

WHEN A DIPLOMAT GOES INTO POLITICS BECAUSE OF WAR The case of João Chagas (1910-1914)

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Abstract

Analysis of the case of a Portuguese diplomat, João Chagas, who, during the First Republic, and by resorting to the conditions available to him as representative of his country, surpassed the mere negotiating role attributed to diplomacy to conduct national politics, succeeding in changing the international statute of Portugal in the Great War.

The article describes the internal and external situation of Portugal in political, geopolitical and geostrategic terms, the conflict between Portuguese and British interests, the activity of Portuguese diplomats in London, Berlin and Paris, and, finally, the work of João Chagas

Keywords

Portugal; Great Britain; France; Great War; diplomat; conflict; João Chagas; strategy

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WHEN A DIPLOMAT GOES INTO POLITICS BECAUSE OF WAR

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Introduction

It is often believed that between the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century diplomats were negotiators accredited to governments or entities with international weight and, as such, mere instruments of the authorities they represented, acting to attain the goals set to them. Thus, a diplomat did not make politics, because he carried out the policy he was instructed to conduct. This fact placed him, and forced him, to be above any partisan trends, conferring him a status of independence and impartiality.

Over twenty years ago I detected a situation that breaks away with this model (Fraga, 1990: 149-155). Therefore, I believe it is important to disclose the case of a Portuguese diplomat who, with wit and intelligence in the performance of his mission, penetrated the restricted fields of politics and set out on his own what the Portuguese government should have defined all-together.

In order to understand the contingencies that determined the action of this diplomat, it is necessary to make several incursions into history to perceive the context of the constraints and conflicts that existed at the time. These conflicts involved a mesh of internal and external motives, as well as opposing interests of a geopolitical, geostrategic, personal, and collective nature. The wise assessment and the overcoming of these obstacles by the diplomat in question have today catapulted him to a level that can be taken as exemplary.

Let us go back to the proclamation of the republic and look briefly at events at the time.

The republic: its conflicts and instabilities

By proclaiming the republic, the new political regime carried within a set of conflicts that were difficult to resolve. These were both inherited conflicts and conflicts in the making, some of which were expected to be settled politically, whereas others were believed to be of difficult resolution. Indeed, inherited conflicts were more potential than real, and the result of either structural weakness – in the economy – or of geostrategic factors. Conflicts in the making had two clearly defined aspects: on one hand, the non-acceptance of the new regime by the monarchists and, secondly, the divisions that the Portuguese Republican Party had carried within from the time of propaganda.



We shall focus our attention on the potential internal conflicts among republicans and on the actual conflict between republicans and monarchists¹. Then, under the scope of potential external conflicts, we will attempt to understand the geostrategic situation that placed Portugal on one of the axes of the Madrid-London-Lisbon triangle, and have a fleeting look at the potential conflict involving Portugal, Great Britain and Germany over Portuguese colonies in Africa.

The guerrilla between republicans and monarchists started, virtually, days after the republic was established in Portugal. Monarchist elites did not accept the new political regime. However, it was only after the first quarter of 1911 that the date of the first organised counter-revolution was set (Santos, 2010: 87-97). The petition made by Captain Paiva Couceiro to War Minister Colonel Xavier Correia Barreto demanding that the government made a national referendum to determine if voters chose the republic or the monarchy, marked the date.

Galicia was the refuge of all active monarchists who were dissatisfied with the new regime. Sometimes, some of the most faithful internal conspirators living in Portugal secretly passed the Minho River to settle in Vigo, thus answering the call of royalist leaders (Mello, 2002: 38-39).

The nightmare of the counter-revolution remained active and ongoing until February 1919, when the so-called Monarchy of the North came to an end, of which, among others, we have the report made by Rocha Martins (Martins, 2008). It should be pointed out that the monarchist counter-revolution, in addition to carrying out two militarised raids on the province of Trás-os-Montes in 1911 and 1912, and to keeping the conspiracy alive over time by taking advantage of the fluctuations of domestic politics, as soon as the Great War broke out in August 1914, tended to support a possible German victory, against the will of the deposed monarch (Ferrão, 1976: 116-119).

Besides the conflict with the monarchists, the republicans maintained another with the catholic party (Fraga, 2001: 66-68). We cannot say it was autonomous because, in fact, the latter never, in themselves or through their clergy, plotted independently against the Republic, due to the non-official alliance between the two. We can say that, at least up to 1919, the governments of the republic had to openly fight royalist and catholic resistance, even though the latter was much smaller in number than the former.

Still in the domestic arena, let us look at the conflict that destabilized the old PRP during the first year of the Republic. Indeed, even two or three years before the establishment of the new regime, the existence of at least two tendencies within the party could be felt: one was radical and Jacobin, the other moderate and conservative. The former was led by Afonso Costa and had the largest number of supporters. It followed the ideas of Brito Camacho and was supported by groups of intellectuals who were cautious and preoccupied with reconciling, in social and political terms, fields that would hardly remain together. In fact, the fall of the monarchy could not be just a change of regime; it had to mean a break with tradition and, therefore, gain a revolutionary stance as advocated by the most extreme wing of the PRP.

¹ I do not wish to go into major detail here, as I have addressed this topic in depth on previous occasions (Fraga, 2001: 49-101).



