

About-Face: The United States and Portuguese Colonialism in 1961¹

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Abstract

In 1961, the Kennedy Administration decided to adopt a new African policy, supporting self-determination and independence. This change occurred while the war against Portuguese colonial rule erupted in Angola. Acting in accordance with the principles adopted by the administration, the American Ambassador in Lisbon informed the Portuguese government of this new policy and recommended the urgent adoption of reforms in the Portuguese territories in Africa. When, in March, the situation in Angola was brought to debate in the United Nations, the United States voted in favor of a defeated resolution condemning Portuguese colonialism. Needless to say, this action provoked a serious crisis in Portuguese-American relations.

Keywords

United States, Portugal, Colonialism, Angola, United Nations

Introduction

Commenting on the election of John Fitzgerald Kennedy to the presidency of the United States, the Portuguese Ambassador in Washington, Luís Esteves Fernandes, predicted a difficult period for Portuguese-American relations. The new president, Fernandes warned, would promote "the official adoption of an anticolonial policy, subordinated to the principle of liberation for all dependent territories." (AHD, MNE-SE, PAA, Box 288). The Portuguese Ambassador was probably aware of Kennedy's considerable record in terms of public declarations on colonialism. Since the mid-1950s, John Kennedy had indeed realized the growing importance of nationalism in Africa and its consequences for American foreign policy. His presidential ambitions had led him to criticize the record of the Eisenhower administration and to promise that in a future Democratic administration the United States would "no longer abstain in the United Nations from voting on colonial issues [...] no longer trade our vote on other such issues for other supposed gains [...] no longer seek to prevent subjugated peoples from being heard." (quoted by Mahoney: 1983, 187).

Once elected, Kennedy would face a first serious test of his announced new African policy with the crisis in Angola in early 1961. In February, the first important armed action against Portuguese colonial rule in Angola took place, with the assaults on the civil and military prisons of Luanda; a few days later, the Liberian delegation at the United Nations requested the inclusion of the situation in Angola on the agenda for the next Security Council meeting. In Washington, it was time for important political decisions regarding Portugal and Portuguese colonialism.

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1. A New African Policy

In the early 1960s, the political scenario in Africa was changing. The anticolonial wave was reaching its peak and, in 1960, the year Kennedy was elected, seventeen new African nations gained independence. The situation in Africa had become a major issue in the context of the Cold War. In recent years, the Soviet Union had been paying more attention to African issues, trying to establish friendly relations with the newly independent countries. During the Eisenhower administration, the United States responded to the new situation in Africa in a "slow and ambivalent fashion," due to its close alliance with the European powers (Duignan and Gann: 1984, 286). American policymakers feared that European leaders might consider open support for anti-colonialism and nationalism in Africa as treasonous to the Atlantic alliance. U.S. State Department officials frequently praised the French, British, and Belgian colonial administrations in Africa and warned against the dangers of premature independence. In the second half of the decade, however, certain signs of change began to appear and the American government began to take more interest in African issues. According to the historian David Gibbs, however, this interest came more "in response to decolonization, rather than as a supporter of it" (Gibbs: 1995, 314). Within this context, in 1958, the State Department created a Bureau of African Affairs, and the United States government began to promote the academic study of African cultures and languages and to channel "loans and grants" to Africa. Gradually, "anticolonialism came to be interpreted as a policy that was moral in itself, as a device for expanding American trade, and as a means for strengthening the American position" (Duignan and Gann: 1948, 288). Gibbs points out, however, that "one should not [...] misunderstand the nature of the Eisenhower administration's interest in Africa or exaggerate the extent of it." In fact, the formulation of African policy "remained largely in the hands of the bureau of European affairs" and Africa was given "low priority by the administration" (Gibbs: 1995, 315).

As mentioned above, John F. Kennedy had a good record in terms of public anti-colonial statements. During his presidential campaign, he appointed Chester Bowles, a long-time supporter of African liberation, as his foreign policy adviser. This nomination increased expectations that Kennedy would bring significant changes in American policy towards Africa. This continent became, for the first time, a significant theme in the 1960 campaign, allowing Kennedy to distance himself from the Republican candidate and from Eisenhower's support for colonial powers. Kennedy repeatedly stated that the United States had "lost ground in Africa" because it had "neglected and ignored the needs and aspirations of the African people." (Schlesinger Jr: 1965, 554).

