

Winston Churchill Memorial Dinner
Estoril Political Forum: 27 June 2023

Your Royal Highnesses Dom Duarte Pio and Dona Isabel de Herédia
Professor João Carlos Espada
Dr. José Ribeiro e Castro
Professor James W Muller
Distinguished guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good evening and thank you for your kind words.

First of all, I would like to record my thanks my dear friend, Professor João Carlos Espada, for the honour of being invited to address tonight's Winston Churchill Memorial dinner; and to another dear friend Dra. Maria João Araújo, whose extraordinary passion and tireless commitment to the relationship between the United Kingdom and Portugal has been an enduring inspiration to me.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have now been in Portugal for four and a half years. I well remember a conversation I had with my predecessor before I started this job, way back in 2018, when we were discussing the challenges I would face. And she said to me, I hope you are an expert on Winston Churchill, because you're going to meet this wonderful person called Professor Espada who is a serious expert and he will expect you to speak regularly on this subject. Well, she was right, and although I have singularly failed to become a serious expert on Winston Churchill, I am certainly more expert than I was, and it has been nothing but a pleasure and a privilege to interact on many happy occasions with Professor Espada, with the Instituto de Estudos Políticos and with the Estoril Political Forum.

I am perhaps better qualified to talk about the famous and historic alliance between England and Portugal, the first formal expression of which took place 650 years ago with the signature, at St Paul's in London, of the first treaty of alliance between the two countries. A treaty that, remarkably, is still in force today.

Tonight we are, very appropriately I think, celebrating that 650th anniversary. Two weeks ago, His Excellency the President of the Portuguese Republic travelled to London. On the morning of 15 June, he was received at Buckingham Palace by His Majesty The King; and then the two Heads of State travelled together to St James's Palace for a very beautiful service of thanksgiving at the Queen's Chapel. For those of us who were fortunate enough to be present, it was an unforgettable moment, seeing the King and the President side by side, paying tribute to six and a half centuries of friendship and alliance between our two countries and the shared values that have underpinned that alliance over all that time. The service was a perfectly judged blend of English and Portuguese language and music and high above the altar we could see the crest of Catherine of Bragança, wife of King Charles II, our Portuguese queen – because this was the chapel in which she worshipped over three hundred years ago. After the service, the King and the President inspected the original Anglo-Portuguese Treaty of London, signed on 16 June 1373, which was brought to St James's from the National Archive, specially for the occasion. It was a moment of absolute magic and it would not have happened without the extraordinary vision, determination and hard work of my friend Maria João Araújo, to whom I once again offer my thanks and congratulations. And for her dedication and all that she has achieved I would like to propose a round of applause for Maria João.

So as it is our theme for this evening and because it is a great story I am going to talk about the Anglo-Portuguese alliance, famously the world's oldest diplomatic alliance still in force today.

And I'm going to start with the claim that the foundations of our alliance were in fact laid more than two hundred years before that treaty was signed in 1373. The seeds were planted on 16 June 1147 when 164 ships of the second crusade, on their way from Dartmouth in England to the Holy Land, took shelter from an Atlantic storm at Porto. There were about thirteen thousand men on board, half of whom were English, the remainder German, Flemish, Norman and Scottish. Now this was not an English army as such – these soldiers were basically mercenaries. But they were an organised military force, predominantly English, and they were answering the call of Pope Eugene III, who was determined to reverse the loss of Christian territory in the Holy Land. Most historians take the view that the Second Crusade was a failure – the Christian armies were basically defeated and turned back in what is today Turkey.

But there was this very interesting side story in Iberia, because of these ships that landed in Porto. Now bear in mind that this was only a few years after Dom Afonso Henriques had declared the Kingdom of Portugal independent of Leon. The nascent kingdom of Portugal was small and concentrated in the north. More or less all the territory to the south of the Douro was under Muslim rule. The great city of Lisbon was far beyond the reach of the small Portuguese army.

But Dom Afonso Henriques spotted an opportunity when he realised that this substantial military contingent had washed up on his doorstep in Porto in 1147. And he succeeded in persuading the crusaders, instead of boarding their ships and sailing on to the Holy Land, to join forces with his army and march south on Lisbon. And the combined army of about 20,000 men duly laid siege to the city on 1 July. There were a few skirmishes but the siege rapidly turned into a pretty effective blockade and on 21 October the exhausted and starving Muslim forces surrendered and the triumphant crusaders marched unopposed into the city. And I'm sorry to say that there are some quite grisly accounts of the way they behaved immediately after the capture of the city.