In 1912, the PRP split up, giving rise to two parties: the Evolutionary Party (*Evolucionista*), led by António José de Almeida, and the Unionist Party (*Unionista*), lead by Brito Camacho. Accordingly, what remained of the old Republican Party – now called *Partido Democrático* (Democratic Party) – represented the majority (Marques, 1991: 703-705). The splintering of the republicans went even further, as in the new years of the regime the *Independentes* (the Independents) gained prominence. They were followers of Machado Santos, who was “crowned” with the glory of having been the big winner of the republic in the morning of 5th October at Parque Eduardo VII in Lisbon.

The division and political guerrilla between these party groups continued practically unchanged until the end of the Great War in November 1918. Indeed, the great divide took place between August 1914 and December 1917², with the *democráticos* (democrats) and the evolutionists supporting the idea of active warfare in the battlefields of Europe, whereas Machado Santos’ unionists and independents opposed it by all possible means (Fraga, 2001: 84-89)³.

When one looks at the overall picture of Portugal’s domestic situation between 1910 and the end of the Great War, one realizes that conflicts criss-cross and mutually reinforce each other, because the various parties realized the vulnerabilities of each other and exploit them, in an attempt to obtain political and even social advantages.

Looking at the external panorama, let us try to understand the scenario of conflict within which Portugal had to conduct its diplomatic action, particularly in the London-Madrid-Lisbon geostrategic triangle. In the months prior to the outbreak of the revolution in October 1910, the PRP gave assurances to London that once the republic had been established, there would be no changes in the relationship with Great Britain. In the same fashion, Lisbon expected London to keep the commitments that had bound the two countries for centuries (Relvas, 1977: 221-222). But the truth is that Britain had always had a special interest in Portugal due to the strategic position it occupies in the Iberian Peninsula and Lisbon, either as a monarchy or a republic, never lost sight of the advantages it represented to Britain⁴.

However, a fear always hung with regard to the relationship with Britain: the possible closeness between London and Madrid in clear detriment of the good relationship with Portugal. This fear was neither vain nor void in meaning, as Spain had always had a special appetite for annexing Portuguese territory. The dream of Iberian unification under the hegemony of Spain would have placed the latter in a unique strategic position, and would have turned it into a single important platform with regard to the

² Date when Sidónio Pais dictatorially took power resorting to revolution and violence.

³ The war was the major generator of successive political instability in Portugal: *Movimento das Espadas* (Movement of the Swords), led by Machado Santos in December 1914; at the same time the palace coup of Manuel de Arriaga took place in order to place his friend General Pimenta de Castro as head of government, who imposed the Republic’s first dictatorship; democratic revolution of 14 May 1915 (Fraga, 2001; 167-211); revolutionary attempt by Machado Santos, from Tomar, in December 1916 (Afonso and Guerreiro, 1981); and, finally, the revolutionary and dictatorial coup of Sidónio Pais in December 1917 (Fraga, 2010 a: 439-487).

⁴ Namely: a wide coastline in the Atlantic in the route to Europe, close proximity to North Africa and the entrance to the Mediterranean, the Algarve coast acting as a possible in-depth support to Gibraltar and the adjacent archipelagos of Madeira and the Azores, which are located exactly half way between Europe and the North American continent. Before 1910, the strategic importance of Portugal was established during the Napoleonic wars, the larger scale military conflict in Europe, due the fact it was the gateway for English goods into the continent, thus rendering ineffective the blockade imposed by Napoleon and acting as a platform for the invasion of Southern Atlantic Europe.



Atlantic and the Mediterranean, further enhanced by the possession of the Mediterranean and Atlantic islands, which would have brought increased maritime power to the Peninsula.

In this context, although wanting to become less dependent on its London counterpart, the Lisbon government could not dispense the diplomatic, and, if necessary, military support of England, which made it act with redoubled caution in the capital of Britain, due to the fact that the deposed monarch lived there and the existence of British political trends that were favourable to the annexationist intentions of the Spanish king (Vincent-Smith, 1975: 43). On the other hand, Lisbon had to deal with Madrid carefully, as it knew that Spain sheltered all the active opponents of the Republic. Accordingly, flaring the tempers of a few Spanish social and political sectors could have led to the latter's increased support of Portuguese counter-revolutionaries, and, worse even, could push Spain into the arms of England.

From this brief review of the relations between Lisbon, Madrid and London, one concludes that the representatives of the republic had no easy task in hands in any of those capitals, particularly Manuel Teixeira Gomes, who was Portugal's minister plenipotentiary in London. Maintaining the equilibrium, without compromise or subservience, was the watchword.

We shall now briefly examine the potential conflict Portugal-Britain-Germany over the Portuguese possessions in Africa. The talks that had taken place between London and Berlin in the last years of the 19th century over their agreed division of Portugal's most important colonies in Africa were known to Lisbon in the period between the establishment of the republic and the outbreak of the Great War. In 1914, there were suspicions of further negotiations between Britain and Germany to, once more, endanger Portugal's colonial patrimony (Fraga, 2001: 93-101). Republican politicians knew that, on the one hand, their English counterparts had no major qualms about negotiating with the Germans the transfer of all or part of the Portuguese colonies, even the archipelagos of Madeira and the Azores, in exchange for the containment of the growth of the German merchant and war marines. On the other hand, they were also aware that Germany was anxious to have colonies in Africa and Oceania⁵.

The fact that there was an alliance between Portugal and England that went back centuries had never been a sufficient reason for the distinct governments of Portugal to rely on British decisions. A realistic foreign policy had to suspect the trickery engendered by the British rulers, as they imperturbably put the interests of Great Britain above all else. Therefore, it was clear that behind the formal alliance between Britain and Portugal, there was a climate of suspicion felt by the Portuguese, matched by British evident contempt. In other words, diplomatic relations, albeit friendly in appearance, were potentially conflicting, more than with Germany, because from the latter one could only expect hostility when its national interests, particularly in Africa, became dominating.