Once elected, John F. Kennedy created a Task Force to recommend a new policy for Africa. The Task Force, which went to Africa in December 1960, included three Democratic senators, Frank Church of Idaho, Frank E. Moss of Utah, and Gale W. McGee of Wyoming, and also the President's brother, Edward Kennedy. Its final report recommended "sweeping changes in America's attitude towards Africa." The United States should abandon "its traditional fence-sitting-arising from links with the colonial powers—in favor of support for African nationalism." The report argued that American policy had failed to keep pace with events in Africa mainly because the United States was "accustomed to dealing" with Africa primarily through metropolitan powers that controlled the major part of the continent. The African reality, however, had changed, and the "relative stability of the colonial period, based upon an imposed order, has suddenly given place to grave instability arising from the emergence of many weak and untested independent regimes."

The new administration should adapt its policy towards Africa to the new winds that were blowing across the continent. Its major goals should be the "complete ending of colonial rule" and the development of "stable African governments willing to pursue economic and social development and uphold basic civil rights." At the same time, the future administration should avoid the division of Africa into "spheres of influence of the great powers" and should try to "restrain African internal conflicts and encourage inter-African cooperation" (AHD, MNE-SE, PEA Conf. Box 15)

The report of the Task Force also dealt with some particular situations on the African continent. As far as the Portuguese territories were concerned, the report was particularly critical of American policy. It deplored the "widespread impression that the United States supports Portuguese colonialism in Angola, Mozambique and Portuguese Guinea" and described Portuguese

rule in these places as "intolerable." It justified this impression with the American support of Portuguese membership in NATO and the importance of the American base in the Azores. The report considered that "silence on issues affecting Portuguese Africa is a liability far outweighing any short-term strategic considerations" and went on to suggest that the new administration, in collaboration with the British, should exert strong pressure on Portugal "looking towards the emancipation of her African territories." The United States should also, from now on, cease to accept Portugal's refusal to report to the United Nations on its "non-self-governing territories." (AHD, MNE-SE, PEA Conf. Box 15).

2. Events in Angola

The Kennedy administration's new African policy had one of its first serious tests in Angola. The first relevant armed action against Portuguese colonial rule in that territory occurred on February 4, 1961, when several groups of armed Angolans assaulted the civil and military prisons in Luanda, trying to free Angolan nationalist leaders, and attacked a police station, the official radio station, an administrative post and a police patrol car. According to a report from the American Embassy in Lisbon, the Portuguese "were caught completely by surprise" and suffered seven casualties. (NA, SDLF, 68D401, Entry 5296, Box 6). The following day, fighting and mob violence broke out again in Luanda, during the funeral for the victims of the incidents of February 4. Additional disorders occurred on February 10, with new incidents in the civil prison. This time, thirteen "young Africans" had been killed and "their bodies had been piled up outside the Prison." The American Consul in Luanda, William Gibson, reported that Luanda was "full of troops" and that "a company of rangers had been transported from Lisbon to Luanda." (NA, SDLF, Entry 3093, Box 1).

In Washington, the Portuguese Embassy officially informed the State Department of the events in Luanda, which did not come as a "great surprise" to Portugal. Ambassador Fernandes pointed out that "organs of the international press and other media sources had lately spread the 'news' of the possibility of such riots." The Portuguese government interpreted the events as "part of the Communist assault on the Portuguese position, not only in the Overseas Provinces but also in the Iberian Peninsula with the aim of weakening the Western position and provoking a situation which might be propitious for the intervention of the forces of international Communism." Considering the "very real danger of the situation, it would be of the utmost interest to the free world that public opinion in the United States should become aware of the Communist conspiracy now in action against Portugal." (NA, SDCF, 1960-63, Box 1815).

3. The Liberian request

The events in Angola also had a direct impact at the United Nations, where delegations from several African countries assumed a very critical position toward Portugal. On February 20, the Liberian delegation requested an urgent meeting of the Security Council "to deal with the crisis in Angola." The Liberians believed that "immediate action should be taken by the Security Council to prevent further deterioration and abuse of human rights and privileges in Angola." (NA, SDCF, 1960-63, Box 1821).

