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AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN PORTUGUESE AFRICA:

THE LEGACY OF THE NIXON YEARS *

by

Mohamed A. El-Khawas

Recent media revelation of the secret 1969 study by the National Security Council--NSM 39--did not startle students of African history. Jack Anderson's columns on Kissinger's African tilt aroused very little discussion among academicians, activists and diplomats, largely because it carried no new information. Criticism has long been voiced toward the pro-Portuguese stance of U.S. policy throughout the 1960's. The late President of FRELIMO, Dr. Eduardo Mondlane, once complained that *since John F. Kennedy's death, we have sensed the trend in the U.S. in favor of Portugal.*¹

The Portuguese tilt in American policy stems from the strategic military importance of Portugal, due particularly to the Azores but also to its African holdings along the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, to American cold-war defense planning.² U.S. military interests in maintaining Portugal's friendship as a NATO ally thus served as the guiding factor influencing American policy toward events in Angola, Mozambique, or Guinea (Bissau). This reinforced the existing U.S. tendency to perceive Africa's colonial problems from a European perspective.

John F. Kennedy was the first American President to break away from the traditional U.S. policy. In the early 1960's, when wars of liberation broke out in one colony after another in Africa, Kennedy at first initiated a strong anti-colonial policy toward Portugal. This policy, grounded in the ideal of national rights to self-determination, resulted in a clouding of Luso-American relations and threatened to jeopardize renewal of the Azores agreement. Consequently, toward the end of his term, Kennedy had to change his earlier stance to one more accommodative of Portugal's colonial policy in order to ensure American access to the naval and air base at the Azores, considered indispensable to cold-war defense plans by the Pentagon.³

*This article was originally presented at the 1974 Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, Palmer House Hotel, Chicago, Illinois, October 30-November 2.

His successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, would remain sympathetic to the Portuguese position. General statements might be made in support of the principle of self-determination, but they were always overshadowed by the strong expressed preference for orderly, peaceful, and rational settlement of Portugal's African problems. Although the general American preoccupation with the Vietnamese war relegated Portuguese colonial problems to the bottom of American foreign policy priorities⁴--unfortunately a typical status for African issues--there is evidence of a substantial Portuguese tilt throughout the Johnson years. Most noticeable, perhaps, were the many loopholes that were allowed in the U.S. arms embargo against Portugal. The Johnson administration continued the sale of arms to Portugal and the training of Portuguese personnel and paid little or no attention to the claims about Portuguese use of arms and material supplied under the NATO agreement in its African wars. U.S. trade with Angola and Mozambique more than doubled during the Johnson years, along with an upswing in American investment. At the end of his term, the number of American companies operating in Portuguese African territories reached thirty, most of them starting operations there after 1965.

President Nixon, shortly after coming to the White House, apparently took a further step, by deciding to maintain *public opposition* to Portugal's African policies through a relaxation of pressure. In the context of the recent media dismay over the issue of a Portuguese tilt in American policy, it would seem useful to examine the evidence of recent American actions toward Portuguese Africa in some detail.

Nixon's Approach to Portuguese Africa

Luso-American relations took a turn to the good in 1969 with both the inauguration of President Nixon and the end of the Salazar regime. The new Prime Minister Caetano swiftly moved to improve his relationship with Washington by suggesting the opening of the Azores talks, although at an unspecified date. In return, the Nixon administration expressed its readiness to consider any proposals, and the matter was discussed informally on several occasions during the next year.

Thus, early in his administration, Nixon proceeded to develop his own views and policies toward Portugal and its African territories. To do so, he had to work out a position reconciling the two conflicting purposes--American economic and strategic interests versus African self-determination in Portuguese Africa--that had earlier faced his predecessors in office. A basic decision needed to be made as to whether his administration would reassert the pro-African policy first initiated by the Kennedy administration or adopt a policy more in line with conservative and pro-business attitudes.

Under the direction of Henry A. Kissinger, then national security affairs advisor to the President, the staff of the National Security Council prepared a lengthy secret report which suggested several policy alternatives toward southern Africa, including Angola and Mozambique. The report, known as National Security Study Memorandum 39 (NSSM 39), outlined the administration's alternatives as follows:

Option one--Closer association with the white regimes to protect and enhance our economic, strategic and scientific interests.

Option two--Broader association of the black states in reducing tensions and violence. This included the premise that constructive change can come only by acquiescence of the white and, therefore, selective relaxation of our stance toward the white states was advocated, with increased, but very nominal, economic aid to black states.