Having described the instabilities and the context of conflict – whether existing or in the making – that affected the republic between 1910 and the beginning of war in Europe,

⁵ Britain's *generosity*, offering Portugal's colonial territories, lasted until 1937, when London tried to appease Hitler's expansionist aspirations by *offering* Angola and Mozambique as *gifts*, in addition to the Belgian Congo (Nogueira, 2000: 171-172).



we need to take a leap in time to 1914 in order to understand the evolution of Portuguese politics in this new scenario.

1914: the interests of Britain and those of Portugal

I will not outline the interests of Britain as part of its foreign policy, since that task would exceed the objectives of the present work. However, it is important to understand at which point the national interests of Britain crossed the national interests of Portugal. When war in Europe broke out, Portugal adopted two sequential attitudes with the London government: it started by stating its neutrality and, the following day, it tried to ascertain Britain's wishes with regard to the Alliance. In other words, first it presented itself as equidistant with regard to the contenders, and then, in a more calculating, wiser and more restrained approach, it transferred the weight of the decision to London, in order not to clash Portugal's position with British interests. Portugal had to protect itself from Spain and from any eventual understanding London and Madrid may have come to have, and, at the same time, it had to protect the integrity of its colonial possessions. Accordingly, Britain had a word to say on the matter. Indeed, the most important word. London was immediately interested in guaranteeing the neutrality of Spain, whose political sympathies leaned towards Germany. Then, it was important that Germany lost its underwater cable strategic connections so as to be isolated from the rest of the world as much as possible. However, most German underwater cables were tied to Portuguese islands in the Atlantic. Moreover, it was necessary to prevent German ships from refuelling coal in those islands. In addition, Mozambican ports were crucial for reinforcing the presence of troops and war material in the colony of Southern Rhodesia.

All these interests involved Portugal, but at the same time, for the sake of Iberian equilibrium, it was necessary to ensure the neutrality of the Peninsula, which in practice was incompatible with the demands that would need to be made to the government of the young Republic. And due to the precedent provided by the Anglo-Boer war (Magalhães, 1990: 215-216), London asked Lisbon to state it was non-neutral and, simultaneously, non-belligerent. Thus Britain could ask Lisbon to carry out international belligerent actions, because the onus of the ambiguity fell on Portugal. This was too much to ask under a covenant, which, in recent times, had not given assurances to the distinct Lisbon governments other than the removal of the threat of a potential Spanish intervention.

The more radical sectors of the republican politics soon defined the real national interest of Portugal: the modification of an ambiguous status that embarrassed the young republic in the international arena (Fraga, 2001: 118-122). The change would take the form of entering war with the support of Britain. This led to a clash of interests between London and Lisbon, originating tension and, therefore, an atmosphere of conflict. The interest of Portuguese radicals in changing the status that had been requested by London was all the greater, given Portugal's ambiguity defined in Parliament on 7 August 1914 (Fraga, 2001: 113), and, about eight days later, the outrage it represented when Portugal's minister in France — João Chagas — was forbidden from receiving or sending coded telegrams, the same applying to the country's representative in Berlin — Sidónio Pais — (Fraga, 2001: 121). The German and French governments responded to a position they had not understood and which,



in different ways, frustrated their expectations. At home, the political trends immediately collided. The monarchists started to want a German victory without caring about the dangers threatening the independence of Portugal as a result of having a pro-German Spain as a neighbour (Lavrado, 1947: 249). The conservative republicans and the independents, led by Brito Camacho and Machado Santos, advocated, at best, war in the colonies to defend them from the ambitions and incursions of the Germans. The trade unions and the socialists were against any kind of belligerence (Fraga, 2001: 115-118).

Finally, the Catholics were divided and stood close either to the monarchists or to the conservative republicans. At the end of August 1914, the radical wing of the PRP led by Afonso Costa interpreted national interest in a realistic and detached manner with regard to past political experiences. A few republicans no longer involved in political and party movements were left out of this process.

The struggle of Afonso Costa and of his supporters began to focus, externally, on the termination of the ambiguity created by Britain, taking Portugal into war, since it was the only way to gain international respect and honour for the country and the Republic, while at the same time opposing the imperialist arrogance of Britain with the simple, yet dignified sovereign will of Portugal. According to the interpretation in those days, belligerence would provide safety as to the possible interference of Spain, enhance the Iberian importance of Portugal regarding a neutral Spain, save the integrity of Portugal's colonial territories, ensure Portuguese diplomats would have a seat at the peace conference, and, internally, safeguard the duration of the republic (Fraga, 2010 b: 103-106).

As can be seen, the context of conflict in which Portugal had to act was complex both internally and internationally. It was necessary to overcome the opposition of the conservative forces and the resistance of the Foreign Office and, wherever possible, link the two actions, given that, internally, the resistance would decrease if belligerence was requested by Britain.

Having now explained the bundle of interests at stake and the dormant conflicts behind them, I shall now briefly analyse Portugal's diplomacy and how it proceeded in the three capital cities most involved in the Great War.

Diplomacy and Portuguese diplomats in three European capitals

It should be noted that the ministers plenipotentiary of Portugal in London, Paris and Berlin, although unquestionably republican, were not affiliated to any party faction. They were personalities who, before or after their appointment to their posts, generally enjoyed the political support of Brito Camacho⁶, as they belonged to the range of republican intellectuals the latter was so fond of. Still, this fact did not prevent them from relating easily with António José de Almeida or even with Afonso Costa.

