in Goa, the Cape Verde islands, and Brazil.

The new Portuguese king, Manuel, who came to the throne in 1494, was an opportunist like his father, King John II, and like the Pharaoh was reluctant to let the Jews leave the country. Portugal, with its scarce population of just one million, even prevented many Jews, especially children, from leaving, and instead used them as forced colonists in the Cape Verde Islands. Spanish suspicions lingered that this converso population was still being used to further Portuguese separatism and even extend Portuguese power in spite of the dynastic alliance and marriage that the Spanish Catholic monarchs had hoped would cement Portugal into becoming its permanent vassal state. Portugal had to take heed of the now more powerful, united, much larger Spain that had just conquered Granada.

Portuguese records show that the approximately 120,000 Jews legally crossing the frontier in 1492 before the expiration of the official eight months deadline had to pay a fee of eight cruzeiros each. King Manuel I changed the planned edict of expulsion to one of forced conversion in May 1497, and granted legal residence to 630 of the wealthiest and most talented Spanish-Jewish families. The exploitation of this wealthy elite was clearly an opportunistic move by the Portuguese king to take maximum advantage of the expulsion.

He also proclaimed a twenty-year moratorium on the activities of the Inquisition, thus facilitating the integration of conversos into Portuguese society. This confirmed the suspicion of many Spaniards that the Portuguese were taking unfair advantage and utilizing this valuable human resource for its own good. For the Portuguese conversos, it meant a respite of twenty years when their loyalty was not questioned. Unfortunately, this did not prevent further hostility and mob attacks against the "New Christians," most notably in Lisbon in 1506 following an epidemic. The mobs were convinced that the former Jews still had great wealth and influence and were being sheltered by the crown. The Portuguese king was angry and ordered the public execution of forty-five culprits who had incited the mob, which indeed lends suspicion that close ties had existed between the Portuguese crown and the Jewish community, and lends credence to the motivations of Columbus-Zarco acting as a double agent.

### **The Spanish Captivity**

Intense pressure forced the Portuguese to follow the Spanish example of expelling the Jews in 1497, a step that the Portuguese king reluctantly took depriving his country of some of its best merchants, diplomats, mathematicians, and mapmakers. Feelings of resentment were aggravated by the Spanish attempts to absorb Portugal that temporarily succeeded between 1580-1640, a period known as "the Spanish Captivity." It was a political mistake that only encouraged a strong and proud reaction that cemented the identity of the independent Portuguese nation as a separate state and culture. Imagine what problems Spain would have today if - on top of contentious separatist sentiment in the Basque country, Catalonia (including a movement to secede and declare independence), and Galicia - Portugal were added to the list!

There is also great resentment that Portugal was drained of resources and forced to provide the "Invincible Armada" with a substantial part of the ships, its nautical expertise, and thousands of trained seamen. Many of the ships and men ended up at the bottom of the sea as a result of the vain and foolhardy attempt in 1588 to invade England and restore it to Catholicism. The Portuguese often reflect sadly that the loss of their empire was the result of attempts to seize control of much of Morocco and North Africa from its base in Ceuta and that it faced a numerically superior enemy armed with equivalent weaponry, while the Spaniards obtained their great empire in Mexico, Peru, and the rest of South and Central America by fighting people who possessed a stone-age technology.

### **World War I and Spain's Sudden Ironic Pro-Zionist Policy**

Relations between the two countries have been marked by mutual suspicion, fear, scheming and a border dispute over the town of Olivença and its surroundings (subject of a future article) ever since Portugal reestablished its independence in 1640. For almost three centuries, the two countries coexisted in an uneasy atmosphere especially since Great Britain became Portugal's

strongest ally and Spain schemed to recover its loss of Gibraltar. The successful Portuguese revolution in October 1910 deposed the corrupt monarchy and established a republic, setting an example that remained a nightmare for the Spanish monarchy. The Portuguese broke with the past overnight, introducing a new flag and a national anthem, separating church and state, and adopting a new constitution as well as ending the monarchy - all anathema to the ruling circles in Spain that looked upon the chaos and unstable republican government in Portugal with contempt.

These fears made Spanish King Alfonso XIII play with the idea of intervening to overthrow the Portuguese republic. He considered Spanish aid to the Allies in World War I and even eventual entry into the war in return for British recognition of a Spanish "re-integration" (conquest) of Portugal into one realm again. This scheme encouraged Portugal to outbid Spain and enter the war. Spain remained neutral and devoted itself to playing the role of a neutral and a meeting ground for peace advocates. The Spanish king even succeeded in using his personal prestige to back several humanitarian projects in order to counteract Portugal's attempts to enter the war on the Allied side.