Portugal immediately began its political campaign against the placing of Angola on the agenda of the Security Council. The Portuguese representative at NATO delivered a note to its partners asking them to pressure their own governments to vote against the Liberian motion. The Portuguese government requested their NATO allies, members of the Security Council, "to instruct their delegates firmly to oppose the inclusion of the item on the Council's agenda." The action of the Liberians was part of a "general campaign to force Portugal to abandon its overseas territories" and part of a "plan to destroy the positions of the West in Africa." Moreover, according to the Portuguese government, the Charter of the United Nations did not authorize the Security Council to discuss the "internal affairs of member states." If the Council were to debate the situation in Angola, "a dangerous precedent would be created for United Nations interference in the

responsibilities of sovereign states to preserve law and order in their territories." (NA, SDCF, 1960-63, Box 1821).

In Washington, the Portuguese Ambassador also met with several State Department officials and requested the support of the United States "in averting Security Council consideration of the Liberian request." The Portuguese Ambassador argued that the Security Council was not "competent" to discuss the events in Angola since these were "purely internal matters." He also emphasized that the Portuguese government regarded "the threat of a Security Council discussion as a serious matter," and expected "NATO solidarity" to be "the key" to any American action. In response, Woodruff Wallner, from the Bureau of International Organizations, indicated that the United States had not yet reached a decision. His guess, however, was that "the item would be placed on the Council's agenda." (NA, SDCF, 1960-63, Box 1821).

The State Department tried to avoid discussion of Angola at the Security Council and instructed the United States delegation at the United Nations (USUN) to approach the Liberians and to inform them that the new Administration had "a number of African problems under active review, including, as a matter of major importance, the Portuguese territories in Africa." The United States expected to "take steps in the near future designed to contribute to the improvement of this difficult situation." In light of these circumstances, the American government hoped that Liberia would avoid the discussion of the Angola question in the United Nations for the time being, realizing that "this problem can be best advanced at this time through quiet channels rather than in public debate, which will likely exacerbate the situation." (NA, SDCF, 1960-63, Box 1821).

The USUN, however, disagreed with these recommendations sent by the State Department. In anticipation of a broader debate within the administration, the head of the American delegation, Adlai Stevenson, argued that the United States should not oppose the placing of Angola on the agenda, "as some of our allies may urge." Angola was seen "among Afro-Asians as a straight colonial issue" and these countries would "disregard the legal arguments presented by Portugal to justify her claim that Angola is a matter of domestic concern." The refusal to support the motion proposed by Liberia would be viewed "as favoring Portuguese over Africans." Moreover, "in view of the importance of disassociating ourselves from old line colonialism we should not appear to accept Portugal's contention that Angola is part of Portugal or that its inhabitants have a genuine opportunity to determine their own future." (NA, SDCF, 1960-63, Box 1821).

The arguments of Adlai Stevenson apparently convinced the State Department. A telegram sent from Washington to the USUN admitted that, since Liberia was insisting on calling a Security Council meeting on Angola, there was no real alternative but "to acquiesce in the consideration of this matter by the Council." The United States, therefore, would "vote affirmatively" regarding the placement of the issue on the agenda of the Security Council. (NA, SDCF, 1960-63, Box 1821).

4. The *démarche* with Salazar

The Kennedy Administration decided to inform the Portuguese government of this major change in policy, indicating that Portugal could no longer count on American abstention or support in the United Nations. Secretary of State Dean Rusk instructed Ambassador Elbrick to see Oliveira Salazar and to tell him that the Administration was "deeply concerned over the deteriorating position of Portugal in the United Nations and in Africa." The United States wanted "to talk frankly and in friendly spirit with Portugal as an ally" in order to improve "mutual understanding" and to influence Portugal "to undertake major adjustments in her policies which as presently constituted seem to us headed for very serious trouble." The immediate problem was the Liberian motion to place the Angolan question on the agenda of the Security Council. Rusk informed Elbrick that the USUN would vote in favor of the motion, explaining that due to American "worldwide commitments and responsibilities" it was "increasingly difficult and disadvantageous to Western interests publicly to support or remain silent on Portuguese African policies." The administration was "greatly concerned that because of our close association with Portugal, which we value as an ally, we shall come under increasing criticism from Afro-Asian countries which will, rightly or wrongly, tend to hold us responsible for Portuguese actions." In view of this situation, the Ambassador

should stress to Salazar that "step by step actions" were "imperative for the political, economic and social advancement of all inhabitants of Portuguese African provinces towards full self-determination within a realistic timetable." The American government was "fully aware of the economic importance of the overseas provinces to Portugal and of the great potential cost of their development," and therefore was prepared to extend "important bilateral assistance to Portugal and to her overseas territories" (FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol. XIII, 895-897).