At this point, it is important to understand how diplomatic activity was perceived in Portugal and, to some extent, across Europe. Accordingly, the republic, in line with the monarchy, still followed the French diplomacy paradigm that had emerged in France in

⁶ João Chagas should be excluded from this assessment, as he had little sympathy for the Unionist leader who, in turn, believed Chagas to be closer to Afonso Costa than he actually was.



the 17th century and remained throughout the 18th century, requiring diplomats to master the art of negotiating (Moreira, 2002: 80-82). They did not make politics; they executed politics through negotiation, using the delimited powers conferred to them, and only those powers. The diplomat was basically an intermediary that conveyed information, understood the signs and acted in order to attain the objectives set from above. It is true that high-level meetings took place during state visits, but they did not yet have the negotiating impact of some of today's visits. They were forms of contact to iron out the negotiations that governments would undertake, since, particularly after the French Revolution and the Congress of Vienna, sovereignty lied increasingly on the nation and not on the sovereign representing it. To a certain extent, it was United States President Thomas Woodrow Wilson who introduced high-level talks between heads of state and heads of government in Europe in 1919, when signing the Peace Treaty and the creation of the League of Nations (Kissinger, 1996: 200). Of course diplomats continued to fulfil their negotiating mission; however, it became clear that something was changing in the relationship between states, hence, in their possible role.

Manuel Teixeira Gomes, a large farm proprietor in the Algarve and owner of a stable dry fruit exporting company, a writer and traveller, used to negotiating and an affable gentleman (Rodrigues, 1946), was invited to represent the republic in London in 1910. His mission was extremely difficult because, in addition to London being the city chosen by King Manuel II to be in exile, it was where the Marquis of Soveral, the former Portuguese minister accredited to the court, lived, and he moved within the British diplomatic circles with great ease. All the difficulties that the Portuguese foreign policy went through between 1910 and 1914 had some impact on England, and Teixeira Gomes took charge of them with much skill, knowing how to overcome the hurdles that certain areas of British policy created in relation to Portugal (Gomes, s. d.: 20). Perhaps the most difficult moment for Teixeira Gomes before the outbreak of the Great War was in 1913, when there were rumours about the new Anglo-German agreement concerning Portugal's colonies. The minister made incessant contacts with the Foreign Office until he was able to confirm the existence of an understanding that revived the 1898 agreement, although Sir Edward Grey, British Foreign Minister, believed that the new document had proper dissemination. Teixeira Gomes contributed greatly to this end (Silva, 2006: 328-329). Germany disagreed with the publication of the agreement and only agreed with it on the eve of war, on 28 July 1914.

At the outbreak of the Great War, Teixeira Gomes merely followed Lisbon's instructions, at the same time he conveyed to the government of the republic all the information deemed relevant and that would enable the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to make the wiser decisions. Although he never stated it categorically, Teixeira Gomes made it clear he was not a supporter of Portuguese belligerence, although realising that, ultimately, it ensured Portugal's security internationally and, in particular, in the peninsula. Incidentally, D. Manuel II came to the same conclusion because, being in a centre of important decisions, he received information from Portugal and from Spain and, as Teixeira Gomes, he feared the ambitions of Alfonso XIII (Lavrado, 1947: 250).

At the suggestion of Brito Camacho, Artillery Major Sidónio Pais, a full professor at the University of Coimbra, was chosen to represent Portugal in Berlin. He went to the capital of Germany in September 1912. At first he stayed in a hotel because the



Legation was not inhabitable, and he had to wait over a month before moving in, buying most of the furniture at his own expense.

From a political perspective, in those days Germany could be described in one sentence: "autocratic monarchy with a few parliamentary ornaments" (Silva, 2006: 315), which allows us to question the importance that such an experience may have had on the future behaviour of Sidónio Pais. We shall never fully know in this regard. At the diplomatic level, we know that foreign affairs were riddled with tricks, whereas intrigue abounded in internal affairs. Diplomats obeyed blindly to the *Kaiser* without contesting his orders, which removed their capacity for independent negotiation, turning them into mere transmitters of a will that came from above (Silva, 2006: 315-316).

It was with this type of diplomats that Sidónio Pais had to carry out instructions from Lisbon, which were to convince, as best as possible, the German market to buy Portuguese products, namely cocoa from the S. Tomé colony. This was a mission of charm that Sidónio Pais tried to accomplish during the first years of his stay in Berlin, by establishing relationships with some journalists working for the press with a wide circulation in the capital and even in Germany. His task was not easy, as the news sent to the Reich's capital by the German correspondents in Lisbon discredited the information that the minister so diligently gave in interviews to Berlin's newspapers (Silva, 2006: 318-321). Perhaps the greatest difficulty Sidónio Pais had to face regarding the fulfilment of the mission he had been assigned was the huge bureaucratic barrier that restricted his access to decision-making entities, even within the German Foreign Affairs Ministry.

The Minister Plenipotentiary had the opportunity to slightly expand his limited ability to manoeuvre when the news that Germany and Britain were about to reactivate the 1898 agreement on Portugal's colonies started to circulate in February 1913. At the time, the Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Zimmermann, received him, assuring him that Portugal's colonies were not at any type of risk, and that Germany only wished to expand its trade with the approval of London and Lisbon. This was enough for the Portuguese minister to be sure that something was being plotted (Silva, 2006: 327) and he informed the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic. Not satisfied, Sidónio Pais requested an audience with Germany's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, who was so peremptory, so convincing, so honest that Sidónio Pais was absolutely sure that nothing was being negotiated behind the republic's back (Silva, 2006: 327).

