
CONSTANT VECTORS OF THE NATIONAL
DEFENCE POLICY IN PORTUGAL

Virgílio de Carvalho

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HISTORICAL OUTLINE

The historical analysis of the behaviour of the Portuguese shows, through several centuries, a remarkable steadfastness, coherency and popular approval in matter of defence. Therefore, it can be said that in Portugal prevails, to say the least, a firm national defense instinct which tends to be a constant of the defense politics of any political force or democratic political coalitions ruling the Country.

In order to have a better understanding of that instinct we must underline that Portugal had to face, since the proclamation of its independence in 1143, a permanent challenge of survival which arises from its territorial specific characteristics of geographical situation, configuration and composition.

Whithin a generalized emancipating movement that included several peripheral regions, more than 8 centuries ago — Brittany and the Basque Country included — Portugal was the only successful one.

The success of the Portuguese has been generally attributed to the following general factors:

- Attainment of economic self-reliance, and consequent development of its own individuality, through the economic exploitation of the sea, namely in what concerns fishery as well as domestic and exterior means of communication;
- Support from the Pope, who not only wanted the Iberian peninsula freed from the northafrican Moors who occupied a large part of it, but also wished to secure strategic positions fit for providing good

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support to the crusades «sealift» between the North of Europe and the Holy Land.

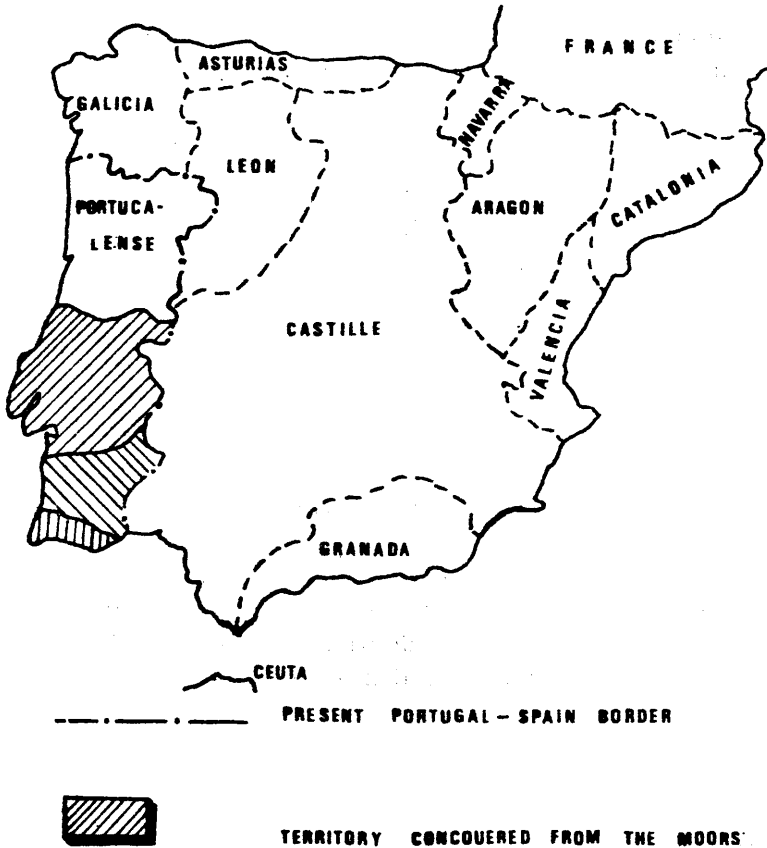
With the help of the Crusades and the religious-military Orders, the Portuguese, confined in the beginning to the Portucalense Country, were able to widen their territory towards the South, along the Coast, conquering it from the Moors.

This enlargement of the territory and of its Atlantic coastland has contributed decisively for the geostrategic viability of Portugal. The famous portuguese historian, Jaime Cortesão, has defined the atlantic strategy of viabilization of the country as follows: «by the end of the 12th century the people occupied the whole coast and created a type of national life, the Nation organized itself in maritime terms and, by that effort the masses, Portugal started to have its own life...».

A sufficient iberian geostrategic balance was this way accomplished, and that was just good enough until the Iberian Peninsula was caught in the wars for the european equilibrium. This took place during the so called Hundred Years War, when France fell back upon the Alliance with Castille in order to face up to England, which forced the British and the Portuguese, in their turn, to make an alliance. And it was this way that the oldest Alliance still in force today, the Anglo-Portuguese one, was born in 1386.