Dean Rusk also recommended some caution to Ambassador Elbrick. Rusk was "fully aware" of the "distasteful nature" of this approach to Salazar and had "few illusions" that the Portuguese government was going to change its policies towards its African territories in the near future. Above all, the United States wanted to avoid the appearance of a "take it or leave it" attitude which could cause a Portuguese "counter-action, which we do not want in connection with NATO or the Azores where we believe retention of base rights is very important." (FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol. XIII, 895-897).

Elbrick went to see Salazar on March 7 with the counselor of the Embassy, Theodore Xanthaky. "The countdown had got us both a little jumpy," Elbrick confessed, but the interview "went off relatively smoothly." (NA, SDLF 68D401, Entry 5286, Box 2). Elbrick explained to Salazar the new American policy and the Portuguese leader, after listening without interruption, stated that he was not surprised by this new policy, since several "high government leaders" had already publicly expressed similar views in recent months. He was, however, "profoundly concerned" with the "apparent lack of understanding" of the American government "as to the dangers which will unquestionably result for the West if the present American policies in Africa are not reversed." Salazar was particularly worried by the fact that the Soviet Union was "actively engaged in attempting to bring about the downfall of the two nations of the Iberian Peninsula." The Russians were "attacking Portugal via Africa and it would appear that the Americans are ingenuously playing their game." Salazar also warned Elbrick that it was "manifestly impossible to be an ally of Portugal in Europe and an enemy in Africa." (NA, SDCF, 1960-63, Box 1813).

This *démarche* marked a real turning point in the relations between Portugal and the United States. The American government formally informed Salazar that it had changed its policy in Africa and its policy towards Portuguese colonialism. Later that day, Elbrick sent a telegram to the Secretary of State commenting on the interview. Salazar, he wrote, was "calm and very self-possessed and was not unfriendly throughout the interview." But it was "obvious" that he rejected "any thought of Portugal's complying with the United States suggestion" (NA, SDCF, 1960-63, Box 1813).

5. The Security Council Resolution

Meanwhile, in New York, Portugal continued to oppose the debate in the Security Council. The Portuguese Ambassador, Vasco Vieira Garin, delivered a letter of protest to the President of the Security Council, who was now Adlai Stevenson, denying the United Nations any jurisdiction over the Angolan territory. The situation in Angola was a matter "exclusively within the jurisdiction of the government of Portugal." (American Foreign Policy. Current Documents, 1961, 883). Nevertheless, the Security Council initiated its session on March 10 and decided to include the Angolan issue on its agenda. There was no vote on the placement because, as Woodruff Wallner explained to the Portuguese Ambassador in Washington, "when it became clear that a majority of the Council was prepared to support inscription... Stevenson decided it would be pointless to have a vote." (NA, SDCF, 1960-63, Box 1821).

While the Security Council meeting was taking place, the Portuguese Ambassador in Washington made one last attempt to change the American position. Fernandes again met with Woodruff Wallner and declared that Portugal had accepted the American policy of "non-opposition to inscription." But now that the item was already inscribed, his government wanted the United States to abstain from the vote on the resolution that would certainly occur. Wallner replied that the United States did not share the view that Security Council consideration of Angola was "illegal". Nevertheless, it was "impossible" for the Administration "to decide our position on a

resolution until it had been submitted." (NA, SDCF, 1960-63, Box 1821).

On March 14, the representatives of Ceylon, Liberia and the United Arab Republic submitted a draft resolution calling for the introduction of reforms in Angola and requesting the appointment of a subcommittee to examine the situation in the territory. Dean Rusk recalled in his memoirs that he "strongly recommended to the President that we support the resolution." According to Rusk, the United States had to demonstrate that it opposed colonialism "in fact as well as in rhetoric, and supporting the resolution was one way to do this." (Rusk: 1990, 274). In a telegram sent to the USUN, Rusk recognized that the resolution went further than he would have wished, with the "disadvantage of injecting the United Nations into the Angolan problem on a continuing basis." This would certainly be "distasteful to the Portuguese and may complicate our bilateral efforts to effect an adjustment of Portuguese government policy in Africa." Nevertheless, the United States should vote favorably. (NA, SDCF, 1960-63, Box 1820).

