Cold War Constraints: 
France, West Germany and 
Portuguese Decolonization

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Introduction

In this article, we will analyse the particular role that France and West Germany played in supporting Portugal’s resistance to decolonization. Faced with the refusal of the United States to support his colonial policy at the beginning of the 1960s, Oliveira Salazar had to turn to his European Allies. The fact that both France and West Germany were willing to respond positively to this request is explained by the particular context these two countries were experiencing, in a world constrained by the Cold War. They decided to support Portugal in its resistance to decolonization mainly for reasons related to the Cold War and the importance that both Paris and Bonn attached to the particular role played by Portugal in this context. For France, supporting the Portuguese regime was seen as a way of defying the Western superpower and protecting its own interests in Africa; for the Federal Republic of Germany, it was a matter of keeping Portugal inside the Atlantic Alliance.

During the 1960s, these were the objectives behind Franco-German support of Portuguese colonial policy, which were reflected in the military cooperation and political assistance to the Estado Novo regime.

Cold War and Decolonization

If World War I helped to create local resistance movements against colonialism, it was World War II that destroyed the colonial system itself. In the Far East, occupation by the Japanese destroyed the French, British and Dutch imperial systems and the European powers proved unable to rebuild their imperial structure in those territories.¹ Nor can we ignore the impact that the United Nations Charter had in the process of dissolving the colonial structure and ideal. The endorsement of Wilsonian values, this time reflected by the approval of the Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, reinforced the post-war transnational

¹ Odd Arne Westad, The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of our Times (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 86–87.
discourse. Although the Charter and the Declaration of Human Rights did not include enforcement mechanisms, they acted as an important source of legitimation of colonial peoples’ efforts to build their societies independently of the European powers.  

Everything pointed towards a rapid disaggregation of the colonial empires. The first major state to obtain its independence was India, in 1947. With the Cold War under way, there was, however, no substantial interference from the superpowers in this process. The Indian nationalist movement had been growing since the 1930s and became more active during World War II, despite harsh British repression. The United Kingdom’s inability to forge alliances with the Indian elites intensified the process of transfer of power, sealing the end of Britain’s ‘jewel in the crown’.  

In other regions of Asia and Africa, the Dutch, French and Portuguese were not so sensitive to the nationalist elites. If Indira Ghandi and Jawaharlal Nehru were able to secure independence for India, Ho Chi Min in Vietnam and Sukarno in Indonesia were strongly repressed. Furthermore, the United Kingdom decided to keep control of Malaya and Singapore, as well as its African territories. In this first decolonization wave in Asia, within a completely chaotic and fast-changing environment, the beginning of the Cold War was something unprecedented, both for the anticolonial and imperial actors, and even for the United States and the Soviet Union. Concerned with the evolving situation in Western Europe, both superpowers took time to adjust to events in Asia. Although understanding the radical nature of some movements, the US hesitated to openly support their European allies’ maintenance of their colonial empires. The American objective was to encourage their allies to improve the economic and social conditions of the dependent territories, putting aside outdated conceptions of development.  

Mao Tse-Tung’s coming to power in China, in 1949, and the beginning of the Korean War, in 1950, contributed to combining firmly the Cold War dynamics and the process of decolonization. In Vietnam, China began supporting Ho Chi Min’s forces fighting the French, leading the US to unquestioningly support their European allies, at least in those areas that, like Indochina, were of strategic interest for the West. From this moment on, the Cold War was a factor in European resistance to decolonization. By the end of the Korean War, the developments in Asia and Africa were seen mainly through the Cold War lens, both by the United States and the Soviet Union, which was followed,
immediately, by China and all the other Third World countries. Basing itself on a theory of modernization, according to which the economic and social development of the population and the preservation of the liberal system was the best way of preventing communist infiltration, the United States tried to persuade the European colonial powers and the newly independent countries to follow the North American model. In the case of the colonial powers, the 1948 Marshall Plan was the clearest example of this policy, even having a special programme (Point IV) dedicated to the developing countries, very similar to that applied in Europe. This reflected the need to implement a policy which had a direct economic and social impact, but it largely ignored Third World concerns regarding its own political evolution towards self-determination. From the Western point of view, abandoning the colonial empires seemed to be out of question.6

Later on, during the Eisenhower administration, the United States continued to insist that their European allies should invest in the political and economic development of their colonies. At the same time, they tried to draw the newly independent countries to their political bloc, not understanding that a possible interest by these countries in the American economic model did not correspond to an extension of cooperation at the political and diplomatic levels. Moreover, and mindful that the Cold War was conducted mainly in Europe, and in Germany in particular, the North American political elites ended up by focusing mainly on European issues, leaving Third World problems behind. Thus, they tended to be more sensitive to the appeals of the European colonial powers, which argued that they needed their empires in order to stimulate their own economic recovery.7

The intensification of the bipolar conflict and the growing impact it had on Third World disputes prompted the formation of an alternative position regarding decolonization. In Bandung, in 1955, the main anticolonial leaders defined a new transnational ideological base, which would allow the Asian and African peoples to be protected from the bipolar rivalry. Thus, Bandung created an alternative international order, built by countries which had their colonial past as common ground. As the Cold War reached stalemate in Europe, the superpowers spread their ideological competition towards the Third World, which proved to be fertile ground.8

In fact, during the 1960s, the United States, the Soviet Union and also China saw the newly independent Third World countries as stages on which their dispute was to be fought. Despite the post-colonial Third World leaders’ insistence on non-alignment, they were dragged into this ideological conflict,