What I find extremely interesting is that many of the English knights chose to stay in Portugal rather than continue their journey to the Holy Land. Perhaps the most famous of them was Gilbert of Hastings, who became the first Bishop of Lisbon, new capital of the expanding kingdom of Portugal. But it is known that there were many others, perhaps thousands, many of whom were granted land and property by Afonso Henriques along the Tejo, in places like Vila Franca de Xira. So if you think that the British community in Portugal is a recent phenomenon, think again. Many Englishmen were living in and around Lisbon nine centuries ago.

And I don't think it's too much of a stretch to conclude that this was one of the reasons why it seemed a relatively straightforward and natural thing for Portugal and England to enter into a formal military alliance two hundred years later.

But let's now fast forward to the latter part of the fourteenth century. I would like to reflect briefly on why it was that England and Portugal joined forces in the way they did. And the answer is that this was driven as always in mediaeval Europe by the great strategic chess game that was permanently being played out between the great European powers throughout the Middle Ages.

England and France had been engaged since 1337 in a bitter conflict – the Hundred Years War. France entered into an alliance with the Spanish kingdom of Castile in 1369. The English were very worried about this. Castile had a powerful navy, the English didn't want to see that in the hands of the French. On top of that, John of Gaunt, son of King Edward III, the Duke of Lancaster, a very powerful figure in England, had married the daughter of the King of Castile, which he believed gave him a legitimate claim to the Castilian throne. Now Castile also had its eye on Portugal and the King of Portugal was a sworn enemy of the King of Castile, and so on the principle that your enemy's enemy is your friend, an alliance with Portugal must have seemed a logical strategic move for the English. And of course for the Portuguese, whose territory and independence were under constant threat from Castile, an alliance with England offered an incredibly valuable security guarantee.

And so for all of those reasons a preliminary treaty was signed at Tagilde in 1372, a precursor to the Treaty of Alliance signed at St Paul's in 1373 between Dom Fernando of Portugal and King Edward III of England. But if the plan was to defeat Castile, install John of Gaunt on the Castilian throne and force the French to the negotiating table, that was certainly not how things played out. And then in 1383, Dom Fernando died, bolstering the claim of King John of Castile, who was his son-in-law, to the Portuguese throne.

This was a tough time for Portugal. Portugal's independent existence was now under serious threat and the country became very unstable – a civil war broke out between supporters of union with Castile and those who recognised John of Aviz, the illegitimate half-brother of Dom Fernando, as King of Portugal.

John of Aviz was desperate for English assistance and his Ambassador in London eventually persuaded the English to send a modest military contingent to Portugal. These soldiers, many of them highly skilled archers, fought alongside the Portuguese, most notably at the famous battle of Aljubarrota in August 1385. And it does seem that, although there were only about 800 of them, the English contribution was instrumental in the eventual defeat and withdrawal of the Castilian forces from Portuguese territory. Why was the English contribution so decisive? I think the answer to that is that the English brought with them a piece of game-changing military technology – the long bow. The English long-bow was already being used with devastating effect in the war against the French. And it seems to have been similarly devastating when deployed against the Castilians.

And anyone who visits the magnificent Dominican convent at Batalha, built to commemorate the victory at Aljubarrota, can immediately appreciate what a turning point this was in Portugal's history. And from that moment onwards, I think you could argue that the Anglo-Portuguese alliance was real and secure. And on 9 May 1386, the most famous of all the Anglo-Portuguese treaties, the Treaty of Windsor, was signed by representatives of King John of Portugal and King Richard II of England. And the following year, King John married the daughter of John of Gaunt, Philippa of Lancaster, thereby adding a Royal and dynastic component to the alliance.

So this was an alliance born of strategic and military interests.

But, crucially, the treaties also created the conditions for trade in commodities like cloth, textiles and wine, to flourish between the two countries; and this strong commercial relationship became more and more embedded over the centuries, all the time strengthening the ties between the English (from 1707 onwards of course the British) and the Portuguese.

In 1640, Portugal broke free from Spanish rule and installed Dom João de Bragança on the throne. Portugal was back as an independent European power with its many valuable colonial possessions and there was a bit of a scramble to forge new alliances. For once the English were not well placed to take advantage, even though John IV was keen to rebuild the ancient alliance after 60 years of rule from Madrid. England of course was about to embark on its own bloody civil war – in 1642 – which ended with the trial and execution of King Charles I in 1649 and the suspension of the English monarchy. But when the English monarchy was restored in 1660 Charles II became king and the English wasted no time in renewing their relations with Portugal and negotiating the marriage of King Charles with the daughter of King John – Catarina de Bragança – who became our Portuguese queen in 1662.

I wish I had more time to talk about Catarina because I think she was a very fascinating and rather tragic figure. But what I can say is that this was very much a transactional marriage in the context of the alliance and Catarina's dowry included the north African port of Tangier, the islands of Bombay in India and two million Portuguese crowns. And as we have already heard this evening, Dona Catarina is also credited with introducing the English to tea drinking.