According to the final text of the resolution, the Security Council, "taking note of the recent disturbances and conflicts in Angola resulting in loss of life of the inhabitants, the continuance of which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security," called upon Portugal to "consider urgently the introduction of measures and reforms in Angola." The Council also decided to appoint a subcommittee "to examine the statements made before the Security Council concerning Angola, to receive further statements and documents and to conduct such inquiries as it may deem necessary and to report to the Security Council as soon as possible." (*Department of State Bulletin*, April 3, 1961, 499).

The Security Council did not approve the resolution. There were only five favorable votes (United States, Soviet Union, Ceylon, Liberia and the United Arab Republic), and six abstentions (Great Britain, France, Turkey, Ecuador, Chile and China). Adlai Stevenson made an extensive statement justifying the American vote. According to the president of the Security Council, "while Angola and the conditions therein do not today endanger international peace and security, we believe they may, if not alleviated, lead to more disorders with many unfortunate and dangerous consequences." The United States believed that "the people of Angola are entitled to all of the rights guaranteed them by the charter" of the United Nations and, therefore, considered that Portugal had the "solemn obligation to undertake a systematic and rapid improvement of the conditions of the peoples of its territories." (*Department of State Bulletin*, April 3, 1961, 497-498).

6. Reactions

In Lisbon, the defeat of the resolution in the Security Council was received with jubilation, but the American vote caused strong indignation. In late March, Franco Nogueira, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, met with Ambassador Elbrick and explained to him that the Portuguese government could not understand the "casual manner" in which the United States dealt with the African problem, which was of "such vital importance" to Portugal. His government could not understand the American tactics, "publicly attacking Portugal in the Security Council" only one week after making "private and confidential approaches" to Salazar. Nogueira pointed out that no Portuguese government could survive the loss of the overseas territories and therefore the result of American policy, "if pursued to its logical conclusion, would produce a neutralized or even a Communist beachhead on the Iberian Peninsula." (NA, SDCF, 1960-63, Box 1260).

Moreover, Portuguese officials quickly linked the discussion of the Security Council resolution to the beginning of an extremely violent attack by UPA forces in Northern Angola. In fact, on March 15, large-scale violence began in Northern Angola, near the frontier with Congo. A major attack on Portuguese authorities and the population took place, with at least 200 Europeans being killed or wounded. The American Consul in Luanda reported to Washington that "apparently coordinated attacks broke out in a number of posts along the border with the former Belgian Congo early in the morning of March 15 and at the same time other attacks took place in the so-called 'Dembo's' section of Angola." This report mentioned that "Angolan natives [...] probably led by expatriate Angolans from the former Belgian Congo" attacked administrative posts, trading stores and plantations with "unprecedented ferocity, killing white families, mulatto families

and native Africans who had not joined their movement with equal and impartial brutality." (NA, SDCF, 1960-63, Box 1821)

The Portuguese press was particularly violent in criticizing the United States and effectively "fanned an anti-United States sentiment with articles stressing the duplicity and unreliability of United States policy." (NA, SDCF, 1960-63, Box 1814). On March 17, for instance, the *Diário de Notícias* affirmed that the position the United States assumed in the United Nations was "profoundly deplored by the whole Portuguese people." This newspaper pointed out that "if the United States were attacked in its external territories, in Alaska, in the Hawaiian islands, in Puerto Rico, in the Virgin islands, in the islands of Samoa and Guam, or in the Panama Canal zone, who would ask if these countries or territories are legitimately a part of the United States, or if it were not the time to promote the independence of some of them?" (*Diário de Notícias*, March 17, 1961, 2). Adlai Stevenson became a favorite target of the Portuguese press. *Novidades*, also on March 17, warned Stevenson that he was "walking on a slippery and dangerous path," as a representative of a country "which is the leader of the Western World." Stevenson could use the post he had for "self-destruction," but he should not "drag others" with him, counseled *Novidades*. (NA, SDCF, 1960-63, Box 1814)