With the outbreak of war in August 1914, all communication with the Portuguese Foreign Ministry began to be made through the chargé d'affaires of Portugal in Berne. This represented the end of a diplomatic presence. However, the Minister of Foreign Affairs could still see that Sidónio Pais was clearly in favour to Portugal's neutrality in the conflict that was about to start⁷.

João Chagas was appointed Minister Plenipotentiary to Paris on 23 March 1911. He was a republican journalist, a pamphleteer, well-spoken, polite, elegant, a distinguished gentleman who had taken part in the revolution of 31 January 1891. For this reason, he was arrested and deported to Angola, but never lost his political convictions. After

⁷ Moreover, Sidónio Pais was on his way to Lisbon to spend the summer holiday when war broke out in Europe. He did not stay long in Portugal, returning to his post after having conferred with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Colonel Freire de Andrade.



-serving the sentence, he returned to Portugal and, as a freemason, conspired in the last stage of the monarchy. Together with António José de Almeida, he ended up assuming responsibility for the higher civilian organisation that followed the military in the revolution. This led him to establish close links with the Carbonária society.

When he had been in post for a few months, in early September 1911 the newly elected President of the Republic Manuel de Arriaga convened him to form the first constitutional government of the republic. His detachment from the republican tendencies that would fracture the PRP had been acknowledged. This government did not last longer than a few months, as in the beginning of November it no longer had the parliamentary support of the more conservative wings — almeidistas (supporters of José de Almeida) and camachistas (supporters of Camacho). He was given the Legation in Paris once more, by decree of 21 November. The mission he was given was not as complex as that of Teixeira Gomes, but was not as simple as that of Sidónio Pais.

In 1910, the Republic of Portugal had broken with the tradition of a monarchical Europe⁸, becoming a reproached, even feared republic, due to its adoption of social and political behaviours of unexpected radicalism. France, already politically and socially more appeased, represented a model for Portuguese republicans, who expected ideological solidarity from the country. Therefore, João Chagas had to placate the opinion of the most conservative French social sectors.

Due to his long experience as a journalist, his command of the French language and natural elegance, it was hoped that he would intercede with the main French newspapers and soften the picture that was being outlined of a Jacobin Portugal. It was also hoped that he would be able to penetrate in a correct, pervasive and persistent way in the political and social circles of Paris to present a more orderly and temperate image of Portugal, one of a country less subservient to the wishes of Britain but in need of all support to be able to overcome the obstacles it was facing. Alongside this mission, João Chagas was expected to remove the leeway enjoyed by the monarchists who were exiled in France or conspired there. Accordingly, the mission of the Portuguese Minister Plenipotentiary to Paris was complicated. He was able to bring it to fruition, thanks to his tactfulness, consideration and the vast knowledge he acquired in the French capital and his ease of access to the France's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Novais, 2006: 43-53).

Of all our representatives in the most important European capitals — London, Berlin and Paris — he was the one who had greater success in accomplishing the mission assigned to him. Such success can only be justified by a combination of extrinsic and intrinsic factors. He benefitted from the social atmosphere that pervaded the French capital, which he was able to take advantage of thanks to the excellent relations he established as a result of his intelligence and personality⁹.

João Chagas was undoubtedly insightful, had a broad view of international politics and excellent knowledge of Portuguese politics. Moreover, he was in a great position to be aware of the distinct conflicts that took place between 1911 and 1914, since he was not at the centre of decisions, like Teixeira Gomes, or unaware of them, such as Sidónio Pais. Thus, he was sufficiently distant from the facts, which gave him the insight to

⁸ The exceptions were France and Switzerland.

⁹ Just check any of the four volumes of the diary he kept to understand the intense social life he led.



intelligently discern the interests of Portugal amidst the webs being woven and that pushed Europe into war. On 2 August 1914, he wrote the following passage, which I underline, in his Diary:

"This afternoon the German Ambassador was still in Paris. Thus, it is confirmed that Germany wanted war and wove it in collusion with its Austrian sister. *I am not proud of my good sight, but I believe I have seen it.* Germany's attitude was ambiguous. *One must always be wary of ambiguity*" (Chagas, 1930: 125-126)¹⁰.

The self-profile of the Portuguese minister in Paris is thus described in a few sentences. And how did João Chagas see the situation in Portugal on that very same day 2 of August? More than a mere impression, he writes the only strategy that his country should follow in his Diary:

"Pressed by me with questions sent by telegraph on what would be Portugal's attitude in case Britain intervened, the Foreign Minister told me that Portugal would be neutral 'except if Britain demanded the fulfilment of the treaties'. I was heartbroken! What! Portugal does not understand that now is the time, or never, to redeem its past tutelage of England and be its ally, be somebody! My poor country! Beautiful country! Ugly men! Ugly animals!" (Chagas, 1930: 28).

It is not the diplomat speaking; it is the politician that writes this outburst in his Diary. And he will play a key role in the first change of the ambiguity he disliked.

