

Portugal

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Summary

Portugal's participation in the First World War was depicted by its supporters as a vital component of the consolidation of the country's young republican regime (established in 1910) and its affirmation abroad. However, there was never any consensus on intervention and the despatch of an expeditionary force on the Western Front, and a coup d'état in December 1917 led to a revision of Portugal's commitment to the conflict. The defence of the country's substantial colonial empire generated greater agreement at the level of national elites, but the war in the colonies – especially in Mozambique – proved especially problematic for the Portuguese. All of these factors, taken together with domestic upheaval and a disappointing peace treaty in 1919, suggest that rather than strengthening the Republic, the First World War served to undermine it fatally, leaving it unprepared for the challenges of the post-war world.

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Introduction

Portugal's experience of the First World War was unique, and remains difficult to categorize. A latecomer to the conflict, entering the war was not solely in Portugal's power, depending instead on approval by [Great Britain](#), the senior partner in a centuries-old alliance. The head of a large colonial [empire](#), Portugal found it impossible to mobilize overseas resources to aid it in the conflict. A victorious ally, its armed forces were shattered on the field of battle and did not recover in time to contribute decisively to the triumph over [Germany](#), be it in Europe, be it in Africa. A *coup d'état* in December 1917 overthrew the interventionist politicians who had led the country to war, and the new leadership focused its attention on developing an alternative political path at the expense of the war effort, even while the country remained a belligerent.

Long a preserve of military and diplomatic historians, the importance of the First World War for Portugal's evolution in the 20th century is now better appreciated. Political and cultural historians especially have helped to explain both the hopes deposited in the interventionist project by its promoters and the consequences – domestic and international – of the project's failure in the wake of social upheaval, political turbulence and military disappointment.

Anglo-Portuguese Alliance

A Troubled Relationship

Over the course of the 19th century, the venerable Anglo-Portuguese alliance gradually faded from London's concerns, although it remained the central pillar of Lisbon's [diplomacy](#). The two countries clashed over the partition of [southern Africa](#) in 1890, leading to a British ultimatum on the issue, and Anglo-Portuguese relations suffered a further shock in October 1910 when the Portuguese Republic was proclaimed. Crowning the ensuing period of troubled relations were the negotiations between Great Britain and Germany regarding the partition of Portugal's [colonies](#) should the country default on its foreign debt – part of a wider, but unsuccessful, attempt at *rapprochement* between the two Great Powers. That Britain could even countenance such a negotiation – which eventually failed on a technical, not a political, issue – shows that to many in the British political and military establishment, notably “Liberal Imperialists” such as [Edward Grey \(1862-1933\)](#) and [Winston Churchill \(1874-1965\)](#), the alliance was essentially a dead letter.¹ Churchill, in fact, argued for a closer understanding with [Spain](#) in the wake of the Portuguese monarchy's demise. However, the alliance had not

completely slipped from the notice of British officialdom. Within the Foreign Office, a number of diplomats, namely Sir [Eyre Crowe \(1864-1925\)](#), saw in the Portuguese colonial empire an important asset for the maintenance of national and imperial security. These men fought a successful rear-guard action against their political masters and the attempt to improve relations with Germany by redistributing African territory at Portugal's expense. The Portuguese, meanwhile, were kept abreast of these negotiations, which allowed them to understand that the alliance, as seen from London, was one of many competing strands of British foreign policy, and a fragile one at that. In the face of conservative hostility against the Republic and mounting international tension (as evidenced by the Second [Moroccan Crisis](#) and the two [Balkan Wars](#)), the alliance, for all its limitations, remained important to Portugal's survival. Thus, while paying lip service to the task of developing better relations with all countries, notably [Brazil](#), successive Portuguese governments tried to align themselves with London whenever possible.