When England started to lose ground in that war and its Navy slowly reduced its presence in the region, the Portuguese, already conscious at that time of the role that the control of the sea meant for the viability of their Country, decided to develop their own naval power. Being meanwhile impossible to reestablish the geostrategic iberian balance by other means, the Portuguese did chose then the so called «atlantic option», which began with the invasion of Ceuta in 1415, and proceeded with the settlement and developing of the archipelagos of Madeira and Azores in 1419 and 1420, respectively. The result of the occupation of Ceuta by the Portuguese, who stayed there for almost two centuries, was probably a much faster fall of the Moorish Kingdom of Grenada, because it became more difficult for it to get the north-african support. Thus became possible the consequent unification of the rest of the Peninsula under the Catholic Kings of Castille, in 1492. Spain accomplished this way its present configuration, three and a half centuries after Portugal's independence.

PORTUGUESE EXPANSION (1128 - 1279)
AND THE IBERIAN KINGDOMS



Portugal has therefore become itself a «quasi-archipelago», more than five centuries ago, by the exploiting of its sea boundaries (as a matter of fact the only one really free) in order to guarantee its own survival and freedom of manoeuvre. The high rate of development meanwhile achieved to support the atlantic option, concerning shipbuilding, astronomic navigation and art of war fields, has latter endowed the portuguese with a capacity of exploiting their very special geographical position to by-pass the Mediterranean commercial way to India by the Cape route. It was through their famous maritime adventure, which meanwhile proceeded, that a less than 2 million people ended up by launching throughout the World the first seeds of what is now called the Western World.

PORTUGAL AND THE WEST

On account of their History, the Portuguese are in very special conditions to understand, and to be willing to stand by the values and freedom of the western World. As a matter of fact, the great majority of the Portuguese is in favour of the Atlantic Alliance, as it has been proved in all the elections held since 1974, largely won by political forces that openly give their support to the participation of the Country in NATO. The Portuguese show this way how they understand the geostrategic contribution that must be offered by their «quasi-archipelagic territory» to the western defense and, above all, the extraordinary relevance of the solidarity which has to exist between the Europeans and the North-Americans. In fact, they know that, in the same way that Portugal has to resort to an atlantic counterbalance in order to resist the continental entanglement of the rest of the Iberian Peninsula, the Allies have only been able to face the Continental Power, two World Wars already gone through, with the help of the North-American Continent. We must therefore infer that, if the NATO countries are aware of the need to safeguard the North Atlantic Ocean control in order to ensure freedom in Western Europe, it must also be easy for them to understand the reasons why the Portuguese are so concerned about the integrity of their discontinuous territory, and why they wish to keep their interterritorial sea, which nearly corresponds to the IBERLANT, in portuguese hands.

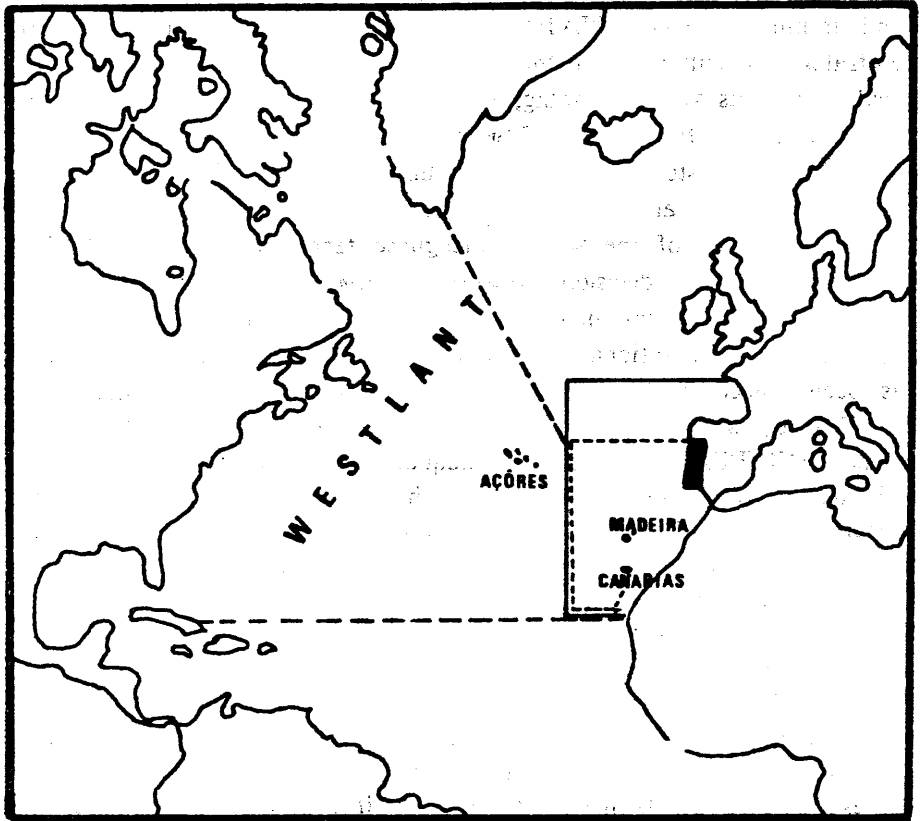
NATO plays at present the role of Maritime Power, and apparently understood the atlantic geostrategic nature of the portuguese territory by deciding to insert it, as a whole, within the area of the Supreme Atlantic