A diplomat doing politics: the solution of the insoluble

We have examined the international stance adopted by the Portuguese government in August 1914 following the request made by Britain – non-neutral and non-belligerent – and how only the more radical republican wing – the *democrats* – was willing to fight off this attitude, as it opposed the interests of Portugal. Without having exchanged views with representatives of this republican ideological segment, on 2 August, as soon as French troops moved to the battlefield, João Chagas concluded, like them, that Portugal's national interest required the country to fight on the side of Britain

In 1990 when I wrote the results of my research for a master dissertation on strategy¹¹, I was the first to notice that João Chagas played a key role in the first attempt to change Portugal's status in the conflict that had broken out in Europe (Fraga, 1990: 149-155). Six years later, without acknowledging my research, Nuno Severiano Teixeira came to the same conclusion (Teixeira, 1996: 226-231) and, several years later, Noémia Malva Novais referred vaguely to my work and revisited the topic

¹⁰ My italics.

¹¹ Titled *Portugal e a Primeira Grande Guerra: Os Objectivos Políticos e a Estratégia Nacional: 1914-1916*.



(Novais, 2006: 73-78). I am convinced that this is a situation that deserves a place within History of International relations in Portugal since it reflects a rare attitude in the life of a diplomat, for which reason I believe it is worth explaining what, over twenty years ago, I brought to the attention of the scientific community: how was it possible for a man – a diplomat – outside his normal workplace to intervene in any significant way, indeed as a politician, in the decisions of the government of his country resorting to diplomatic mechanisms.

Early in the war, due to the risk of Paris being bombed or even occupied, the French government moved to Bordeaux. As was his duty, João Chagas also moved to that city. On 8 September 1914, he left Bordeaux and went to Lisbon, on the grounds that the government of his country had not officially ordered, as was usual, the statement underpinning Portugal's international situation over the armed conflict to be handed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France. In my view, this was a merely formal excuse to start what I describe as going beyond his competences, no longer acting as diplomat but as a politician. João Chagas was not the kind of person to act on impulse. He wanted to reverse the course of Portugal's foreign affairs. Accordingly, he devised an interesting and effective plan.

By way of a parenthesis, there is an important detail that enables us to understand the relationship between the brief account I gave earlier and the attitude of João Chagas I shall describe next: the characteristics of the Cabinet that faced the onset of the Great War in Portugal.

By decision of the President of the Republic Manuel Arriaga, on 9 February 1914, the one-year old stable government led by Afonso Costa was replaced by a *party tight* Cabinet led by Bernardino Machado. As its name indicates, it was a government where all republican political tendencies coexisted, in an attempt to manage the equilibrium. Possibly as a result of this feature, it proved unable to set definite directions to ascertain the national interests of Portugal. It lacked the strength of popular legitimacy achieved at the polls and confirmed in Parliament. To some extent, this was what made Portugal accept the ambiguity of the request made by Britain with regard to Portugal's position in the war. In any case, as soon as the Minister Plenipotentiary to France arrived in Lisbon, he sought and managed to get in contact with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Colonel Freire de Andrade, to learn about the situation, which, seemingly purposely, he had not been informed about.

On 11 September, Freire de Andrade said to João Chagas that he believed that the latter's wish was "to send a Portuguese expedition to the battlefields". In the own words of Portugal's minister in France

"I dissuaded him. I told him what my wish was, which was to see the country in a clear situation, [...]. It is necessary to define the position of the country through diplomatic means. To help him understand, I told him that the official text of the statements of the Prime Minister should have been, or had to be, communicated by letter to the Ministers of Germany and Austria" (Chagas, 1930: 215).



This transcript is enough to realise that Portugal postponed the solution of an abstentionist stance that should have been resolved at the outset of hostilities in Europe. In addition, we also come to know what Freire de Andrade, at least, thought of João Chagas.

My view is further reinforced by the fact that João Chagas resorted to a diplomatic reason to come to Lisbon. That was the justification, but not the purpose. Accordingly, after a meeting with the British Minister Plenipotentiary Lancelot Carnegie, to whom he skilfully demonstrated the lack of transparency in the way the British government was dealing with the government of Portugal, he met the French Minister in Lisbon, named Deaschner. He writes nothing important about this meeting, held on 12 September, in his Diary. A careful analysis of all entries over a four-year period shows that João Chagas was quite wordy, to the extent of writing about details that current readers would find insignificant. The absence of detailed information about the meeting with Deaschner is, thus, an odd fact and almost an unusual slip.

On 14 September, João Chagas wrote about another meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs:

"I told him that, in order to take up my post, he should give me the authority to make a clear communication to the French government. I even told him what the contents of that communication should be. He immediately agreed. There was a Cabinet meeting this afternoon, which he called for to assess the situation of Portugal, a matter that I had raised in my official correspondence. Freire de Andrade *informed me that the Cabinet had thought that the attitude that had been taken was the best. I did not insist, because I still hope that forthcoming events will force the government to change it. My efforts need to be tenacious, but discreet*" (Chagas, 1930: 223)¹².

Note how João Chagas associated matters and how he concluded, with almost total certainty, about the need to change the government's attitude.

It is easy to think that Chagas was thinking of carrying out, or supporting, some revolutionary act. That could not be further from the truth. The minister enjoyed his post; he would leave it when he was sure a large majority, at the *request* of political leaders, would accept him, as was the case in May 1915, when he accepted to be President of the Council of Ministers. By then he had left the Portuguese representation in Paris to serve the dictatorial government of Pimenta de Castro. To further strengthen my point, it should be recalled that on 6 September 1914, while still in Bordeaux, he had assured journalist Hermano Neves "*that he had already carried out enough revolutions, and what Portugal needed now was order*" (Chagas, 1930: 210).