The War and Portuguese Politics

By early 1914, republican politics had reached an impasse, no political party trusting in the others to oversee elections. President [Manuel de Arriaga \(1840-1917\)](#) now turned to the man he had beaten for the presidency, [Bernardino Machado \(1851-1944\)](#), generally seen as a great conciliator. Machado's executive was labelled a [government](#) of pacification, its most important task being to hold free and fair general elections. Its existence was a troubled one, subject as it was to great pressure from the republican parties as they jockeyed for position in the forthcoming contest. Envisaged essentially as a solution for very pressing domestic difficulties, it was surprised by the outbreak of war in Europe. On the very day that it declared war on Germany, the [British government](#) asked Portugal neither to follow it into the conflict nor to declare itself neutral, remaining ready to perform whatever services London might require in what was viewed as a short conflict.²

For the next year and a half Portuguese political life would be played out against the increasingly pressing question of whether or not to enter the conflict, whose end was nowhere in sight. The interventionist current, although not necessarily large, was politically and culturally influential, and sought to present the defeat of Germany as the final hurdle to clear in order to guarantee the Republic's future. To this end it enlisted the main ideas and images of 1914-vintage Allied [propaganda](#), with its depictions of the "beastly Hun" and the emphasis on [atrocities](#) against civilians.³ Other interventionist considerations involved the defence of Portugal's colonial empire and warding off of Spanish designs over Portugal. The alliance with Britain and the republicans' francophilia naturally determined the sympathy of much of the population towards the interventionist cause, but not even all republicans

bought into the interventionist project; the Unionist party, led by [Manuel de Brito Camacho \(1862-1934\)](#) was reluctant to take to the field of battle without an unambiguous invitation from London.⁴ Bernardino Machado tried to harness the interventionist current to the survival of his government, holding a special parliamentary session on the issue and obtaining extraordinary powers to deal with the international situation as he and his ministers saw fit. But, as it turns out, these ministers were themselves divided (with Foreign Minister [Freire de Andrade \(1859-1929\)](#) notably opposed to any unsolicited participation).⁵ Moreover, the question of intervention did not obscure the other great issue of the day, the forthcoming elections, of which no one had lost sight.

From the Declaration of War to the Pimenta de Castro Government

Britain's request that Portugal neither enter the conflict nor declare its [neutrality](#) was understood by much of Portuguese interventionist opinion – starting with [João Chagas \(1863-1925\)](#), Portugal's minister at Paris – as a transparent attempt to keep Portugal in a subordinate position, depriving it of all diplomatic initiative.⁶ There is good reason to believe that Chagas's contacts with the French minister in Lisbon, [Émile Daeschner \(1863-1928\)](#), were behind Paris's request for the delivery by Portugal of its French-made 75 mm artillery pieces, quickly endorsed by London.⁷ This request suggests that [France](#) was keener to see Portugal intervene in the conflict than Great Britain, perhaps hoping to use the issue to usurp the latter's place in Portuguese affairs. However, General [Pereira de Eça \(1852-1917\)](#), the war minister, balked at sending these guns on their own: if the Allies wanted the guns, they would have to accept Portugal as a belligerent. He assured his interlocutors that a division could be mobilized quickly, and his stance made him a darling of interventionist politicians. Great Britain, accepting the minister's assurances at face value, responded by inviting Portugal, in secret, to enter the war as soon as such a force was assembled.⁸ But mobilizing a division was, at that time, well beyond the ability of the Portuguese army, and moves to do so increased the apprehension among the officer corps, which eventually boiled over into acts of outright defiance.

