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THE USA AND THE PORTUGUESE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

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The policy adopted by the USA in the process of the regime change in Portugal was, in its essence, characterized by the commitment to contribute to the birth of a representative democracy in the country.

In reality, the Americans ended up by becoming 'involved' in the Portuguese Revolution while trying to influence its final outcome, a fact most entirely owed to the fears associated with the reflexes at the level of the Cold War of events taking place in Lisbon.

And the USA's actions ended up by contributing to the victory of the democratic forces through the support given to the 'moderate' military politicians, through the pressure exerted upon the Portuguese authorities -mainly at the level of the Armed Forces -, through the diplomatic pressure exerted upon the former USSR, through the cooperation established with Western Europe, or even through the sound economic and military support [or 'aid package'] given in the wake of the post-revolutionary process.

Nevertheless, the 'role' of the USA was not the decisive element to the transition from authoritarianism to democracy in Portugal, given that the latter resided in the balance of forces within the context of the internal political and military power (notwithstanding the mixture composed of endogenous and exogenous factors).

Moreover, the policy of the USA throughout the Portuguese Revolution was not homogenous, and it is possible to characterize it in five different phases where its dominant approach is concerned, either at the level of the commitment or at the level of the influential instruments deployed.

Where the first phase is concerned, which took place between the 25th of April and the 28th of September, 1974, Washington's attitude was essentially defined by a relative lack of interest in Portuguese political developments, a fact that was translated in the *wait-and-see* policy.

This initial attitude was a result of several factors, namely, Portugal's low importance *per se* within the framework of US interests, the internal American context of the period – it is important to note that Richard Nixon had been forced to resign in August of 1974, in the upheaval of the Watergate scandal -, and even the emerging contradictory signs originating from Lisbon in the aftermath of the military *coup*.

Paradoxically, it was in this first phase that occurred the event that would end up determining the US attitude towards the whole of the transition-to-democracy process occurring in Portugal: the inclusion of two (2) PCP elements in the I Provisional Government.

The participation of communists in a NATO-member country was perceived by Washington as a very dangerous precedent to Southern Europe and as a risk to the unity and cohesion of the North-Atlantic Alliance, especially in the context of the 'Mediterranean crises'.

But this primordial geopolitical dimension only began to be equated by the US Administration onwards July of 1974, and even so, in response to an event external to the Portuguese transition-to-democracy process, namely, the Cyprus crisis, which involved a military conflict between two NATO-member countries – Greece and Turkey – that contributed to deepen the already troublesome Mediterranean strategic scenario.

Effectively, it was only on this latter date that a record of the US Government reaction may be found, and even so, in the form of a timid response at best, visible in the calling of its Lisbon Ambassador to the State Department and in the latter's instructions to be conveyed to the Portuguese authorities in regard to the strong US disapproval to the presence of communists in the Portuguese Cabinet and in the fact that the way Portugal should deal with that issue would have a strong bearing on the future of US-Portuguese relations.

Notwithstanding this first draft of a response, the US withheld, until the 28th of September, a policy of refusal to commit to a political process whose contours and results were still uncertain, in spite of the political and military aid requests submitted by Spínola, at the same time that it made quite clear to the rest of Southern Europe that US aid to a country with communists in its Government would not be granted.

The beginning of US involvement in Portugal, even at a low intensity, marked the second US policy phase towards the Portuguese transition, which can be dated between the 28th of September of 1974 and the 11th of March, 1975.

At the very centre of this change of heart was the 'left-turn' in the Portuguese political process in the aftermath of the '28th of September' events, which contributed to the ascendance in the State Department of the pessimistic view concerning the Portuguese transition, which was also defended by the Secretary of State.

Three events played a key role in Henry Kissinger's change of heart: the circumstances of Spínola's dismissal, mainly in view of the populist brigades organised by the PCP which stopped the proposed 'silent majority' rally, and which were perceived as a repetition of the events surrounding the 1917 Russian Revolution; the ascendancy of the more leftist military elements – with particular emphasis to the 'gonçalvistas' – to political and military power positions, namely where the 'Governo Provisório'

(Provisional Government), the 'Junta de Salvação Nacional', the 'Conselho de Estado' and the MFA are concerned; the advancement of the PCP within the Armed Forces, the Local Councils, the syndicates and the media.

Notwithstanding the growing pessimism, there was throughout this phase a degree of uncertainty as to the final outcome of the transition regime process occurring in Portugal, which implied that the State Department still believed that the political events were "in a highly fluid state and still susceptible to North-American influence".

This fact led to the Ford Administration's adoption of an ambivalent strategy, combining incentive and penalty instruments: incentives, such as economic aid, in the event of communist withdrawal from the government, all the while maintaining a foreign policy in consonance with the West; penalties, including NATO containment, in the event of the continuing communist presence in the government and the subsequent evolution towards an alignment with the Soviet bloc or even towards a "third-world" stance.

The North-American ambivalence translated in a set of contradicting political actions, which include, in full view of its significance, sending to Lisbon a special mission with the purpose of evaluating the situation 'on the ground' – the "Lukens Mission" -, exerting diplomatic pressure on Costa Gomes and Mário Soares during their joint visit to the USA, promoting Portugal's progressive 'isolation' which was first signalled by its withdrawal from the Nuclear Planning Group, nominating a new team to the Lisbon Embassy to be headed by Frank Carlucci and the approval of an economic and cooperation aid package to Portugal.

In spite of the deepening of the pessimism felt by the State Department during the months of January to March of 1975, a period when the Portuguese political process deteriorated, the USA kept a cautious policy of involvement up until the '11 de Março', a position that reflected the subsiding doubts as to the outcome of the revolution.