After the meeting with Freire de Andrade on 14 September, the following day João Chagas returned to the Foreign Ministry for a new interview, during which the head of Portuguese diplomacy told him he had been *approached* by the *minister of France* with

¹² My italics.



the aim of investigating whether the government would be willing to *give any weapons* to his country.

"He [Freire de Andrade] replied that *Portugal would willingly concede France a few riffles, as long as men to handle them went along too. He could not give the riffles alone.*" (Chagas, 1930: 225)¹³.

Let us examine the situation. Before leaving for Lisbon, on 7 September João Chagas had a meeting with Delcassé, Minister of Foreign Affairs of France, to whom he hinted that he would not return to his post if the Portuguese government did not clarify its position to the Bordeaux government, as was customary. On the twelfth, he had his first contact with the minister of France in Lisbon and did not provide details of interest about the meeting held a few days earlier. On the 14th, he was awaiting developments that "perhaps" would require the Portuguese government to change its position. On the 15th, Freire de Andrade told him what I have transcribed earlier and Chagas *did no enter any comment on his Diary*. All this is strange and suggests that João Chagas was secretly involved in the request made by the French government. This move can only be understood if we go back to the meeting he held with the French Minister of Foreign Affairs on the 7th. In order to explain his unexpected departure from Bordeaux, he said

"I asked my government's permission to go to Lisbon to deal with a [note the term used] *matter about which we have not been in complete agreement* [note how he "opens the game" with Delcassé, using minced words]. *He said with a smile* [note the "smile" detail]: — *Politics!* [Delcassé was sounding things out to confirm his suspicions] I interrupted him: — *No! I am interested about the internal politics of my country, but not passionate about it* [João Chagas stirs the curiosity of the French minister ... what is he passionate about then?] *This is a broader issue regarding national politics* [he is giving his interlocutor all the clues; let him understand, but still have doubts...]. *I am committed to my country having an absolutely clear cut position with regard to the war* [It's all said! Chagas has opened the way for Delcassé to be able to manoeuvre from then on, especially as the Minister Plenipotentiary knew only too well that following Bernardino Machado's ambiguous statement in Parliament on 7 August, France started to think that Portugal was informing the world about its belligerence]. *Your Excellency knows what the views of the Portuguese government on this matter are, and how the country feels about this* [Chagas now wants to be sure the French Minister of Foreign Affairs understands him correctly]. *Our sympathy for France...* *He interrupted: Franco-anglaise...* [says Delcassé, to prove he is aware of the links between Lisbon and London]

¹³ My italics.



Certainly *franco-anglaise*, but even if we currently share our sympathies between the two countries, France's sympathies are not smaller [João Chagas thus let the French minister know which side he was on, and extended his hand to him in an act of alliance]. However, there are some inaccuracies in our politics that I believe should be ironed out. And I added: Should I take up my post again, that will be a sign that those inaccuracies no longer exist [Chagas was urging the French government to take action urgently, and at the same time he was making a clear warning].

Delcassé made a movement clearly expressing his satisfaction and told me: — In that case, I sincerely hope you will come back soon [the message had been understood..., all that was needed was a confirmation ...the empirical realization of the trust that Chagas placed in his mission in Lisbon]. He asked me if my wife would be joining me in my trip [Chagas understood the reason behind his question ...]. — No. My wife stays [the Portuguese minister was astute]. And I added, to ensure he had understood me correctly: — She will stay until I come back, or until she needs to join me in Lisbon [it was all said, I trust my mission will be successful, but one always has to think of distinct outcomes, including the possibility of France doing nothing to help me in my mission!]. The two men shook hands vigorously [they had understood each other without committing themselves to anything]" (Chagas, 1930:211-212)¹⁴.

Following this explanation, let us go back to Lisbon and try to understand the attitude of Portugal's Foreign Minister with regard to the request made by the French plenipotentiary.

Freire de Andrade, who had always favoured Portugal's neutrality, immediately decided that the country would show a belligerent stance — the same Freire de Andrade who only informed Teixeira Gomes of France's request for artillery supplies on 24 September (Estrangeiros, 1920: 40) and who, on 26 October, wrote the following to the above-mentioned minister in London:

"Given the fact that the British government has supported France's request for us to provide it with artillery, I *immediately* wished that this request had been made directly by Britain under the terms of the English Alliance. However, *right from the onset there have been divergences with the War Minister*, who felt that the fact of *sending only artillery* to the detriment of other weapons *would not go down well* in the Army. [...]. In this regard, his stance was uncompromising [...]" (Estrangeiros, 1920: 66)¹⁵.

¹⁴ The comments in square brackets are mine and have the purpose of clarifying the subliminal messages exchanged between the two men.

¹⁵ My italics.



In view of this transcript, there are only two possibilities: either João Chagas lied in his Diary, or minister Freire de Andrade was a liar and a coward, since he was the one who first stated he was in favour of belligerence when he spoke to France's Minister Plenipotentiary earlier when the latter asked him to supply weapons. Personally, I believe in the second hypothesis, although of course I am not one hundred per cent certain.

I have attempted to demonstrate how João Chagas, as a diplomat and using this status, undoubtedly carried out internal and external politics to clarify Portugal's position regarding the Great War, overcoming all existing fears concerning clashes and conflict, at home and abroad. Going beyond his competences, Portugal's minister in France went above the Portuguese government, and in collusion with France's Minister of Foreign Affairs, not clearly verbalized, he went over Britain's will and for a while he changed the status that the latter had imposed upon Portugal. In case any doubts persist with regard to my interpretation of the events, let us go back to João Chagas' Diary to disperse them, and see what he wrote in the days that followed France's request.