Foremost among these humanitarian projects was Spanish pressure on Germany to call upon its ally, Turkey, to rescind the order of expulsion against the Jews of Jaffa in Palestine. What could be more ironic?! Germany was determined to keep Spain neutral, fearing that it might follow Portugal in joining with the Allies and entering the war. These measures only increased Portuguese suspicions that Spain was capitalizing on its neutrality to gain increased recognition and prestige on the international stage. Although these diplomatic ploys have not received major attention by most historians (except in Portugal and Spain; see for example the two works in Portuguese by the Spanish historian Hipólito de la Torre Gómez<sup>8</sup>, the end result was the rescue of the largest Zionist settlement and new economic center of the "Yishuv" in Palestine, Tel Aviv. Had the Turkish expulsion order remained in force, it most likely would have made it much more difficult to obtain approval of the Balfour declaration.

Fear of losing their independence and their African colonies in the event of a German victory drove the Portuguese to enter the war on the Allied side in 1916. The British could simply promise the Portuguese that they could keep what they already had of their colonial empire in Africa, whereas they were hardly ready to bargain away their important naval base in Gibraltar in order to buy Spain's promise to join the Allied side.

The popular reaction to Portugal's disastrous losses in the trenches of France provoked a renewed debate over the country's individuality. For many, it was the outrageous and exaggerated sense of the "Spanish danger" that had impelled the leaders of the various factions that made up the Republican movement to actually "force Britain to accept Portugal as an ally." The Portuguese leaders were aware of schemes and secret treaties prior to 1914 that had been made by Germany and Britain to eventually dispose of Portugal's great African empire in the event of serious disorders affecting mainland Portugal or its African colonies. A British "Anti-Slavery Society" was also extremely critical of Portuguese colonial policies and an important public pressure group.

## **Portugal's Lament at the Versailles Peace Conference and Fear of the "Perigo Espanhol"**

Portugal had to face the ultimate humiliation that despite its decision to actively participate in the war and suffer grievous casualties on the Western Front in the trenches, neutral Spain won a seat on the Council of the League of Nations at the suggestion of President Wilson and the approval of Great Britain. The Spaniards had indeed played their cards well as a benevolent neutral, and Alfonso XIII had become a respected figure on the world stage. The Portuguese could only lodge an official protest that the "traditional, reactionary, Germanophile Spain" had "usurped" its rightful position at the League of Nations and that Portuguese blood had been shed in vain for the Allied cause.

The considerable political unrest in Portugal was exploited by conservative circles close to the Spanish throne that urged intervention on the side of a monarchist counter-revolution in the North of Portugal. The Spanish newspaper, *El Sol*, openly called for intervention by the League of Nations "to restore law and order in Portugal" following the assassination of Sidonio Pais, the Portuguese Prime Minister and the Portuguese press railed against the 'Spanish Danger' (*O Perigo Espanhol*). Pais was a conservative who had been Portugal's Ambassador to Germany (1912-1916), had opposed Portuguese participation in the war and attempted to combat the radical and anti-clerical tendencies of the new republic; he was regarded highly in Spain. His murder in December 1918 provoked a brief civil war but a pro-monarchist insurrection in Lisbon was quickly defeated and anti-Spanish sentiments prevailed in Portugal for much of the remainder of the 1920s.

The Spanish-Portuguese antagonism continued as late as the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), in spite of Portugal's aid to Franco and the ostensibly "friendly alliance" between the Fascist dictator and Portugal's authoritarian leader, Antonio de Oliveira Salazar. Part of the Portuguese high command under the leadership of Colonel Rodrigo Pereira Botelho plotted to seize Olivença, the disputed border town, and restore it to Portuguese sovereignty. However, the Fascist uprising quickly took control of the town and its leaders were careful to expel any local sympathizer who might have joined in a Portuguese attempt to assault the town.

Spain's military found it difficult to abandon the image of Portugal as an "eternal ally" of Great Britain and a possible invasion route by the British navy to attack Spain (as had occurred during the Napoleonic period of the Peninsular War). It comes as quite a surprise to those only familiar with English language sources that Portugal's leader Salazar, in spite of the "Iberian Pact of Non-Aggression" signed with General Franco (1940) and Portugal's open sympathy and aid to Spain during the Spanish Civil War, was still concerned with possible treachery by Franco and an Axis invasion of Portugal in connection with a possible attack on Gibraltar.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Rivalry Continues and Benefits Jewish Refugees!**

An important consideration of the different behavior of the two countries in World War II was the strategic importance of Portugal's Atlantic island possessions in the Azores. These "stepping-stones" on the way to North America were envisioned by the German high command as critical for the threat to strike the United States. New York City lies only 2,500 miles from the Azores. German control of the islands would have aided their U-boats and posed a real threat to the United States' eastern coast.