What about the alliance in the nineteenth century? So many brilliant books and papers have been written about the Peninsular War that I feel anything I say risks being superficial and superfluous. Many of you know this story better than I do. But two names – Beresford and Wellesley – are indelibly written into Portuguese history, because they commanded the British forces who obstinately resisted Napoleon's attempts to capture the Iberian peninsula and dismantle Portugal. Wellesley, who went on to become the first Duke of Wellington, is associated with many famous episodes in Portuguese military history, not least of course the celebrated defence of Lisbon at the Linhas de Torres Vedras, which the French were spectacularly unable to penetrate.

In the interests of time I am going to skate over the difficult episode of the British ultimatum of 1890, when British and Portuguese territorial claims clashed in southern Africa. It was not a glorious moment for relations between our two countries. By the time of the outbreak of the Boer War in 1899, the diplomatic damage had largely been repaired. Although we shouldn't underestimate the fallout in terms of Portuguese domestic politics and the implications for the failing Portuguese monarchy.

Instead I would rather say a few words about our alliance in the twentieth century and in particular in relation to the two world wars. I think it's fair to say that it was Portugal's determination to protect its alliance and trading relationship with the United Kingdom that eventually undermined its neutrality in the first world war. And that led to the sacrifice after 1916 of 12,000 Portuguese soldiers, many of them fighting in terrible conditions alongside the British in the trenches in northern Europe. I'm not sure that sacrifice has ever been adequately appreciated, though a few years ago a beautiful pair of stained glass windows was unveiled at St James's Catholic Church in Twickenham, London to commemorate the Portuguese who died in the first world war. That is the church at which Dom Manuel II worshipped for the remaining years of his life after his exile from Portugal in 1910.

The story of the alliance in the second world war is extremely interesting, and of course it brings Winston Churchill into the story. I will say a bit more about that in a moment.

But to sum up, there was a lot to celebrate in London two weeks ago. The celebrations came almost exactly a year after the President of the Portuguese Republic and the Portuguese Prime Minister visited London and our two Prime Ministers signed a new UK-Portugal agreement - a broad and ambitious Joint

Declaration on Bilateral Co-operation. I was fortunate enough to be at the meeting in Downing Street between Boris Johnson and António Costa at which the agreement was reached.

For me this marked a key point in not just looking backwards at our unique alliance, but using that history as the foundation for a modern relationship based on common values and our close practical ties. This felt particularly timely and relevant of course since so much of our joint business is conducted bilaterally, with the UK no longer a member of the European Union.

Our new agreement covers foreign policy, defence and security, research and higher education, trade and links between our people at all levels. Two weeks ago our Foreign Ministers met in London to review progress in delivering the agreement, and also signed a new agreement on international development, strengthening our joint efforts to reduce global poverty.

In addition to that, we will be signing – soon – a new bilateral defence agreement that will be more detailed and comprehensive than anything our two countries have had before in this area.

Now I said I would end with a few words about Winston Churchill, Portugal and World War II.

Eighty years ago, in 1943, Prime Minister Churchill stood in the House of Commons to make – and I quote:

“an announcement ... arising out of the Treaty signed between this country and Portugal in the year 1373 between His Majesty King Edward III and King Ferdinand and Queen Eleanor of Portugal”

Churchill went on to explain how a further ten Anglo-Portuguese treaties had deepened our alliance building on the 1373 agreement. He ended his statement by saying:

“I take this opportunity of placing on record the appreciation by His Majesty's Government, which I have no doubt is shared by Parliament and the British nation, of the attitude of the Portuguese Government, whose loyalty to their British Ally never wavered in the darkest hours of the war.”

And so in 1943, the United Kingdom invoked the provisions of the 1373 London Treaty drawing on the guarantees that both countries would *"assist, maintain and uphold each other mutually, by sea and by land, against all men that may live or die"*.

And that was how the allies were able to secure from Salazar and neutral Portugal, military facilities in the Azores that provided extraordinarily important protection for allied merchant shipping against German U-boats in the Atlantic. It is regarded by many historians and military experts as a turning point in the Battle of the Atlantic, if not the whole of World War II. Churchill himself believed that this diplomatic achievement with Portugal played a significant role in shortening the war.

In his famous 1946 'Sinews of Peace' speech, in which Churchill coined the phrase the Iron Curtain, he also recognised the significance and importance of Britain's historic alliance with Portugal and how it could contribute to the building of a peaceful, law-abiding post-War international order. He said:

"The British have an alliance with Portugal unbroken since 1384, which produced fruitful results at critical moments in the late war. None of these alliances clashes with the general interest of a world agreement or a world organisation; on the contrary they help it."

And that is the note on which I would like to end: Churchill's observation, as true today as it was in 1946, that the friendship and alliance between our two countries is a genuine force for good in the world.

Thank you.