Option three--Limited association with the white states and continuing association with the blacks to retain some economic, scientific, and strategic interest in the white states, with a racial posture acceptable to the blacks, but with opposition to violence.

Option four--Disassociation from the white regimes with closer relations with the black states.

Option five--Disassociation from both black and white states in an effort to limit our involvement in the problems of the area. 5

It is widely believed that the policy choice made by the President, on Kissinger's recommendation, centered on the second option. It was based on the premise that

The whites are here to stay (in southern Africa) and the only way that constructive change can come about is through them. There is no hope for the blacks to gain the political rights they seek through violence, which will only lead to chaos and increased opportunities for the Communists.

We can, by selective relaxation of our stance toward the white regimes, encourage some modification of their current radical and colonial policies and through more substantial economic assistance to the black states (a total of about \$5 million annually in technical assistance to the black states) help to draw the groups together and exert some influence on both for peaceful change.

Our tangible interests form a basis for our contacts in the region, and these can be maintained at an acceptable political cost. 6

Accordingly, the Nixon administration decided to maintain *public opposition* to Portuguese policies in Africa, but to pursue a *quiet policy of more relaxed relations*. The desire was to *increase communication and selective involvement* with Portugal on the theory that friendly persuasion rather than condemnation would be likely to bring about changes in Portugal's colonial policies.⁸

This new policy has had its impact on the U.S. voting behavior in the United Nations. The U.S. has repeatedly voted against resolutions condemning Portugal for its refusal to recognize the right of the people in the Portuguese territories to self-determination and independence or expressing concern over the intensification of foreign economic activities in these territories or appealing for a stop to the training of Portuguese military personnel and the sale of arms.⁹ A comment in *The Economist* noted that *Nixon's administration has used the veto more freely than its predecessors*.¹⁰

In 1970, the U.S. moved to *stifle any criticism of Portugal's colonial role in Africa* by more liberal members of NATO such as Norway and Canada, a strategy which (would) in fact enable a more *silent and cohesive coordination of aid to Portugal*.¹¹ This was a part of concerted efforts by the U.S. to extend the NATO zone as far as the Cape of Good Hope in an attempt to combat the increasingly growing threat of Soviet naval power in the Indian Ocean. In 1970, Portugal's Defense Minister Rebelo offered NATO the use of its *territories and bases outside the NATO zone, which could help control the vast area of the whole Atlantic*.¹²

The Nixon doctrine calling for *regional and defense arrangements which provide and take advantage of shared responsibilities* was welcomed by Prime Minister Caetano. He interpreted Nixon's call for defense to be *assumed by local and regional forces* to mean that NATO should openly support Portugal in its colonial wars in Angola, Guinea (Bissau) and Mozambique. Caetano, in his *Guidelines of Foreign Policy* (1970), stated that

*The West is a bloc, but this solidarity cannot be limited to a few matters located on the territory of Europe...At all times and everywhere in the world its values or vital interests are threatened, we have the duty of defending them.*¹³

As John Marcum has noted, the Azores fit very well into the Nixon doctrine emphasis on *strategic entrenchment into detached insular bases* in a way that a *potent military outreach* could still be maintained.¹⁴

As of March, 1971, a new agreement had not yet been reached on the Azores. Caetano thereupon began to exert pressure for an agreement to be concluded; he announced that American use of the Azores base could not continue without a formal agreement and threatened to make it just a NATO base whose operation would be restricted to NATO uses.¹⁵ Some months later, the executive agreement was signed with Portugal. In exchange for utilization of the Azores bases, it authorized the U.S. Export-Import Bank to extend a credit-loan to Portugal of \$436 million, a figure four times the total amount the Export-Import Bank had extended to Portugal between 1946 and 1971. It was a five-year accord and was made retroactive to 1969, the date when first written communication was exchanged between the two governments.¹⁶

The terms of the agreement represent substantial change in American foreign policy in a direction strongly favorable to Portugal. Such a move was very much in line with Kissinger's interest in NATO, with his overriding concern with the Troubled Partnership, and with his vast and deliberate efforts to revise the North Atlantic Charter. Aside from the strategic value of the Azores for refueling transport aircraft enroute to Europe, Portugal's NATO membership was undoubtedly an important factor in the Nixon Administration's decision to remain friendly toward Portugal even at the cost of sacrificing African friendship. The beneficial terms of the agreement, especially the provision of \$436 million in aid and loans to Portugal, reflect the administration's desire to better American-Portuguese relations, and should be seen in the context of Kissinger's grand design of strengthening NATO members economically and militarily prior to the conclusion of SALT talks and the subsequent reduction of American troop strength in Europe.¹⁷