Thanks to him, we know that Bernardino Machado was double dealing Freire de Andrade, because on the one hand he asked him not to leave his post as Minister of Foreign Affairs, and on the other he privately accused him of betraying his orders (Chagas, 1930: 229), although the Prime Minister was the author of the ambiguous statement made on 7 August. João Chagas had a low opinion of him due to his political zigzagging, and knew that Bernardino Machado was anxious for him to return to his post in Bordeaux as soon as possible. Accordingly, on 16 September he wrote in his Diary:

*"This is how this abominable impostor [Bernardino Machado] wants to let me know that I am over extending my stay in Lisbon. I have stayed long enough and there is nothing left for me to do here. What is left to do will be up to those who stay here"*¹⁶ (Chagas, 1930: 229-230).

I believe there is no need for further evidence that Portugal's minister in France only came to Lisbon to alter the course of the international stance that the country had adopted as a result of the ambiguous British request. This is what can be inferred from what Chagas wrote. But let us go a bit further to clarify any possible doubts.

Once he was back in Bordeaux, on 21 September Chagas sent the Minister of Foreign Affairs of France the statement he had written in Lisbon with Freire de Andrade, and waited for Delcassé to call. The meeting only took place on 3 October. In his Diary Chagas describes some of the conversations held with Delcassé, with the caution that is common in diplomatic contacts:

¹⁶ My italics.



"[...] in order to initiate the matter I wanted him to talk about, I discreetly alluded to the request for artillery material made by France's minister in Lisbon. He confirmed the request [i.e. he had understood the message Chagas had passed on to him at the last meeting before his departure]. He said that France had three thousand pieces of artillery, but added — *il y a de blessée* (he meant they were deteriorated) which need to be sent to the arsenals ... What intrigued me in Freire de Andrade's telegram was him telling me that the French government had asked for the pieces and the ... gunners [i.e. the French Minister Plenipotentiary in Lisbon meanwhile had recast the request according to Freire de Andrade's initial reaction]. I also mentioned this fact discreetly, which he also confirmed, changing the word to — *attendants*. This is when I told him that this act implied involvement in the war, and that in this case the number of attendants was insufficient [...], and I clearly asked him for his opinion on this matter [Chagas had come to the conclusion it was time to speak clearly]. He exclaimed in a frank manner: — Portugal's involvement in the war?! Do you want my opinion? My personal opinion is that would be great [Chagas thus realized that his efforts had not only been understood but greatly appreciated by France]. And he added: *On n'est jamais de trop*. I thought to myself— *À la bonne heure!* [as can be noted, the understanding had been perfect and João Chagas' 'mission' a success!] (Chagas, 1930: 258-259)¹⁷.

Conclusion

In order to understand the timeliness of João Chagas' action it was necessary to outline a complex situation, both internally and externally, and then emphasize the analysis of the atypical behaviour of Portugal's Minister Plenipotentiary to France. His performance between 1911 and 1914 was paradigmatic, given that, amidst the most critical periods of Portuguese politics in a context of major turmoil and conflict, and by combining his diplomatic status with his sensitivity and political experience, he was able to define a national strategic change which, indeed, was the responsibility of the government and not of an individual who was a mere representative and negotiator. The political inversion triggered by João Chagas did not linger because the opposing forces had time to get an almost immediate regression. Another year was required to ensure that the conditions that would lead Portugal to take the position coveted by João Chagas were present, both at home and abroad. Months later, when it was no longer possible to return to the point of departure, Britain first and Sidónio Pais later placed Portuguese politics in a situation of compromise (Fraga, 2010 a: 637), demonstrating that the limited prospects of a policy lacking audacity or broad horizons stood above the values of a clear national strategy. At this point, I believe it calls for a brief reflection on the legitimacy, or absence of it, of the conduct of João Chagas, as a diplomatic agent, to act by himself in defiance of instructions from his government. Indeed, diplomats have the duty of negotiating within the limits imposed on them, leaving their political

¹⁷ The comments in brackets are mine.



convictions out of the arena where discussions between states are held. From a restrictive view, the behaviour of Portugal's representative in France was wrong. However, as in very special circumstances involving military commanders, he realized that the national interest would be in serious danger if rulers pursued a policy of ambiguity with regard to the war that was about to start. When he became aware of it, he attempted to draw the government's attention to the change in course Portugal's foreign policy was going through. He did so in the correct way, dictated by the ethics inherent to the post he held. He was not listened to, nor understood, regardless of the fact that he was out of the country and in a privileged position to assess the international legitimacy of Portugal's belligerence. For this reason alone he went beyond the rigorous boundaries of the ethical fulfilment of his mission, and conspired internationally — without leaving incriminating traces— against the government of the state he represented. The government's *deafness*, dictated by excessive submission to the will of London, legitimized the action of João Chagas, who knew he was not politically isolated in terms of the observation of Portuguese foreign affairs in 1914. In order to better serve, he went over the limit, and ultimately saw his action legitimized by the political party led by Afonso Costa that came into power, achieving the desired belligerence in March 1916. Thus, one concludes that in very specific circumstances where state sovereignty is seriously at risk, whole or in part, and all legal possibilities to correct the course of matters in foreign affairs have been exhausted, the diplomat, when backed by internal support representing the majority and justifying his attitude, gains legitimacy to subvert the instructions received by the government he represents on behalf of the nation's best interest. In doing so, he is acting on behalf of the nation and not merely because he openly disagrees with it in a conflicting manner, in which case resignation is the only ethical way out.

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