In 1975, the '11 de Março' event was the first major turning point in the US policy towards the Portuguese transition, giving birth to its third phase of involvement which lasted until August of the same year; the latter may be characterized by the existence of an open dispute, within the bosom of the Administration, between two quite distinct policy strategies in regard to the Portuguese transition to democracy.

The first, known as the 'Vaccine theory', which was defended by the Secretary of State, stated that Portugal was 'condemned' to become communist and should, therefore, be isolated within NATO, in order to promote a 'vaccine' to the rest of Europe.

The second, which can be defined as a strategy of 'Support to the Moderates', was defended by Frank Carlucci and stated that Lisbon could be 'saved' and safely conducted to democracy only if the internal 'moderate' forces were supported, more specifically the "melo-antunista" MFA group and the non-communist political parties – mainly the Socialist Party (PS), the winning party of the elections to the "Constituinte", the Catholic Church and the syndicates not attached to the PCP. Simultaneously, the USA should provide signs of public support to the Portuguese revolution, namely through the economic aid to the Provisional Government, through a closer connection with the Armed Forces, through the abstinence of promoting Azorean separatist movements – by sustaining a policy of absolute neutrality – and the exiled right-wing groups.

Throughout this phase, the "impetuous advancement of the revolution", reflected in the coerced property statizations, in the agrarian reform, in the "sindical unity", in the institutionalization of the MFA, in the I Pact MFA-Partidos, in the *República* and *Renascença* affairs and in the military tribunals, supported Henry Kissinger's approach in Washington, an approach which was chiefly translated in the fact that an attempt was made to isolate, or even to expel, Portugal from NATO.

And the Secretary of State even tried to convert the 'Vaccine' into NATO policy towards Lisbon, as is demonstrated by the diplomatic initiatives held with the Western European Allies, with the aim of convincing them to accept to ostracize Portugal within the Western Defence Organisation, most specifically in the context of the NATO Summit held in Brussels, on the 30th of May, 1975.

Despite the fact that, in July, an attempt at altering Henry Kissinger's position had been acknowledged, that was reflected in the counter-attack led by the "moderate" internal forces - that were not only enticed to act but were made to know that if the "PCP-gonçalvistas" alliance was defeated, an attempt would be made to solve the country's difficult economic situation -, during this phase, the hard line prescribed by the "Vaccine Theory" was Washington's dominant position towards Lisbon.

But in August of 1975 there was a deep change in the US strategy towards Portugal, thus promoting the fourth phase of involvement, which can be defined by the adoption of the support policy towards the "moderate" military-political elements.

At the heart of this change was a shift in the Secretary of State's own position, mainly caused by a combination of three separate actions: that of Frank Carlucci within the Ford Administration, that of Western Europe in relation to Washington, and the ascendance of the Portuguese anti-communist military-political forces.

During this phase, Western Europe played a crucial role, and emphasis should be placed on the actions formulated within the context of the Helsinki Conference, when a deep contribution was made in order to promote the victory of the forces sustaining the defence of the democratic path.

Frank Carlucci himself played a most crucial role when he prevailed over the Secretary of State in the dispute within the Ford Administration by imposing his own perspective of events taking place in Portugal.

The key moment occurred on the 10th of August, 1975, when the Ambassador went to Washington and was promised the direct support of the White House to his policy towards the Portuguese transition, which was achieved through the personal intercession of Donald Rumsfeld, Gerald Ford's *Chief of Staff*, and a personal friend of Frank Carlucci.

From then on, the State Department made a commitment to the strategy defended by the Ambassador, having made use of several instruments designed to influence the Portuguese political process towards a democratic stance, in close cooperation with Western Europe.

During this phase of the Portuguese transition to democracy, the USA actions can be structured along six main axis: political (and, if necessary, military) support to the "Grupo dos Nove" ; political and economic support to the democratic political parties; putting pressure on the Portuguese military-political authorities – mainly on Costa Gomes – with the purpose of forcing the removal of Vasco Gonçalves and the constitution of a new, communist-free, Provisional Government; the exertion of political pressure on the USSR, by directly threatening the Kremlin with both the end of *détente* and the Helsinki Treaty, if the USSR did not stop lending its support to the PCP; concession of economic aid to the VI Provisional Government – a Cabinet practically free of communists, the latter of which only withheld the post pertaining to the minor cabinet ministry of the Environment; cessation of any links to both Azorean separatist movements and to right-wing groups whatsoever, and the lending of support to the Portuguese State in connection to the Azores.

This policy of support to the anti-communist military-political forces was deeply and chiefly reflected in the US's and Western Europe's disposition to military support to the "Grupo dos Nove" and to the democratic political parties in the context of the latter's possible HQ transfer to the north of the country, in view of a potential "Lisbon uprising"-type of event, a circumstance which never materialised, but nevertheless played an important strategic and psychological role in the "25th of November"

framework, by effectively guaranteeing a secure safeguard in the event of a military confrontation with the revolutionary left.

Finally, with the 25th of November, 1975, and the end of the revolutionary process, a fifth US policy phase towards the transition to democracy was enacted, which can be defined by the provision of an ample support given by the Ford Administration in connection with the installation of the Portuguese democratic regime.

This support was chiefly based on two pillars: economic aid and military support. Economic aid comprised, on a bilateral level, the granting of a short-run credit line through the *Exchange Stabilisation Fund*, in the value of 300 million USD, and, on a multilateral level, the promotion of an international consortium to support the concession of the so-called “great loan” – 1,5 billion USD – of which, 550 million USD directly funded by the USA. The military support comprised the financing of the restructuring of the Portuguese Armed Forces, with the goal of increasingly integrating them within NATO – and by withdrawing them from the political arena –, having the US Government provided 30 million USD for the acquisition of equipment and training within the context of the creation of the Portuguese Airborne NATO Brigade.