Although the requested guns were eventually sent to France without soldiers, Portugal did not go to war in the autumn of 1914, to the immense frustration the country's interventionists. This failure contributed to the fall of the Bernardino Machado, after which a prolonged political crisis was resolved by the return of the largest party, the Democrats, to power (which guaranteed their victory at the polls whenever elections were finally held). Increasingly apprehensive about the mounting hostility between the professional officer corps and the interventionist Democratic party, President Arriaga, in January 1915, invited General

[Joaquim Pimenta de Castro \(1846-1918\)](#), a veteran republican officer, to form a government and to oversee the forthcoming electoral process.⁹ His appointment, unconstitutional in nature, effectively brought to an end all talk of going to war. This did not, however, upset the British, who were favourably impressed by Pimenta de Castro's cooperation on most matters. If anything, there was in London a certain amount of dismay at his very violent overthrow on 14 May 1915.¹⁰ Despite the evident support of much of the army's officer corps, Pimenta de Castro succumbed to an uprising of sailors and civil revolutionaries before he could hold elections and influence their outcome.

The Democrats Return to Power

Eager to consolidate the impression that the 14 May revolt had been a national revolution against a nascent dictatorship, and not a simple *coup*, the Democrats' leader, [Afonso Costa \(1871-1937\)](#), stayed away from the resulting cabinet. Still, general elections duly delivered an overwhelming Democratic majority in both houses of parliament. In the ensuing months the government tried to convince the British government to reissue the October 1914 invitation, to no avail.¹¹ When Costa finally returned to power, in December, most Allied observers believed that his pragmatism would lead him to keep Portugal out of the conflict; it was on this basis that Britain began to negotiate a substantial loan to Portugal.¹² Nevertheless Costa soon showed himself determined to pick a fight with Germany, using the failure of the German minister at Lisbon, Baron Friedrich Rosen (1856-1935), to present his compliments to Bernardino Machado after the latter's election to the presidency of the Republic as one avenue to manufacture a showdown. He would soon be handed a more promising basis for belligerency.

Empire

An Unfulfilled Promise

The coming of the Republic in October 1910 deepened Portugal's attachment to the myth of empire. All republicans believed that empire, as a living link with a glorious past, would play a key role in reawakening the national genius, dulled by centuries of monarchist and clerical reaction (even if the constitutional monarchy had invested quite a lot of political capital into the consolidation and "pacification" of the African colonies).¹³ And there remained, of course, the hope of extracting considerable wealth from the colonies. But such ideological readings of history and pious hopes for the future could not overcome the fact that Portuguese economic agents had still not amassed sufficient capital to transform the colonies. Whatever investment occurred was carried out by the state, or was heavily guaranteed by it, to the

detriment of the impoverished metropolis. Concessionary companies yielded disappointing results. Moreover, many parts of Angola, Mozambique and Portuguese Guinea still required a costly military presence to enforce Portuguese sovereignty.¹⁴ For most of the population, lastly, the empire meant little: the number who settled there was dwarfed by the number who [emigrated every year to Brazil](#).

These difficulties proved, in the end, insurmountable. The Republic's colonial programme was essentially based on decentralization, in the hope that local (white and mixed-race) elites might be able to develop, given sufficient power and resources, their respective territories more efficiently than far-off Lisbon. But little came of such plans, and the regime, which relied on the income provided by import and export duties charged on trade with the colonies, as well as the re-export of colonial goods, had almost nothing to say on the ideal relationship with the indigenous population, or tensions between that population, the (very few) white settlers, and metropolitan business interests, conservative in their outlook and fearful of significant reforms. Without financial investment in the Portuguese colonies, these remained, for the most part, in the doldrums, and subject to periodic rebellions against Portuguese rule.