Allied Comand (SACLANT) and not in the SACEUR (Supreme Allied Command for Europe) one. The whole portuguese territory has therefore been placed to serve the atlantic vector of european defense. On the other hand, it must have been NATO's knowledge of the extraordinary atlantic geostrategic potentialities of the portuguese territory that led NATO to decide, since its very beginning, for the admission of Portugal into the Alliance, and not for the one of Spain as well, probably on account of the notion that the historical and natural allied of the Maritime Power in the Iberian Region has always been Portugal.

The inclusion of the whole portuguese territory in the SACLANT, a wise and correct decision, because it respects the need of Portugal for interterritorial cohesion, doesn't have a correspondence in the NATO organization of operational commands, since the archipelago of Azores has been placed in the CINCPACFLT, with main headquarters at the U. S. A., while the archipelago of Madeira and the Continent are at the CINCPACFLT having headquarters in Portugal. We may also add that a very similar division of the portuguese territory has also appeared at the bilateral treaty of defense between the U. S. A. and Spain, which effectively inserts Spain in the western military defense plan. On the other hand, there are some North-American strategists who consider the Azores Islands as being part of their Country's forward defense. Such ideas certainly arise from the fact that they are not aware of Portugal's historical formation and survival process, non-acquaintance and misunderstanding that we do hope will soon be clarified: in reality it is quite a nonsense that an Alliance may be prejudicial to vital interests of one of its members. In fact, it is not acceptable that the participation of Portugal in NATO will be carried out in a way that might interfere with the efforts made throughout the centuries by the Country in order to preserve and to safeguard its own viability and geopolitical influence.

The dragging of such an uncomfortable situation will certainly be very inconvenient to the safekeeping of the trust and solidarity which must exist between true allies because such situation might well be taken advantage of by NATO's opposers.

It becomes obvious that the above inconveniences arise directly from the interrelation of the geostrategic relevance of the portuguese territory



----- IBERLANT
———— ZONE OF STRATEGIC INTEREST OF SPAIN

and interterritorial space, from the benefits it may bring to economic and political purposes, and from the present inadequacy of the portuguese military power.

Although nobody will certainly be unaware of the extreme relevance of the portuguese «quase-archipelagic» territory, it must nevertheless be underlined that such importance springs out directly from its adequacy to serve as a platform capable of providing good support to the defense of the western european vital routes, and from its privileged position as a surveillance strategic point to detect surface vessels or submarines from the Warsaw Pact (namely ballistic or cruise missiles launching ones); such support is certainly of the utmost importance specially in what concerns the viability of the reinforcement and resupply routes («Sealift» and «airlift») to Europe originating from the North-American Continent.

As we all know, such viability is surely one of the most decisive elements for the deterrence of a conventional military attack of the Warsaw Pact to Western Europe and, consequently, from the nuclear escalade it could originate. We must also emphasize that the Portuguese-American bilateral agreement concerning the Lages air base also allows, under certain conditions, the north-american support to other parts of the world where the vital interests and the security of the West might be threatened as well.