Table 1

Exports of American Aircraft and Helicopters
to Angola, Mozambique, and Portugal: 1965-1972

Year	Angola		Mozambique		Portugal	
	Number	Value	Number	Value	Number	Value
1965	5	\$209,940	1	\$23,177	5	\$7,021,428
1966	7	\$248,196	-	-	1	\$14,667
1967	16	\$360,647	-	-	7	\$14,132,912
1968	11	\$303,556	1	\$105,122	14	\$25,370,505
1969	5	\$211,056	2	\$7,576,956	9	\$7,753,035
1970	12	\$477,797	21	\$808,030	10	\$16,458,256
1971	23	\$513,908	1	\$5,143,175	9	\$10,487,256
1972	-	-	13	\$881,678	10	\$57,936,512
Subtotal, 1965-68,	39	\$1,122,339	2	\$128,299	27	\$46,539,512
Subtotal, 1969-72	40	\$1,202,761	37	\$14,409,839	38	\$92,635,307

Source: Bureau of the Census, FT-410 Export Statistics.

Because of strong criticism,¹⁸ the Nixon administration found it necessary to give assurances that the new Azores agreement did not mean any departure from the long-standing American policy of support for self-determination in the Portuguese colonies. This position was made clear in the testimony of Undersecretary of State U. Alexis Johnson in hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations during 1972.¹⁹

The official American view was not shared by the Portuguese government, however. According to *Noticias de Portugal*, Marcello Caetano announced that

The treaty is a political act in which the solidarity of interests between the two countries is recognized and it is in the name of that solidarity that we put an instrument of action at the disposal of our American friends, who are also now allies. ²⁰

The shift in American policy had its impact on the U.S. arms embargo against Portuguese territories. In 1970, revised guidelines were issued permitting "more liberal treatment" of dual purpose equipment (that could be used for civilian or military purposes). Consequently, Portugal was able to purchase helicopters, aircraft, large airliners and other equipment that could be converted to military usage if the need arose.²¹ (See Table 1). Between 1971 and 1972, for example, the Nixon administration authorized the direct sale of two Boeing 707s and two Boeing 747s to Portugal for use as military transport planes in Africa. Moreover, the Export-Import Bank authorized loans and guarantees supporting the sale of a number of Rockwell aircraft under the cooperative financing arrangement extended to Portugal under the Azores Agreement.²²

The U.S. has also continued to provide Portugal with military assistance, averaging about one million dollars per annum. In addition, U.S. training of Portuguese military personnel has continued. Table 2 reveals that the number of Portuguese trained by Americans at home and abroad almost doubled—from 74 in 1968 to 130 in 1969—during the first year of the Nixon administration. It also shows that, while American training was largely concentrated on naval personnel between 1968 and 1970, by 1971 the U.S. had begun to provide a substantial amount of training for Portugal's Air Force officers. The U.S. trained a total of 48 Portuguese Air Force personnel in 1971, as compared to a total of only 10 between 1969 and 1970.

In addition, the U.S. began to increase substantially its delivery of defoliation chemicals (i.e. herbicides), which have been used by Portuguese forces in Africa. As documented in Table 3, the export of herbicides to Portugal was six times greater in 1970 than in 1969; herbicide exports to Mozambique were about five times higher than the level of the year before.

Table 2

Number of Portuguese Military Personnel Trained by the
U.S.: Fiscal Year 1968-1972 Inclusive

Year	Army		Air Force		Navy		Total
	U.S.	Overseas	U.S.	Overseas	U.S.	Overseas	
1968	6	4	1	-	63	-	74
1969	3	25	7	-	95	-	130
1970	8	29	2	-	49	-	88
1971	6	31	3	45	18	-	103
1972	6	30	10	17	16	-	79
1973	15	35	12	17	15	-	94
Total	44	154	35	79	256	-	568

Source: Implementation of the U.S. Arms Embargo (Against Portugal and South Africa, and Related Issues). Hearings before the Subcommittee on Africa of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, 93d Congress, 1st session, March 20, 22; April 6, 1973. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973). p. 89.