6 John Kent, ‘United States Reactions to Empire, Colonialism, and the Cold War in Black Africa, 1949–1957’, The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, 33.2 (2005), 195–220.
7 Bradley, p. 477.
8 Michael Latham, ‘The Cold War in the Third World, 1963–1975’, in The Cambridge History of the Cold War, ed. by Odd Arne Westad and Melvyn Leffler, vol. II: Crises and Détente (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 258–80 (pp. 258–59).
which was fought between different development models. Thus, Cold War competition was magnified in the post-colonial regions of Asia and Africa, mainly because it overemphasized local conflicts, which had much more to do with local factors than with ideological differences.9

Portugal and the Colonial Issue in the Cold War

Two major events characterized the political and social scene in the second half of the twentieth century. After the end of World War II, the world was divided between two superpowers and their spheres of influence. However, even more than the Cold War it was the emergence of new states, formed as a consequence of the European colonial empires’ disaggregation in Asia and Africa, which undoubtedly characterized world history, influencing international politics up to the present day. The most recent developments in decolonization studies allow us to understand that the Cold War was not just the political context that characterized the independence process of most peoples of Africa, Asia and Central America. Each of these two phenomena to some extent explained the other.10

In order to understand the interconnection between the Cold War and decolonization we must avoid confusing these two political, economic and social processes. A superficial analysis of the Soviet and North American documents may lead us to conclude that the decolonization process of the second half of the twentieth century was just another element of the bipolar rivalry. However, it is now clear that decolonization was a broad political process, which did not simply begin after World War II. As well as being deeply rooted in local factors preceding the Cold War, it undeniably followed that conflict, extending beyond its end.

Nevertheless, particularly after the 1950s, the bipolar rivalry affected the decolonization process at different levels, mostly because the United States and the Soviet Union (and, later, China) tried to export to the new emerging states their own model of political, economic and social organization.11 This underlines the fact that the Cold War cannot be considered as merely a cause of the decolonization process, but also as a political conflict which framed it ideologically, helping to delay or accelerate the long process of political and social transformation that swept Asia and Africa in the second half of the twentieth century. It could be said that the relation between the Cold War and decolonization reflects the progressive domination of international society and politics by the ideological competition between the two superpowers.12

9 Latham, pp. 279–80.
10 Michael Graham Fry, ‘The United Nations Confronts the United States in 1958’, in A Revolutionary Year: The Middle East in 1958, ed. by Wlm. Roger Louis and Roger Owen (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2002), pp. 143–80 (p. 143).
11 Bradley, pp. 464–70.
12 Odd Arne Westad, ‘The New International History of the Cold War: Three (Possible) Paradigms’, Diplomatic History, 24.4 (2010), 551–65.
The transformation that occurred in the international system after World War II forced the Portuguese regime to make some changes in the way Portugal presented its colonial policies to foreign countries. Salazar’s ingrained distrust of US power, due especially to US anti-colonial positions, made him anticipate that an attack on the colonial empires was imminent. However, Lisbon saw a way to improve relations by exploiting the strategic importance of the Portuguese Atlantic islands, particularly the Azores. The invitation to Portugal to become a founding member of NATO clearly showed that the US wanted her involvement in the Western Alliance, despite being a dictatorship. This allowed the _Estado Novo_ to pursue its traditional goals in foreign policy: the Atlantic vocation and a preferential alliance with a maritime power that would contribute to the maintenance of the colonial empire. The integration of Portugal into the North Atlantic Pact gave the regime equal status with the other European powers.\(^\text{13}\)

After 1951, Salazar changed the Constitution, trying to replace the classic imperial idea that dated to the interwar period. Portugal reinforced its assimilationist conception of colonialism, designating its colonies Overseas Provinces, which would join with the European territories to form a nation that was ‘una e indivisível’ [united and indivisible]. However, this reform maintained the _Estatuto do Indígena_ [Native Statute], denying citizenship to the majority of the colonized peoples.\(^\text{14}\) Overall, we can say that the reorganization of the Portuguese colonial empire after World War II reflected a belief that Portugal could only survive as an intercontinental bloc. For the Portuguese political elites there was no space in the Cold War world for small countries because the world tended towards the constitution of great territorial blocs, economically strong and politically united. In other words, in this world ‘as nações mais pequenas se sentem oprimidas’ [the smaller nations feel oppressed] and tend to be absorbed by powerful countries or blocs.\(^\text{15}\)

Thus, from the end of the 1940s the _Estado Novo_ regime tried to frame Portuguese resistance to decolonization as a Cold War issue. In the developments in the Dutch and French empires in Asia, Salazar saw the pernicious hand of the Soviets. According to Portuguese diplomatic rhetoric, it could be expected that the same Soviet strategy would be extended to Africa too: in Salazar’s own words, the Soviet Union was preparing to ‘set fire to the African continent’. In his opinion, the only way to avoid such an event was through the establishment of European–African cooperation, with the support of the United States.\(^\text{16}\)

\(^\text{13}\) Nuno Teixeira, ‘Entre África e a Europa: a política externa portuguesa, 1890–2000’, in _Portugal contemporâneo_, ed. by António Costa Pinto (Lisbon: Dom Quixote, 2004), pp. 87–116. See also António Telo, _Portugal e a NATO: o reencontro da tradição atlântica_ (Lisbon: Edições Cosmos, 1996).

\(^\text{14}\) Valentim Alexandre, ‘O império colonial’, in _Portugal contemporâneo_, ed. by Costa Pinto, pp. 67–86.

\(^\text{15}\) Alberto Franco Nogueira, _A luta pelo Oriente_ (Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Políticos e Sociais, 1957), p. 97.