The First Shots are Fired

Convinced that they must surely be at war with England's oldest ally, and perhaps laying down a marker in a post-victory redrawing of African boundaries, German colonial troops crossed the border to attack Portuguese garrisons in southern Angola and northern Mozambique soon after the conflict in Europe began. News of these attacks, as well as the departure of expeditions to secure the borders of Angola and Mozambique, allowed interventionists to claim that, for all practical purposes, Portugal was already at war with Germany. This was not the case, however, and in fact the organization of these expeditions rendered more difficult the attempt to put together the already mentioned division to be sent to France. In December 1914, a German foray into southern Angola, ostensibly to secure vital supplies, escalated, leading to the death of a number of Germans, including an officer. A massive retaliatory raid was then mounted by German forces, which culminated in the attack on, and destruction of, the fort at Naulila, a local Portuguese stronghold.¹⁵ As the Portuguese fled, the Kwanyama people, only recently "pacified", erupted into revolt. The Portuguese hold over southern Angola was suddenly undone. It would take months before the territory was again secured, during which time Allied forces conquered South West Africa. General Pereira de Eça's campaign to reoccupy southern Angola, which culminated in the set-piece battle of Môngua (18-20 August 1915), would later be at the centre of war-crime allegations during secret sessions of parliament in July 1917.¹⁶

Going to War

Germany declares War

In the end it was forces outside Portugal's control that determined its participation in the conflict. Britain's worsening shipping situation led it to cast an eye over the dozens of modern German ships which had taken refuge in Portuguese waters in 1914. There had been some previous discussion over these ships, but it had proved inconclusive. As 1915 drew to a close, the issue returned to the fore, not least because France also began to show an interest in the vessels, again raising the spectre of French interference in Anglo-Portuguese affairs.¹⁷ Afonso Costa was asked by the British simply to seize the ships and put them at London's disposal, which he initially refused, suggesting that the request should be formulated in accordance with the terms of the Anglo-Portuguese alliance. While this step was being considered in London, Edward Grey launched a solo run, trying to scare the Portuguese into compliance by threatening to cease the supply of vital foodstuffs and fuel with British ships for as long as the German ships remained untouched in Portuguese waters.¹⁸ Costa held his nerve (unlike some of his ministers) until at last London agreed to invoke the Alliance in its request for the seizure of the ships. Once this was secured, Costa moved at breakneck speed, passing legislation which allowed for the seizure of the vessels on the same day as these were taken in a military operation, without any prior consultation, be it with the ships' owners, or with the German legation. The move was then explained publicly as a response to the country's urgent economic needs.¹⁹ An outraged Germany, its initial complaint ignored, responded with a declaration of war on 9 March 1916.

The declaration of war was met with the formation of a Sacred Union cabinet, led by Evolutionist party leader [António José de Almeida](#).²⁰ This was essentially an alliance between interventionist formations, with the Democrats holding the most important portfolios: Finance (Costa), Foreign Affairs ([Augusto Soares \(1873-1954\)](#)) and War ([José Maria Norton de Matos \(1867-1955\)](#)). Determined to obtain funding for Portugal's war effort and a place on the [Western Front](#), Costa and Soares then set off for London, where they secured both, in return for leasing the greater part of the seized German ships (many of which needed substantial repairs) to a British firm, Furness & Withy. In the meantime, under Norton de Matos' supervision, an "Instruction Division" was assembled at Tancos for training and manoeuvres, and the results, while not spectacular, led an excited interventionist press to speak of a "miracle": Portugal suddenly possessed, it was uncritically stated, a modern army, capable of taking to the field of battle against Germany. On his return from England, Costa was exultant: the Republic, he explained, had never been stronger, given the high esteem in which it was now held by the Allied powers.²¹

Intervention in Europe and its Costs

Although they had agreed in London to accept a Portuguese force in France, and had, on Afonso Costa's request, issued an invitation for such a force to be sent, the British were sceptical about the value of a putative [Portuguese Expeditionary Corps](#) (*Corpo Expedicionário Português*, CEP). To evaluate the progress made since 1914, an Allied Military Mission was dispatched to Lisbon, headed by General [N. W. Barnardiston \(1858-1916\)](#).²² Green light was eventually given for the CEP's departure, but a long list of delays ensued, not least as a result of a French suggestion that it should be assigned to the French sector. Once it was resolved that the CEP would fight alongside the British, and the terms under which it would do so were hammered out in a Convention, another setback was endured: Naval officer [Machado Santos \(1875-1921\)](#), who had gained notoriety in the revolution of October 1910, led a coup against the Sacred Union on 13 December, claiming that the time had come to restore the Republic's lost purity, supposedly sullied by party strife.²³ As a result of all these delays, the first transports had to wait until January 1917 before setting off.