In 1940 (the 300th anniversary of Portugal's regaining its independence), a leading Spanish magazine wrote (threatened?) that: "it was God's will that the two countries be reunited again."

This anecdotal incident reflected much of Spanish anxiety over Portuguese "neutrality" and possible cooperation with the British. Franco maintained a strict neutrality, and even permitted thousands of Spanish volunteers to serve with the German Army in a special "Blue Division" to fight against communist Russia (5,000 were killed and missing in combat on the Eastern Front).

The Portuguese, however, knew where their most vital interests lay and by June 1943 the British formally invoked their ancient alliance with Portugal, requesting the use of airfields on the islands. Portugal agreed. Following the war, Portugal was an honored ally - a founding member of NATO in 1949 - whereas Spain under Franco remained a pariah state for another decade and was not even admitted to the United Nations until 1955.

It is unlikely that Portugal would have been so well regarded by the Allies had it not been for an amazing turn of events that worked to the advantage of Portuguese dictator Antonio Salazar. Along with the noble Swedish ambassador to Hungary, Raoul Wallenberg, another diplomat of much lesser rank, the Portuguese Consul in Bordeaux at the time of the German conquest of France in June 1940, Aristides de Sousa Mendes,<sup>10</sup> deserves to be regarded as a truly "Righteous Gentile." An austere career diplomat, he was struck by the awful human tragedy engulfing so many refugees, among whom were many Jews trapped in France, and he took it wholly upon himself to use his office to help all of them in contradiction to strict orders.

Sousa Mendes provided families with Portuguese documents to legally enter Portugal and transit Spain from France. He did this knowing that he would be severely punished, and doubted that his documents would be honored by Spanish officials. Portugal was obligated by the ancient Treaty of Windsor with Great Britain to provide assistance in wartime, but as in World War I, it was not applicable since neither country had been directly attacked by an aggressor. Moreover, Salazar had signed the much more demanding "Pacto Ibérico" treaty of friendship and non-aggression with Spain's Generalissimo Franco in March 1939.

The clever Portuguese dictator knew that he was most vulnerable to a German-supported Spanish attack if he were suspected of treachery or if Spain decided to realize its age-old ambition to annex Portugal. He therefore played for time and demonstrated pro-Axis sympathies by shipping supplies of much needed foodstuffs to Spain. He expressly forbade his diplomats to grant transit visas to "Jews expelled from countries of their nationality" and "stateless persons," as well as all "those who cannot safely return to the countries from whence they came." He reinforced this with another directive on 17 May 1940, that "Under NO circumstances" was any visa to be issued unless previously authorized from Lisbon on a case-by-case basis. This was a reserve safety clause for the dictator, who knew that he might find it advantageous to let a few prominent individuals escape to America to win goodwill there. However, he never expected a third-rate minor diplomat to open the floodgates, or that the Spanish authorities would accept this wave of refugee traffic.

Sousa Mendes personally intervened at the border when Spanish guards questioned the authenticity of the visas at the border towns of Bayonne, Hendaye, and Irun. Approximately 30,000 refugees, among them 10,000 Jews, directly owed their lives to the Portuguese consul who was recalled and declared insane, the official explanation later reported in the Spanish and Portuguese press. The Portuguese ambassador to Spain, had to intervene and relieve Sousa Mendes of his post.

Salazar demanded an enquiry and that "appropriate punishment" be meted out, but before a decision could be taken, Life magazine featured a headline story on 29 July 1940 calling Salazar "The greatest Portuguese since Henry the Navigator!"<sup>9</sup> The naïve Life reporters could not accept the story that a minor Portuguese consular official had acted on his own conscience. They were unaware of the press reports of insanity or the charges to be filed against him so they concluded that this magnificent act of humanity must have been the work of Portugal's leader, Salazar.

The simple reality of the situation demanded a cover-up from both the Portuguese and Spanish officials, who could not admit to such incompetence and risk losing the good will earned by Portugal. Sousa Mendes was removed from office and declared guilty of "professional incapacity," but the entire matter was handled with the utmost tact so as not to ruin the good press the country had received in the United States. It was also a kind of insurance for Salazar that Spain could not threaten Portugal in the future and use its "German" card, since Portugal could then retaliate with both American and British support. So, although he never forgave Sousa Mendes, he did not close the Portuguese border for the remainder of the war and Lisbon became the chief embarkation point to the new world for refugees who managed to flee Nazi-occupied Europe.