The Nixon years also witnessed the consistent growth of American private-sector investment in Angola and Mozambique. As an example, Cabinda Gulf Oil, considered to be the largest single foreign investor in Portuguese Africa, estimated its total investments as worth \$209 million in 1972 and reported that its exports of crude oil had jumped from 4.7 million tons in 1971 to 6.8 million in 1972 (an increase of 43.9%), bringing in approximately \$167 million in foreign currency, the equivalent of 25.4% of all export earnings. It was reported that, in 1972, Gulf alone paid the Portuguese authorities in Angola \$61 million, including \$43 million in income taxes and \$18 million in royalties; in comparison, for the entire period between 1958 and 1972, the total payments by Gulf had totalled \$96.7 million. In the same year (1972) Gulf Oil signed an additional contract allowing it to expand its activities into prospecting for and exploitation of sulphur, helium, and carbon dioxide in Angola.²³

Largely because of the Gulf Oil investment, the U.S. by 1968 was Angola's second major supplier (with 11.8% of imports), outranked by Portugal but followed closely by West Germany (11.1%) and Britain (8.9%). In the following years, the American share of Angola's market again rose steadily: imports from the U.S. increased by 17.2% in 1970 and a further 16.5% in 1971, primarily due to increased importation of capital goods, raw materials, and partly finished goods for local industries.²⁴

Table 3

U.S. Exports of Herbicides to
Angola, Mozambique and Portugal, 1962-72
(In Millions of Dollars)

Year	Angola	Mozambique	Portugal
1969	2	-	57
1970	43	28	344
1971	-	88	115
1972	39	413	151
Total	84	529	667

Source: "Portugal Afrique: La Guerre de L'OTAN"
Jeune Afrique No. 705, July 13, 1974, p. 64

There have been increases recently in the number of American companies seeking mineral concessions. In 1972, Argo Petroleum Corporation of Los Angeles received a concession covering five areas totalling 12,189 square kilometers. During the same year, six companies applied for petroleum concessions in Angola. These included the Ranger Oil Company of Cheyenne, Superior Oil Company of Houston, Carlsberg Resources Corporation (Los Angeles), the Milford Argosy Corporation of North Portland, Esso Exploration, Inc. of Houston, and Iberian Petroleum, Ltd. of Stanford. In addition, Western Geophysical Company, a subsidiary of Litton Industries, was subcontracted in 1971 by ANGOL to carry out part of its prospecting activities off-shore in the Congo area. Further, Texaco continued its prospecting operations with ANGOL, PETRANGOL and TOTAL. It was also reported that ANGOL-PETRANGOL Association had negotiated with a group of foreign companies to increase off-shore prospecting activities in the Cuanza area.²⁵

Angola's potential mineral wealth has also been the object of investor interest. Portugal's encouragement of foreign capital has resulted in much competitive activity by American and European multinational corporations for the exploration and the development of possible deposits of iron ore, diamonds, sulphur and phosphates. In 1969, three American firms--Diversa, Inc., Diamond Distributors of New York and DIAMUL--were granted concessions for diamond prospecting and exploration in southwestern Angola. The Rockefeller Group, represented by the Clark Canadian Exploration Company holds one-third of the share capital of the Companhia de Fosfatos de Angola (COFAN), which began phosphate prospecting in Cabinda in 1969. In May, 1972

the Great Lakes Carbon Corporation of New York applied for a concession to prospect for and exploit copper deposits in Cuanza-North Districts. In 1973, the Riverwood Corporation of Midland, Texas was contracted by the Companhia dos Asfaltos de Angola for the exploitation of rock asphalt.²⁶

With respect to Mozambique, Bethlehem Steel and its consortium partners obtained an exclusive concession in 1972 for mineral prospecting between Djanguire to Changara in the Tete District. In the same year, the Export-Import Bank granted an investment loan of a little over a million dollars to the Banco Comercial e Industrial de Lourenco Marques. Hunt International Petroleum Company and Mozambique Amoco Oil Company are currently involved in oil prospecting and exploitation.²⁷

Controversy over American economic activities in Portuguese Africa has continued to surface. John Marcum criticized Nixon's policy for its direct or indirect result in the increased flow of American capital into petroleum, diamond, phosphate mining and industrial development in Portuguese Africa.²⁸ The activities of Gulf Oil Corporation have occupied the most attention. In 1971, activities of church groups led by the United Presbyterian Church (USA) started a drive to solicit proxy votes from stockholders in order to force Gulf to suspend its Cabinda operations. In August 1972, the World Council of Churches voted to sell its stock in companies that do business with white minority regimes in southern Africa.²⁹

Recent Developments

Toward the end of the Nixon era, Luso-American relations grew stronger as his administration presented a stance of understanding and appreciation for Portugal's colonial problems in Africa. Nixon rejected violence as a means for national liberation and insisted on the need to reach a negotiated settlement.³⁰

When the PAIGC declared the independence of Guinea (Bissau) in September 1973, the U.S. refused to recognize the creation of the new nation. The United States was determined to block the admission of Guinea (Bissau) into the United Nations whenever the matter came before the Security Council. Because the African countries decided not to press for Guinea's admission during the 1973 session, it was not necessary for the U.S. to use its veto power on the issue.