\(^\text{16}\) ‘Breves considerações sobre política interna e internacional: a propósito da inauguração do Estádio de Braga’ (28 May 1950), in A. Oliveira Salazar, _Discursos e notas políticas_, vol. iv (Coimbra: Coimbra Editora, 1961), pp. 459–78.
The great importance that the regime attached to its colonial empire motivated it to resist the decolonizing movement by use of force. Particularly after 1955, with Portugal’s admission to the UN, her colonial policy came under strong attack from the international community. The Estado Novo’s refusal to decolonize and its decision to defend the empire by force favoured a diversification of Portugal’s traditional alliances. In fact, the new US policy towards Africa, defined after the Suez Crisis, which favoured an exit of European powers from the continent, created a period of increased tension in American–Portuguese relations. Pressure from the US led Portugal to react, by refusing to renew the Azores agreement. This situation endured from 1962 to 1971 and ultimately increased the distance between Washington and Lisbon.17

By the end of the 1950s, Portuguese foreign policy was gradually shifting from a strong relationship with the Atlantic powers (the UK and US) towards a new relationship with the continental countries (France and the Federal Republic of Germany), which had already recovered economically and politically from World War II. By becoming closer to France and West Germany, Portugal sought to make good the loss of the political and military support given until then by the US and NATO, by turning its back on its Atlantic tradition and embracing a European continental stance. It is within this context that we understand French and West German relations with Portugal during the 1960s.18

This shift reflects Portugal’s major concern regarding its colonial policy. As the United States was unable, for either domestic or external reasons, to guarantee support to the maintenance of the Portuguese colonial empire, Lisbon’s only alternative was to adopt a more pragmatic and flexible foreign policy. It would always be sympathetic with Western values, as long as that stance did not threaten Portuguese interests in the Third World. Whenever her sovereignty was put to the test outside Europe, Portugal would search for alternative support, assuming an autonomous position towards the Atlantic powers, as a way to safeguard Portuguese colonial policy. Simultaneously, the disposition of France and West Germany towards Portugal can be understood as a reflection of the search for a ‘progressive autonomy’ of the Western countries from the United States.19

17 António Telo, ‘As Guerras de África e a mudança nos apoios internacionais de Portugal’, Revista de História das Ideias, 16 (1995), 347–69 (p. 368).
18 Ibid.
19 John Lewis Gaddis defines progressive autonomy as something that the countries within each bloc tried to obtain, especially at the end of the 1950s. In the Soviet bloc, the main example is the People’s Republic of China. In the Western bloc, de Gaulle’s France shows the progressive difficulty that the US had in controlling their allies. Gradually, the ‘weak were discovering opportunities to confront the strong’. John Lewis Gaddis, The Cold War (New York: Allen Lane, 2005), pp. 119–55.
French and West German Attitudes to the Portuguese Resistance to Decolonization

The above mentioned diversification of alliances in Portuguese foreign policy was only possible due to the good will of France and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) towards Portuguese colonial policy. On the one hand, France and Portugal had shared since the 1930s a common position regarding their colonial empires, namely assimilationist principles. During World War II, there was even some ideological rapprochement by Portugal with the Vichy regime, which contributed to an understanding between the two countries.20 Surprisingly, perhaps, this understanding was not broken after the liberation of France, and the two countries’ cooperation continued until 1974, based on shared common interests in Africa. Portugal had a hard-line policy of resisting decolonization, while France saw Africa as one of its strategic areas of influence.21

West Germany, on the other hand, had been founded in 1949 as a direct consequence of its occupation after World War II. The firm resolve of Chancellor Konrad Adenauer to bind the FRG to the Western bloc characterized the first years of its foreign policy. In 1955, the FRG was finally admitted to NATO and recognized as an autonomous international actor. Due to Germany’s sensitive position (a divided country in a divided Europe), Bonn’s main concern was with the stability of the Western bloc. The conservative elites ruling the country had always demonstrated a particular respect and admiration for Salazar, who represented the spirit of ‘old Europe’, particularly for his conservative, Catholic character.22 Besides this personal dimension, West Germany was particularly interested in the political stability of Portugal and the maintenance of the regime, in order to avoid any possibility of a communist takeover, which might spread to Spain.23

These were the two starting points for the role these countries played in the Portuguese resistance to the decolonization process. As mentioned above, France and Portugal had in common a colonial empire, which would face the same type of challenges; although they found somewhat different answers to these challenges, they had a similar view of their interests in the Third World. West Germany, for its part, was mainly concerned with the international impact of the Portuguese colonial problem, which led Bonn to develop an ambivalent policy towards it.

20 Cf. Helena Pinto Janeiro, Salazar e Pétain: as relações luso-francesas durante a II Guerra Mundial (1940–1944) (Lisbon: Edições Cosmos, 1998), p. 203.
21 Amaral da Silva Lala, L’Enjeu colonial dans les relations franco-portugaises, 1944–1974 (unpublished doctoral thesis, Institute d’Études Politiques de Paris, 2007), p. 28.
22 Ana Mónica Fonseca, ‘A República Federal da Alemã e a política colonial do Estado Novo no início da década de 1960’, in Outros horizontes: encontros luso-alemanes em contextos coloniais, ed. by Fernando Clara (Lisbon: Edições Colibri, 2005), pp. 65–78.
23 Ana Mónica Fonseca, A força das armas: o apoio da República Federal da Alemanha ao Estado Novo (1958–1969) (Lisbon: Instituto Diplomático, 2007).
French and Portuguese cooperation on the colonial issue

For both Portugal and France, the beginning of the decolonization movement after World War II was perceived as a threat to their role in world affairs, leading both countries to resist granting self-determination to their colonies. Therefore, the approval of the United Nations Charter, as well as the Marshall Plan initiatives regarding the developing of European dependent territories, was treated with great suspicion by both the Paris and Lisbon governments. This situation allowed the beginning of a technical and economic cooperation between the two countries in international forums such as the African Commission for Technical Cooperation.