### **Franco Responds in Kind**

Franco was an arch-conservative who wished to restore the monarchy but did not personally whip up anti-Semitism or employ anti-Semitic themes in his campaign to seize power and topple the republic. Embarrassed by the favorable American press received by Salazar in June 1940, Franco made it Spanish policy to accept all refugees who legally entered Spain and even gave special attention to Jews of Spanish-Portuguese descent (the "Sephardim").<sup>11</sup> He also realized that it could conceivably be in Spain's interest to maintain a decent and humanitarian respect for the refugees and he was determined not to play "second fiddle" to Salazar. Although neither had intended to aid Jewish refugees, the inherent sense of rivalry between the two countries inadvertently came into play as a result of a sensationalist story in the American press of humanitarian interest.

### **Franco and Salazar Walk a Tightrope**

In spite of declarations of congratulations and thousands of tons of wheat and corn sent to Franco as a congratulatory gift by Salazar at the conclusion of the Civil War and the nationalist victory, both dictators nervously viewed each other in a game of cat and mouse or four way chess between Britain, Germany, Spain and Portugal. The two dictators had signed the Iberian Pact of Friendship on May 17, 1939 pledging respect for their common border and promising that neither would aid a country that attacked the other. Both were dismayed at the Non-Aggression Pact that launched World War II and the "firm alliance between Hitler and Stalin, a move that caused extreme confusion, doubt and hedging all bets. Portugal and England had a treaty from 1386 (Treaty of Windsor, the oldest diplomatic alliance still in force) pledging assistance if either were attacked. Salazar knew of Franco's desire to recover Gibraltar and the possibility that he might be drawn into the war on Germany's side. In World War I, the

Portuguese had joined the allies on the strength of the British pledge to protect the Portuguese Empire and that meant that Portugal had a vested interest in maintaining British sea power.

Although Franco was cautious, his brother-in-law, Foreign Minister Ramón Serrano Suñer, a powerful pro-German figure schemed for Spanish involvement in the war on German's side and on several occasions had made remarks to his German counterparts that an invasion of Portugal would be necessary once Spain took the plunge to recover Gibraltar by force. Plans were drawn up by the Spanish army commanders for a full scale invasion and even several popular Spanish magazines indicated that 1940 was an historical year that marked the "unfortunate" separation of Portugal from its motherland of Spain in 1640 (when Portugal reasserted its independence).

Franco was more cautious and stalled for time presenting impossible demands to Hitler in order to enter the war. In the meantime, the British reassured Salazar that again they would protect the Portuguese Empire abroad, defend Portugal in case of invasion by Spain and urged Salazar to reinforce military preparedness especially in the Azores, a vital naval base in the Atlantic. Under German control, an airbase in the Azores would allow German bombers to reach New York City! It would also mean a tremendous increase in the supply capacity of German U-boats in the North Atlantic! In April 1941 before Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt declared that he considered the Azores in the Western hemisphere, therefore falling under the provision of the Monroe Doctrine! In May, Senator Claude Pepper of Florida urged the President to seize the Azores by force.

By June, 1943, Salazar could see the eventuality of an Allied victory and signed an agreement with the British invoking the Treaty of Windsor granting them use of the islands as an airbase in return for which Portugal received \$30 million, the promise of modern fighter aircraft and anti-aircraft guns and the promise of British aid in the event of an Axis attack on the Portuguese mainland.<sup>12</sup>

## **The Rivalry Today**

The rivalry has almost evaporated completely except for the passions of a major confrontation between the two countries' football teams in the European Cup and some vestigial antagonisms that arise among some "die-hards," especially on the Portuguese side. Celebrations of the restoration of Portugal's independence (December 1st) are still occasionally marked by such anti-Spanish signs as "Better Poor than Spanish," and letters of protest continue to be featured in some Portuguese dailies expressing resentment at Portuguese national television for bringing Spanish language news reports from Spanish TV without subtitles in Portuguese. To most observers, this only proves that some Portuguese still have an inferiority complex.

There is popular opposition in Portugal to the far-reaching economic and planning proposals for a trans-national Euro-region embracing the Portuguese province of Alentejo and the autonomous region Extremadura of Spain. The two regimes and peoples have never been so close or harmonious as today but like other age old rivalries between close neighbors who have been 'submerged' for centuries under coercion or duress (Ireland and Scotland vs. England, Denmark vs. Sweden, Slovakia vs. The Czech Republic), there is some lingering resentment and paranoia.

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## Notes

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