Nixon's efforts to improve the atmosphere of Luso-American relations seemed to have paid off during the recent Middle Eastern war. When the U.S. decided to re-equip Israel during the Yom Kippur war, Portugal was the only NATO ally which allowed American planes bound for Israel to use its refueling facilities in the Azores base which is conveniently located midway between New York and Tel Aviv. Caetano's decision to assist the

U.S. was based on his desire to show the U.S. that Portugal was a reliable ally; he hoped that the U.S. could in turn give his country diplomatic and moral support in its efforts to retain its African colonies.³¹

In April 1974, Caetano was overthrown and General Antonio de Spínola, a moderate conservative, became provisional President of Portugal. The U.S., notably, decided to withhold American support for the new government, apparently out of fear that Portugal might go Communist.³²

Portuguese interests in maintaining American friendship did not change under the new government. Although some observers had commented that Portugal would no longer need American diplomatic and military support when the decolonization process—advocated by Spínola—was completed in Africa, it was all the more evident that the loss of the African territories would mean that Portugal would become more dependent on economic aid from the U.S. and Western Europe. In fact, when President Nixon met with General Spínola in the Azores in June, 1974, the latter sought to extract promises for more American aid to Portugal. No American announcement was made concerning any aid agreements, however.

Nixon's abrupt departure from the White House has not yet resulted in any changes in U.S. policy toward Portugal, largely because Kissinger has continued to dominate policy decision-making in the new Ford administration. As evidence, it can be noted that the U.S. and Portugal began negotiations in September 1974 in an effort to secure a new treaty enabling the U.S. to continue to use the Azores airbase. The State Department was reported to be *fairly confident* that a new agreement would be reached quickly.³³

At the same time, various diplomatic observers in Washington have expressed concern over the apparently growing influence of the pro-Soviet Portuguese Communist Party in the new military-controlled government. They fear that Portugal might be the first country to go Communist in what has been called a *southern Europe domino theory also involving Spain, Italy and Greece*. To assess the situation, Lt. General Vernon Walters, CIA Deputy Director, was sent to Lisbon for a *personal appraisal* in August. Two months later, a four-man team from the State Department, led by Alan Lukens, director of the Iberian section, arrived in Lisbon for another independent review.³⁴

Spínola's abrupt resignation in September 1974 caused further anxiety in Washington since it was interpreted as another sign of Portugal's drift further to the left. However, some reassurances about Luso-American friendship were offered by Portugal shortly thereafter, through the visits to Washington of Foreign Minister Mario Soares and President Francisco Da Costa Gomes; during their fall 1974 visit, they sought to reaffirm to the

Ford administration that Portugal would remain in the NATO and that the U.S. would continue to have access to the Azores facilities. They also asserted their view that Portugal needed *large amounts of (American) economic and political help* in order to assure the growth of democracy in Portugal. Dr. Soares said further that *We want to continue as friends and allies of the U.S., but we feel we ought to have more compensation for the people of the Azores in return for letting America keep the base here.* 36

Despite Portugal's overtures to the U.S., Luso-American relations have been strained during the last few months. This is due primarily to Secretary of State Kissinger's anxieties over what he considers to be an alarming rate of increase in the influence of the Communists in Lisbon. He fears that the Portuguese Communists will, sooner or later, force Portugal out of NATO, an event that would eventually weaken American influence in the Mediterranean. When Ambassador Stuard Nash Scott disagreed with this Kissinger assessment, he was fired from his post in Lisbon. Scott believes that *Portugal is not in danger of going Communist* and he feels that *any displeasure with events here would be a major mistake.* 37

Nevertheless, the U.S. seems to be highly suspicious of the presence of a Communist in the Portuguese government. This was recently demonstrated by the American decision to postpone a NATO nuclear planning group meeting in which Portugal would have been included. Postponing the meeting has given the impression that Portugal could no longer be trusted with NATO secrets. Furthermore, Portugal's leftist-controlled news media has accused the CIA of planning a coup to oust the present regime because of its tolerance to Communist activities in Portugal.

The Ford administration has apparently decided to turn the heat on Lisbon in an attempt to keep the Communists out. Such a policy, some observers fear, could undermine the long-standing basis of Luso-American relations. The emergence of new political forces in Portugal does require a policy response by the U.S.³⁸ It would be fortunate if it provided the opportunity for a careful reassessment of American priorities and long-term interests in both Portugal and in Portuguese Africa as well.

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