Additionally, for Portugal, France’s traditional Christian and colonial heritage was perceived as an alternative to the American cultural supremacy in the Western alliance. However, what could be seen as a perfect conjunction for cooperation was affected by the different nature of the political systems in each country. Portugal witnessed with deep sorrow France’s departure from Indochina in 1954, from Tunisia and Morocco in 1956, and Algeria in the early 1960s. Contrary to what happened in democratic France, however, Portuguese resistance to decolonization was mainly explained by the authoritarian nature of its regime. It was the Estado Novo’s political elites and Salazar himself who decided to resist by force any move towards self-determination in the Portuguese empire, mainly because it was inconsistent with the nationalist ideology of the regime.

Despite these differences, France and Portugal came to share common interests right up to the end of the Portuguese colonial empire. Together, they tried to avoid the attacks that both countries suffered in the UN (France until leaving Algeria, in 1962; Portugal until the end of the Estado Novo, in 1974). For France, supporting Portugal meant helping a country in its dispute with the United States over its colonial policy, and, most importantly, assisting a country that had an important presence in Africa, a region that France considered of strategic importance. These were the main reasons why Portugal and France deepened their political and military cooperation, in the final years of the Portuguese empire.

Nevertheless, the first years of the Gaullist era in France were followed with some concern by the Salazar regime. In 1958, Charles de Gaulle came to

24 An earlier version of this topic was published in Portuguese Studies Review, 16.2 (2008), 103–19 (pp. 106–11).
25 Commission de Coopération Technique Africaine (CCTA). Amaral da Silva Lala, pp. 60–88.
26 Amaral da Silva Lala, p. 80 and Sandrine Bègue, La Fin de Goa et de l’Estado da India: décolonisation et Guerre Froide dans le Sous-Continent Indien (1945–1962), vol. 1 (Lisbon: Instituto Diplomático, 2007), pp. 555–57.
27 António Costa Pinto, O fim do império português: a cena internacional, a guerra colonial e a descolonização, 1961–1975 (Lisbon: Livros Horizonte, 2001), p. 86.
28 Daniel Marcos, Salazar e de Gaulle: a França e a questão colonial portuguesa (1958–1968) (Lisbon: Instituto Diplomático, 2007), pp. 235–46.
power broadly defending authority, order and strong governmental control, regarded by the Portuguese regime as a positive change. However, the revision made by de Gaulle to French colonial policy, testified by the independence of French Guinea and the other colonial territories and by developments in the Algerian War, terrified the Portuguese government. The regime saw this change in French policy as the end of an advantageous cooperation between their countries, similar to the situation when Britain relinquished its empire in Asia and Africa.29

Nevertheless, this did not happen. The recognition of the right to self-determination and, therefore, to decolonization by the new French government did not mean the end of cooperation between Portugal and France, despite Salazar’s own rejection of that course of action. For de Gaulle, ending the colonial bond with the African possessions was crucial to the new politics he wanted to pursue: the reinforcement of France as a European power with nuclear capability and, to some extent, militarily independent of American protection. As John Lewis Gaddis put it, France’s goal ‘was nothing less than to break up the bipolar Cold War international system’.30

The relations between Portugal and the French government should be seen in this context. De Gaulle tried to take advantage of the Portuguese refusal to decolonize, realizing that the isolation of Salazar’s regime, despite French cooperation, could strengthen its own position in the Western World. In fact, at the beginning of the 1960s, Portuguese colonial policy was strongly condemned in the United Nations due to Portugal’s obstinate refusal to leave Africa.31 This was the beginning of a tense period in Portuguese–American relations. In early 1961, after the war started in Angola, the new Kennedy administration sought to pressure the Portuguese government into transforming its colonial policy, paving the way to self-determination. Also in the UN, and for the first time, the American administration voted against Portugal and in favour of Third World countries in a set of resolutions that condemned the beginning of the war in Portuguese Africa.32 Thus, it is possible to say that de Gaulle saw in these circumstances the ‘ideal occasion’ to, once again, ‘tackle north American power, accusing it of a lack of solidarity towards its European allies’.33

That is why, when the Portuguese Foreign Minister, Marcello Mathias,34 met

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29 Daniel Marcos, ‘Portugal e a França na década de 1960: a questão colonial e o apoio internacional’, Relações Internacionais, 11 (2006), 31–45 (pp. 34–35).
30 John Lewis Gaddis, The Cold War (London: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 138.
31 Three resolutions were approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations in December 1960, condemning Portuguese colonial policy and demanding the decolonization of the non-self-governing territories. For a detailed description of all the UN resolutions regarding Portuguese colonial policy, see A. E. Silva, ‘O litígio entre Portugal e a ONU (1960–1974)’, Análise Social, 130 (1995), 5–50.
32 Luís Nuno Rodrigues, Salazar–Kennedy: a crise de uma aliança (Lisbon: Editorial Notícias: 2002).
33 Daniel Marcos, Salazar e de Gaulle, p. 232.
34 Marcello Mathias (1903–1999) was Foreign Minister between 1958 and 1961. After leaving the Ministry he was appointed Ambassador in Paris, where he remained until 1971.
de Gaulle in Paris, in October 1960, de Gaulle promised to help the Portuguese struggle to keep the African territories. Informed by Mathias that Portugal would resist granting independence to its colonial possessions, ‘at any cost’, the General’s reply was clear: France would ‘never do anything that could harm the Portuguese ideas towards its colonial possessions.’ With this statement, French–Portuguese cooperation was clearly reinforced. In the UN, for example, French support to Portugal during 1961 was in line with the words of de Gaulle. If, as described above, the United States supported the Third World countries’ resolutions against Portuguese colonial policy, France always chose to follow an abstentionist position, a pattern that continued until 1974.