The events in New York, Ambassador Elbrick pointed out, had become "too convenient a device for the Government to use in diverting public attention from the danger it is facing in Angola." (NA, SDCF, 1960-63, Box 1814). On March 17, the American Embassy in Lisbon was already reporting "a flow of letters, telegrams and telephone calls" protesting against the American alignment with the Afro-Asian bloc and the Soviet Union against Portugal. Elbrick added that the realization that the United States did not regard "its NATO tie as binding it to support Portugal's overseas policy" had come "as a shock to many people outside the government." (NA, SDCF, 1960-63, Box 1814). Later that day, an alarmed Elbrick telegraphed Washington, reporting that Portuguese students in Lisbon and Porto had staged demonstrations outside the Embassy in Lisbon and the Consulate in Porto. The demonstration in Lisbon comprised about 50 to 100 students carrying placards reading "Stupid Americans Playing into Commie Hands" and shouting "Americans Keep Out of Our Affairs." The demonstrators were dismissed by "vigilant police." In Porto, the demonstration involved more than one thousand students carrying banners reading, "Americans get out of the Azores." The police also dispersed them. (NA, SDCF, 1960-63, Box 1814).

The reaction against the American vote in the Security Council came to a head on March 27, when a crowd of fifteen to twenty thousand Portuguese, "mostly students and middle-class," staged a hostile demonstration for more than one hour outside the American Embassy in Lisbon. The protesters marched from downtown Lisbon, where they had first gathered, and eventually broke the cordon of policemen around the Embassy and "surged from all sides to the entrance." The crowd "broke a number of windows by throwing stones." Ambassador Elbrick reported that no one was injured and that the police had done what it could "to control and to disband the crowd." Twenty to twenty-five horse guards had been summoned, and they used "drawn sabers" to break up the demonstration. The demonstrators carried posters with inscriptions such as, "America for the Indians" and "Get Out of the Azores." (NA, SDCF, Box 12160 and NA SDFL 68D401, Entry 5296, Box 1)

The American Ambassador presented a "strong oral protest" to the Portuguese government against this "mob attack." (*The New York Times*, March 29, 1961, 10). The following day, the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs contacted the Embassy saying that the government "deeply regretted last night's disturbances" and assuring the Embassy that it would take "adequate steps" to ensure that more violence did not occur. The Minister, however, pointed out that "manifestations could not be prohibited *per se* particularly because the public feeling is running so high against the United States." The Portuguese government also refused to issue any public statement regarding the incident on the grounds that it would only serve "to underscore United States-Portuguese differences over Africa and thus further embitter relations." (NA, SDCF, 1960-63, Box 1821).

The most important newspapers in both countries discussed the events in Lisbon. For *The New York Times*, the situation in Angola did not "excuse" the Portuguese government for "permitting a mob demonstration in Lisbon of 20,000 Portuguese who stoned the United States

Embassy and carried on for two hours." There was in Portugal "one of the most rigidly controlled dictatorships in the world," and a demonstration of this sort "simply could not happen without the connivance of the authorities." The "Lisbon rioting", as it was called, had to be understood as "an indirect expression of the Salazar government's opinions." However, it should be clear to the Portuguese government that if it wished "to express its opinions" there were "normal, diplomatic channels through which to do so." The editorial pointed out that "diplomacy by managed mobs is expected in Communist countries as part of the cold war," but not "between two allies who may have a difference of opinion over some particular issue" (*The New York Times*, March 29, 1961, 31).

In Portugal, the *Diário de Notícias* pointed out that something had changed in the "old and friendly Luso-American relations." With very impressive words the newspaper added: "It is sad but it was not us. We are the same people who during the war risked devastation and bombardment in order to grant Great Britain and the United States [the] use of bases in the Azores... We are the same people who in February 1948... again conceded to the United States the Lajes facilities, which permitted the United States to maintain its lines of communication with troops stationed in Germany... We are the same people who the United States and England insisted should enter the United Nations, an organization to which we did not desire to belong... We are the same people who participated in NATO from the very outset... We are the same people who last May received President Eisenhower after he had been subjected to Khrushchev's affronts." (NA, SDCF, 1960-632, Box 1260).