Thus, availability of the portuguese territory represents a service to the West whose relevance it is only fair to admit. And this is so on account of eventual difficulties that may be found in getting raw materials from the Gulf Region or the Southern Africa, a situation that may be ended up by neutralizing Western Europe and by reducing the strategic potential of the Western World in relation to the Eastern one, thus seriously affecting the freedom of other countries, including neutral ones, and many of the so called Third World. It must also be taken into consideration that such service as the above mentioned one, implies serious risks to the security of Portugal, because if Moscow ever decides to take direct action in order to achieve its main goal of separating Europeans from North-Americans, the most probable course of action, and at the same time the less dangerous one concerning nuclear escalade could be a surprise attack to the viability facilities of the «sealift» and the «airlift» support to Europe, and not an immediate attack on the eastern european front, which would have the additional

inconvenience of unnecessarily destroying the european productive machine. As it is well known, there are some Sovietic military strategists who published articles advocating precisely this course of action.

Considering the above mentioned, it seems logical enough that the requests made by Portugal to NATO deserve to be pondered and given the best possible attention.

CONSTANT VECTORS OF THE PORTUGUESE DEFENCE PHYLOSOFY

From what has been said concerning historical facts and the problems faced by Portugal on account of the special importance of its position and the specific sensitiveness of its territory, we may infer that the following concerns will probably be part of the guide lines of the national politics of defence followed by any force or democratic political coalition ruling the country:

- The safeguarding of the interterritorial cohesion, by refusing anything that may endanger the unity of the country;
- The preservation of the national sovereignty in the whole territory, through an autonomous military defence adequate to the specific nature of the portuguese «quase-archipelagic» territory, able to resist an eventual military agression for, at least, the time that it always takes to the Alliances, the world public opinion and the international bodies to react: such a military defence would also stand for an effective surveillance and presence at both the interterritorial maritime and aerial space;
- The safeguard of the interterritorial sea-routes and of other sea-routes vital to the viability and supplying of the country, whose imports and exports use the seaway in almost 90% of the cases;
- The safeguard of the historical special relations with the Maritime Power and the participation in NATO;
- The inclusion of military and economic relations with Spain in wider areas than the Iberian Peninsula;
- The development of the country and of its economic competitive capacity, and the diversification and the reduction of its dependencies from the exterior.

All the above mentioned concerns may explain the reason why Portugal can not accept any separation of its territorial parts, even for operational purposes. For the very same reason, the military defence of its positions and of its interterritorial areas by non-portuguese armed forces in peacetime is not welcome. This also explains why the portuguese, who have suffered for several centuries from «geographical claustrophobia», can not agree with a role played by Spain in its maritime frontier (or IBERLANT), neither can they approve of a military iberian unified command, once it would be like going against the portuguese History of survival and, at the very least, it would also mean to hand over geostrategical trumps which are essential to its own capacity of manoeuver and to its influence within the Alliance itself. Nevertheless, we have to underline that this does not mean that the Portuguese are against Spain's entry into the NATO Military Defense Organization, but, on the contrary, they do understand the need for it, they do wish it and they do support it.

It must also be underlined that the above mentioned guide-lines of the portuguese national philosophy are perfectly compatible with NATO security purposes for the portuguese «quase-archipelago», if the national scheme of military defence will be adequate in terms of means and organization to receive, accommodate and support allied reinforcements in case of war. It shall also be underlined that Portugal is not the only NATO country against permanent presences of allied armed forces in its territory in peacetime.

We do hope that what has been explained about the defence of very important Portuguese interests, within NATO, will be well understood by the allies of Portugal. And well understood even to the point of effectively regarding that Portugal's participation in the Alliance, which the allies consider of great utility, asks for an additional effort on military defence that is needed to avoid negative consequences to some of the Country's vital interests. An effort that, to be carried out as far as it is to everyone's security, forces us to divert resources, scarce as they are, from other sectors, as important as education, communications, economic and technological development and modernization of the productive structures.

This means that Portugal, not only has a right to expect support from its allies in order to get suitable military equipment, but does in fact need it badly.

FINAL NOTE

To end up, it must be underlined that it isn't by any way possible for the Portuguese to accept any primacy of the military potencial over the geostrategic one to define the roles to be played by Portugal and Spain in the Iberian-Atlantic area. And this, because the military power is mutable, and it may even be developed with the purpose of influencing the Alliance options, while the geostrategic potential, on the contrary, is a permanent basis of the viability and the expression of any country at international level. And, in Portugal's special case, the geostrategic potential is of an extraordinary importance.

Virgilio de Carvalho

Captain (Ret)