French commitment to Portugal did go further, to the point that France even tried to influence US policy on the Portuguese question. In May 1961, the representatives of France, the United States and the United Kingdom met in London to discuss, among other issues, Angola. On this occasion, the division between France and the US became clearer. The French position was based on the conviction that Portugal was capable of containing the nationalist uprisings. Thus, the attitude towards Portugal should be persuasive, applying only light pressure on Salazar to accept decolonization. According to the French, the adoption of a softer position had the advantage of concealing from the USSR and the Third World the existence of divisions inside the Western Alliance regarding the colonial issue. At the end of May, during President Kennedy’s visit to Paris, de Gaulle insisted that the Western World should not ‘offend’ Portugal, by publicly attacking its colonial policy, because that would only ‘instigate unrest in Angola’. By so doing, the French president was inviting his American counterpart to follow France’s aim to ‘progressively encourage’ Portugal to grant independence to the colonies. In this sense, this moderate attitude towards the Angolan question should prevent the withdrawal of Portugal from the Western Alliance, and avoid political instability or even the establishment of a communist regime in the Iberian Peninsula, which would certainly be the case with a sudden loss of the empire.

France’s sympathetic attitude towards Portuguese colonial policy led the two countries to reinforce their already solid military cooperation. In fact, some senior Portuguese military chiefs were former students of the French War Academy, with a thorough knowledge of French military equipment. France thus became one of the first options when US military supplies started to become scarce. During the 1960s, Portuguese–French military cooperation allowed Portugal to obtain equipment which was indispensable to its African war effort: aeroplanes, helicopters, trucks, ships and submarines. In addition to the Nord-Atlas, Broussard and Harvard T-6 aeroplanes bought even before the Colonial

35 Maurice Vaïsse, Documents diplomatiques françaises, 1960 (Paris: Imprimerie National, 1996), pp. 457–58. The Portuguese diplomat constantly reminded the French representatives that Angola might turn into another case of instability in Africa, just as the Belgian Congo did.
36 Daniel Marcos, Salazar e de Gaulle, pp. 84–95.
37 Maurice Vaïsse, Documents diplomatiques françaises, pp. 669–70.
War had begun, Portugal acquired from France, from 1963, the prestigious Allouette III helicopter.38

Nevertheless, political circumstances forced France to impose some restrictions on military supplies to Portugal. In 1962, the French government was forced by the deterioration of the Portuguese international position to limit the type of military equipment sold to the country. According to the French Prime Minister, Michel Debré,39 France should sell to Portugal only ‘strictly defensive’ material such as cargo planes and other means of transport, whilst the sale of equipment ‘capable of being used in counter-guerrilla warfare’ should be refused.40

However, the negotiations between Portugal and France for the construction of eight warships, four submarines and four escort vessels in 1963–64, reflected, more than ever, the impact of political considerations on military cooperation. In this case, Portugal had to deal with the resistance of some French ministries, mainly Finance (concerned with the stability of the French currency) and Foreign Affairs, but encountered favourable attitudes at the Defence Ministry. The Portuguese Navy had been attempting to buy warships from its French counterpart since 1958, and some preliminary contact took place in 1960. Nonetheless, the beginning of the Colonial War in Angola postponed the talks until 1963, when the negotiations were resumed. Once again, what seemed to be strictly military talks were constrained by the political background. Also in this same year, the French government presented to Portugal a proposal for the establishment of a military base in the Azores that would enable the French Armed Forces to test their ballistic equipment. As we shall see, both issues were related, and the Portuguese government had to exploit French strategic and military needs in order to overcome any political resistance.

Portugal’s main objective was to obtain French financial support for the construction of the warships. France’s first proposal, although favourable to the Portuguese government, was not welcomed by Marcello Mathias, the Portuguese Ambassador at the time. In his words, Portugal’s wish was that ‘os pagamentos começassem o mais tarde possível, que se escalonassem pelo mais longo prazo possível e que a taxa de juro fosse a mais baixa possível’ [the payments should start as late as possible, they should be spread over the longest term possible, and the rate of interest should be as low as possible]. Furthermore, he was not afraid to threaten the French with the possibility of the Azores negotiations being called off.41 It was a high-risk move, but Portugal did accomplish its purposes. France agreed to build eight warships, with the financial operation being supported by French enterprises. Beyond this, the Portuguese Armed

38 Daniel Marcos, Salazar e de Gaulle, pp. 153–59.
39 Debré (1912–1996) was Prime Minister between 1959 and 1962.
40 Archive du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères de France (AMAE), Europe/Portugal (1961–1970)/Vol. 90: ‘Note from the Foreign Ministry’, 1 June 1970.
41 Instituto dos Arquivos Nacionais/Torre do Tombo, AOS/CO/MA-5, ‘Telegram from the Portuguese Embassy in Paris’, 1964.
Forces also obtained guarantees from the French government to supply ammunition to the ships for fifteen years. As Mathias wrote to Salazar, this agreement was extremely important to Portugal because it showed how good the relations between these two states were. Despite the international criticism of Portuguese colonial policy, France ‘não hesitou em provar-nos a amizade das nossas relações’ [did not hesitate to prove to Portugal its friendship] and ‘a sua convicção que a nossa política em África não nos conduza a uma catástrofe’ [its conviction that our policy in Africa will not lead us to a catastrophe].\(^\text{42}\)