Politically, the position of the United States in the Security Council had its first major repercussion a few days later. Oliveira Salazar firmly denied the American government authorization to install a "Backscatter radar installation" on the Portuguese island of Madeira, in the Atlantic Ocean, with capability "for detecting high altitude nuclear tests conducted within the Sino-Soviet bloc." The United States had already requested this authorization on December 6, 1960. (AOS, CO/NE-25, Folder 11). But Salazar's final decision was taken immediately after the vote on the Liberian resolution in the United Nations, and the text written in his own hand could not be more eloquent regarding the new climate of Portuguese-American relations:

"It does not seem opportune to grant the request. The attitude taken by the United States government regarding Portuguese overseas territories, the efforts made, and the spectacular nature of its advice to Portugal in the United Nations, with the declared intent of capturing the votes of the African countries, advise us that, on our part, we should show firmness and should not accede to their requests. It is even impossible to know, at the present moment, the future of our policy regarding the United States, that is, if it would be subject to any revision. This would depend on the role played by that country in inciting subversive acts against Angola and against the permanence of Angola in the Portuguese nation. We should not do anything, for now, that aggravates the United States or their representatives. But denying their requests will show our legitimate resentment and I think that, as far as they are concerned, it will encourage them to be prudent in their relations with us." (AHD, MNE-Se, PEA Conf. Box 15).

It really looked as if John F. Kennedy's prediction of 1956 had come true. In that year, Kennedy had declared that American support for decolonization "will displease our allies" and that the United States would find its policies "hailed by extremists, terrorists and saboteurs for whom we could not have sympathy – and condemned by our oldest and most trusted friends who will feel we have deserted them... Some will plead for a more cautious course; but halfway measures will not do." (Mahoney: 1983, 202).

Conclusion

In late March, a desperate Charles Elbrick telephoned Washington saying that relations

between the United States and Portugal had reached "a low point." While remaining "polite," even his personal friends in Portugal were "extremely bitter over what virtually all Portuguese consider the rapid about-face done by the United States and feel that we did not give Portugal enough time before announcing our change of policy to the whole world in the United Nations." In the Ambassador's opinion, the position of the Embassy was "so unenviable that nobody from here could say anything at the present time that would be influential or that would even be listened to." Elbrick even questioned his continuing role as Ambassador in Lisbon, saying that he was "accomplishing nothing by being in Lisbon at the present time." (NA, SDLF 68D401, Entry 5296, Box 1)

Despite Elbrick's complaints, the pattern of voting adopted by the United States in March 1961 would remain the same throughout this year and also during part of 1962. The United States voted in favor of resolutions concerning Portuguese colonialism in the General Assembly, in April 1961, the Security Council, in June 1961, the General Assembly, in December 1961, and again, in the General Assembly, in January 1962. The deterioration of Portuguese-American relations was further aggravated by the development of frequent contacts between the Kennedy administration and the Angolan nationalist movements and also by the new arms policy announced to the Portuguese government in August 1961. This was, indeed, the most serious crisis in relations between the two countries since World War II. It had been caused by two simultaneous and interrelated factors: the Kennedy administration's new African policy and the beginning of the colonial war in Angola. However, it would only take a few months to produce a new and significant change in the policy followed by the United States government toward Portugal and Portuguese colonialism. Since mid-1962, the strong stance taken by the Kennedy administration in its early period would be replaced by a more complacent attitude toward Portuguese policy in Africa. Ultimately, Cold War considerations tempered Washington's anti-colonial fervor. American policymakers would eventually recognize the strategic importance of the base that the United States armed forces had been authorized to use on the Portuguese islands of the Azores since World War II. Coupled with a tough and intransigent Portuguese diplomacy, the necessity of retaining the Azores base at any cost forced a major "retreat" from the policies adopted by the Kennedy administration in early 1961 regarding Angola and other Portuguese territories. When President Kennedy met with the Portuguese Foreign Minister, Franco Nogueira, two weeks before his assassination, the Portuguese politician tried to convince him to change the policies of his administration toward Portuguese Africa. Kennedy replied that Nogueira could not ask him "after he had gone to the top of the mountain, to go down to the valley again in less than two years." But he already had. (JFKL, Oral History Transcripts, Franco Nogueira, 6).

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AHD, MNE - Historical-Diplomatic Archive, Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
 AOS - Oliveira Salazar's Archive
 JFKL - John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library
 NA, SDCF - National Archives, State Department Central Files.
 NA, SDLF - National Archives, State Department Lot Files.

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