With regard to the establishment of a French military base in the Azores, this also turned out to be a very profitable deal for the military needs of the Portuguese Armed Forces in Africa. The signing of the agreement on 7 April 1964 was a way for Portugal to return France’s ‘amizade e lealdade’ [friendship and loyalty]; at the same time, for Portugal it was an opportunity ‘que nos assegure uma certa forma de estabilidade tanto no apoio político como militar da França’ [that should assure us a certain sort of stability in both political and military support from France].\(^\text{43}\) With this sympathetic attitude, Lisbon managed to force France to ignore the restrictions imposed on military exports to Portugal since 1962, receiving authorization to import military equipment needed by its Armed Forces, particularly rockets.\(^\text{44}\)

With these developments, 1964 was the high point of the Portuguese–French political and military cooperation. From then on, the military relations between the two countries stagnated, although we cannot say that they got worse. Until September 1968, when Salazar left the government, there were no further significant developments in French–Portuguese relations. Despite the French military lobby’s desire to increase cooperation with Portugal, the acquisition of twelve PUMA helicopters in 1969 was probably the most important Portuguese purchase in the second half of the 1960s. Nevertheless, France continued to support Portugal politically in the United Nations.\(^\text{45}\)

### West Germany and the Portuguese colonial issue\(^\text{46}\)

Contrary to what happened with France, the main element of Portuguese–West German relations was military cooperation. Initiated after the FRG’s admission to NATO, in 1955, this cooperation began with the establishment of a training base for the West German Air Force in southern Portugal, at the end of 1960. This base, to be installed in Beja (Alentejo), would serve for training in long-distance flights and was part of a larger system of bases designed for logistics

\(^{\text{42}}\) IAN/TT, AOS/CO/MA-5, ‘Communications from the Portuguese Embassy in Paris’, 29 February 1964.

\(^{\text{43}}\) ‘Letter from Marcello Mathias to Oliveira Salazar’, in Correspondência Marcello Mathias/Salazar, 1947/1968, ed. by Joaquim Veríssimo Serrão (Lisbon: Difel, 1984), pp. 465–66.

\(^{\text{44}}\) Daniel Marcos, Salazar e de Gaulle, pp. 202–06.

\(^{\text{45}}\) Amaral da Silva Lala, pp. 323–401.

\(^{\text{46}}\) An earlier version of this topic was published in Portuguese Studies Review, 16.2 (2008), 103–19 (pp. 111–17).
support in Europe, in case of war. In return for establishing this base on Portuguese territory, it was agreed between Lisbon and Bonn that the German Armed Forces would purchase large quantities of ammunition and hand grenades produced by Portuguese military manufacturers (especially the Fábrica Nacional de Braço de Prata — FNBP). One of the most important elements of this agreement was the commitment by the German Defence Ministry that ‘as fábricas portuguesas estariam sempre ocupadas com encomendas satisfatórias’ [the Portuguese factories would always be kept busy with sufficient orders].

That is, these industries would always be kept operative and thus able to produce weapons and ammunitions for the Portuguese Armed Forces as well. As a consequence of this commitment, Lisbon had to pay only the production costs, since the maintenance expenses were already covered by the German agreement. The respective Ministers of Defence, Júlio Botelho Moniz and Franz Joseph Strauss, signed the final agreement for the establishment of the Beja Airfield in December 1960.

However, only three months after the signature of this long-term agreement, the colonial wars erupted in Angola, completely changing the nature of this otherwise regular cooperation between two NATO Allies. Confronted with the Portuguese refusal to recognize the right to self-determination by its colonial possessions, the Federal Republic found itself divided as to what position to take. On the one hand, the strategic importance of Portugal to the Atlantic Alliance was something that Bonn could not ignore. It recognized the importance of supporting a NATO ally that was strongly anti-communist and that controlled one of the main elements of Western — and most importantly, West German — security, namely the Azores. At the same time, the West German leaders feared that, in the event of the Estado Novo losing its empire, the whole regime would fall apart, creating a power vacuum which would allow a communist takeover in Portugal. Such a disturbance would certainly spill over into the rest of the Iberian Peninsula, something unacceptable to Bonn. Moreover, by giving its support, West Germany believed it would be showing Salazar that he was not alone in the Western World, despite the difficulties created by some other European allies, as well as by the Kennedy administration. It is clear, therefore, that a Portuguese withdrawal from NATO was something to be avoided at all costs by the German government.

On the other hand, the FRG was trying to enter Africa, with the objective of gaining some leverage over the Afro-Asian bloc. Besides economic interests (mainly related to the access to raw materials and to the exportation of German products), Bonn’s objective was to avoid international recognition of the ‘other Germany’, the German Democratic Republic (GDR). In particular, it tried to

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47 IAN/TT, AOS/CO/GR-10, ‘Report of the conversations between the Defense Ministers of Portugal and the Federal Republic of Germany’, 16 January 1960.
48 Ana Mónica Fonseca, A força das armas, pp. 43–53.
49 Ana Mónica Fonseca, ‘Dez anos de relações luso-alemãs: 1958–1968’, Relações Internacionais, 11 (2006), 47–60 (pp. 51–52).
gain the support of the new African states for its positions regarding Berlin (which became even more relevant after the construction of the Berlin Wall, in August 1961). Bonn then developed a broad range of instruments to gain the attention of the developing countries in Asia and Africa, which were mainly applied through the so-called development aid. In the early 1960s it created the Ministry of Economic Cooperation, with the main objective of managing the funds provided for this purpose by the federal government. As we can see, Bonn’s position regarding Portuguese colonial policy was always conditioned by the Cold War, either by the importance of political stability in the Iberian Peninsula, or by the competition with East German influence in the Third World.

Bearing this in mind, the solution was to follow an ambiguous policy: Bonn decided not to take any position that could challenge Portuguese colonial policy, whilst trying to avoid any action that could be understood by the Third World as supporting the maintenance of the Portuguese empire. The resulting policy was in practice extremely favourable towards Portugal. In terms of military cooperation, large quantities of aeroplanes, weapons and ammunition were given to Portugal, from the beginning of 1961 and throughout the rest of the decade. The most important aircraft were the Dornier DO-27 (suited to transportation) and the Harvard T-6 (used as a bomber). The Dornier DO-27s were later converted in Portugal for reconnaissance purposes, as well as for undertaking surveillance operations with armed support to ground forces. Although the German authorities knew that these planes were to be sent to Africa, they trusted in the Portuguese declaration that ‘os aviões pertenciam ao Ministério da Defesa Portuguesa e serão utilizados em defesa dos interesses da NATO’ [the planes belonged to the Portuguese Defence Ministry and will be used in defence of NATO interests]. This declaration, requested by the German government as a guarantee, was clearly ambiguous and it could be understood in many senses, which favoured both the Portuguese and German interests. From the Portuguese point of view, it corresponded to the reality, because the ideology stated that the defence of Europe should begin in Africa, and Salazar believed that the Colonial Wars were also a way of preventing Soviet influence in the African territories. On the other hand, this declaration also suited the West German government, allowing it to say to the African states, who accused it of helping Portugal in the Colonial Wars, that Salazar’s government had given assurances that it would use the equipment only inside the NATO region.

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50 Ibid.
51 Bundesministerium für Wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit, BMZ.
52 Bastian Hein, Die Westdeutschen und die Dritte Welt: Entwicklungspolitik und Entwicklungsdiensst zwischen Reform und Revolte, 1959–1974 (Oldenburg: Institute für Zeitgeschichte, 2004), pp. 38–41.
53 John P. Cann, Contra-insurreição em África, 1961–1974: o modo português de fazer a guerra (Lisbon: Edições Atena, 1998), p. 177; Politisches Archiv von Auswaertiges Amt, B 26, 113, ‘Note of the Auswaertiges Amt’, 6 October 1961.
54 AHD-MNE, PEA, M. 486, ‘Telegram 132 from the Portuguese Embassy in Bonn’, 18 October 1963.
55 Ana Mónica Fonseca, A força das armas, p. 165.
A good example of the advantageous cooperation between Portugal and the FRG are the agreements of 4 November 1963, in which the FRG sold to the Portuguese Air Force a total of forty-six Dornier DO-27s and seventy Harvard T-6s. They were sold at a low price, and were paid for by the maintenance of German planes in the Oficinas Gerais de Manutenção Aeronáutica (OGMA). As we can see, the Portuguese government would not have to give any money for the aeroplanes; it was a direct exchange of services, and of much greater value to Portugal than to West Germany.\footnote{AHFA, EMFA, Proc. nº 551,13 — Agreement between the Federal Ministry of Defence and Portuguese National Defence Ministry, 4 November 1963.}

With the changing international context and with the German persistence in penetrating the African continent, Portuguese–German relations deteriorated in the second half of the 1960s. The pressures of the African states and the economic crisis of the period, as well as the coming to power of the SPD (in coalition with the CDU/CSU) in December 1966, caused the reduction of the Beja Base project, with consequences for military relations as a whole. Mainly because of its economic difficulties, the German government decided to reduce the Beja Airfield project, handing Portugal, nonetheless, a final reward. As compensation for abandoning the base, the German Defence Ministry sold Portugal thirty Dornier DO-27s — again at a very favourable price — and allowed relations between Lisbon and the Dornier company to be established so that the aeroplanes could be manufactured in Portugal. In May 1969, with Marcello Caetano now head of government, Portugal and the FRG agreed that the Beja Air Base would become a training base for civil aviation companies, specifically TAP and Lufthansa. All the other projects, including the residential area, hospitals and the ammunitions storehouse, were either abandoned or dramatically reduced.

The German Social Democrats’ arrival in power in Bonn thus coincided with a decline in Portuguese–German military cooperation. While in opposition, the SPD had gone as far as to develop some contacts with the liberation movements of the Portuguese colonies.\footnote{Rui Lopes, ‘Between Cold War and the Colonial Wars: The Making of West German Policy towards the Portuguese Dictatorship, 1968–1974’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2011), pp. 185–220.} However, once in government, and despite having their party leader, Willy Brandt, in the Foreign Affairs Ministry, the Social Democrats did not have the political space or, indeed, the political will, to dramatically change their relations with Portugal. In fact, the West German government’s strategy towards Portugal was changing: relations with Portugal should be kept up, but with the general objective of favouring the liberalization of the regime, and of drawing Lisbon into the EEC. Thus, the arrival of the SPD in power would not mean a radical interruption of the relationship between Portugal and the FRG.\footnote{Antonio Muñoz Sánchez, ‘La Socialdemocracia alemana y el Estado Novo (1961–1974)’, Portuguese Studies Review, 13.1/2 (2005), 477–503 (p. 484).}
This was even more obvious after 1969, when the SPD became the majority party in Bonn (in coalition with the Liberals). Despite actively pursuing an understanding with the Eastern bloc and the Soviet Union (which was obtained in the mid-1970s), Bonn continued with its ambiguous position regarding Portuguese colonial policy. In fact, the division inside the government was even greater now. The Foreign Affairs Minister, the Liberal Walter Scheel, asserted that military cooperation should be preserved, as it was ‘the only realistic and adequate alternative for the Western Alliance strategic objectives and the West German economic interests’. On the other hand, the Minister for Economic Cooperation, Erhard Eppler (from the left wing of the SPD), argued that it was time to end military cooperation with Portugal, and that Bonn should begin supporting the African liberation movements — an ambition that was eventually achieved through the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. However, once again, this division had no direct results on Portuguese–West German relations. There was in fact a decrease in military cooperation, but at the economic level Portuguese–West German relations grew stronger. The participation of West German corporations in the construction of the Cabora Bassa Dam, for which Bonn gave important credit guarantees, was an important signal of continuity.

Only in September 1973, when both West and East Germany were admitted to the United Nations, did the Federal Republic publicly criticize Portuguese colonial policy. Willy Brandt was aware that the Democratic Republic would most certainly support any type of radical resolution against Portugal in the UN General Assembly, thus supporting African ambitions and reinforcing East Germany’s leverage in the Third World. He therefore had to decide whether to maintain the ambiguous, and increasingly difficult, policy of cooperation with Portugal, thus facing criticism in the international arena, and even within his own Party, or to radically change the Federal Government’s position. The increasing criticism from the SPD and of the Social Democrat youth, on the one hand, and publication in July 1973 of an article in The Times denouncing the Wiriyamu massacre, in Mozambique, left Chancellor Willy Brandt with no option: in September 1973, he declared in the UN General Assembly the FRG’s support for ‘the liquidation by the United Nations of the remaining colonialism, especially in Africa’.

59 ‘Memorando do Ministério Federal dos Negócios Estrangeiros sobre a Cooperação militar luso-alemã’, 16 de Novembro de 1970, Akten der Aussenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (AAPBRD), 1970, pp. 2069–70.  
60 The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) is a political foundation associated with the SPD, which developed intense international activity. During this period in particular, the FES represented the left wing of the Social-Democratic Party. One of the most obvious examples of this is the fact that it became public knowledge that the Foundation was giving moral and financial support to the nationalist movements of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea. See Patrick von zur Mühlen, Die internationale Arbeit der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung: Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des Ost-West-Konflikts (Bonn: Dietz Verlag, 2007).  
61 Rui Lopes, ‘Between Cold War and the Colonial Wars’, pp. 128–34.  
62 By referring directly to the remaining colonialism, there was no doubt that this was a reference to Portugal. Thomas Kreyssig, Die Portugal-Politik der SPD von 1969–1976 auf transnationaler und
As can be seen, the relations between Portugal and the Federal Republic of Germany during the 1960s were based essentially on the military rather than political aspects. These were of great importance to the Portuguese regime's colonial policy, mainly because they were fundamental for the maintenance of the wars in Africa. Despite West Germany’s constant dilemma between supporting Portugal and penetrating Africa, we can say that the cooperation with Portugal was favoured. Contrary to expectations, the arrival of the SPD in power (first, in the Grand Coalition, then as the majority party) did not greatly affect the economic and military cooperation between Bonn and Lisbon, as the West German participation on the Cabora Bassa Dam attested. Only when it was forced to take a public position regarding Portuguese colonialism did the FRG opt to criticize its ally, always keeping in mind the constraints of the Cold War and in particularly the competition with East Germany.

Final Remarks: The Cold War and Diversification of Portuguese Alliances in Order to Resist Decolonization

Decolonization and the Cold War were two parallel processes that characterized the second half of the twentieth century. Even though decolonization was a social and political process that pre-dated the start of the Cold War, the ideological competition between the superpowers in the early 1950s quickly affected the struggle for independence of the colonial territories. For a small country such as Portugal, which attached major importance to its colonial possessions, the decolonization movement that emerged at the end of World War II caused great apprehension. Fearing that the end of the empire would lead to both the end of the Estado Novo and the loss of Portugal’s importance in Europe, the regime took advantage of its authoritarian nature, resisting the granting of any kind of self-determination to its colonies.

This was facilitated by Portugal’s position in the Western bloc. Being a founding member of NATO, mainly because of the geostrategic position of the Azores, Portugal was led by Cold War constraints to establish close relations with the main Atlantic power, the United States, despite Salazar’s deep distrust of Washington’s traditional anti-colonial position. However, as developments in the Third World increased pressure on the European colonial powers, Portugal clearly understood that it would have to find alternative sources of support for the maintenance of its colonial policy. Taking advantage of the close relationship with France and the FRG, within NATO, Portugal gradually shifted its foreign policy towards the continental European countries. But why choose France and West Germany?

Both Paris and Lisbon decided to keep their colonial territories for as long as possible. France eventually abandoned its empire, at the beginning of the 1960s,
but this did not mean that these two countries would follow separate paths regarding the decolonization issue. In fact, there were two distinct reasons behind French support for Portugal in its international struggle against the anticolonial movement. First, because France continued to see Africa as one of its strategic areas of interest and as such would not abstain from taking a position in this region. Second, and more importantly, de Gaulle's France opted to manifest a high degree of autonomy in relation to the United States. When the Atlantic superpower demonstrated its unwillingness to support Portugal, even voting against its ally in the UN, France immediately accused Washington of abandoning Portugal. France, by contrast, would assume its responsibility in supporting Portugal, both politically and military.

West Germany, in turn, supported Portugal for reasons mainly related to the stability of the Western bloc. Indeed, West German–Portuguese cooperation derived directly from the participation of both countries in NATO. However, after the beginning of the colonial wars, the FRG decided to maintain the close relationship it already had with the *Estado Novo*. In making this decision, Bonn had faced a typical Cold War dilemma, divided between supporting a Western ally and penetrating Africa, a region increasingly important, not only for economic reasons, but particularly for reasons related to the competition with the German Democratic Republic. Only at the beginning of the 1970s did West German support for the Portuguese regime's colonial policy diminish in its importance, once again due to the evolution of the Cold War and the admission of both East and West Germany to the UN.

Therefore, the Cold War constraints were the main motives which led to France's and West Germany's support for Portuguese colonial policy, and that, conversely, allowed the survival of the *Estado Novo* until 1974.