Having dealt with the Machado Santos *coup* and begun the transport of the CEP to France, the Sacred Union leadership might well have felt entitled to celebrate, but there was no chance to do so. The news from Africa was bad and, as 1917 dawned, the list of problems faced by the government kept increasing. The harsh legal measures adopted to deal with the Machado Santos *coup* resulted in a split within the Evolutionist Party, which in April left the government as a result of a sudden parliamentary crisis. Costa then assumed the reins of power, leading an all-Democratic cabinet, ill prepared for what awaited it. The economy was suffering the effects of a shortage of essential [foodstuffs](#) and coal, with public order breaking down as a result; in a related development, trade-union militancy was on the rise, with a number of high-profile [strikes](#) culminating in a general strike in September. Great Britain, upset by the slow pace of the delivery of the seized German ships, did not show great concern for Portugal's economic plight. The government, though, remained focused on the situation on the Western Front and the CEP's transformation into a full army corps, with greater autonomy; to guarantee this, Norton de Matos travelled to London in May, and on his return proudly announced his achievement. The country was not prepared for the news, which prompted the parliament to go into secret sessions. Even Democratic backbenchers were worried by an open-ended military situation that, in the words of the war minister, and with no victory in sight, would require monthly reinforcements of 4,000 men just to maintain the CEP at its optimal strength.²⁴

The War in Africa

In 1916, the Portuguese occupied, or “liberated”, the disputed territory of Kionga, on the southern shore of the Rovuma river, which separated Mozambique from German [East Africa](#). However, their subsequent invasion of German East Africa was a costly failure leading to a chaotic retreat from the German fort at Newala, the first of many Portuguese objectives.²⁵ In 1917, a German [reconnaissance](#) mission composed of 400 men (mostly, of course, African soldiers, or [Askaris](#)) operated largely unopposed for some four months in Nyassa Province, in northeast Mozambique. Worse still, in November of that year the hard-pressed German army, led by General [Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck \(1870-1964\)](#), punched its way through the border at Negomano and proceeded to spend the next nine months in Portuguese territory, securing what supplies it needed from the indigenous peoples and captured Portuguese posts. Although it was chased by the Allied forces operating in Mozambique, it could on occasion deliver exceptionally harsh blows against these, as occurred in Namacurra, in July 1918.²⁶ In other words, Portugal, thanks to its government’s insistence on fighting in both Africa and the Western Front, lost control of events in Mozambique and was left at the mercy of its Allies – those same countries which, led by South Africa, harboured annexationist intentions when it came to Mozambique.

But Portugal’s problems in Mozambique went much further than the German army; the war led to increased impositions by the colonial state on the population while weakening that same state’s ability to make its presence felt. The result, not surprisingly, was revolt in those areas where government by colonial authorities or concessionary companies was most tenuous. Most of the indigenous population saw the administration simply as an exploitative machinery. It was the lack of a common Mozambican identity among the indigenous population, rather than Portuguese strength, which allowed the colonial state to survive. The Portuguese resorted to a long-established custom of exploiting local rivalries in order to supplement their own forces, offering their indigenous allies a free hand when it came to spoils of the defeated rebellious groups. From early 1915 onwards, the Portuguese had faced a number of [rebellions](#) in Angola. From 1917 onwards, rebellions began to occur in Mozambique as well, as a result of wartime conditions and the growing sense, among the population, that Portugal’s days as a colonizer were coming to an end. The most important of these rebellions occurred along the vital Zambezi river, which divides Mozambique into two. Strongest in the old Barué kingdom, only recently subdued, the revolt lasted from March to September, spreading upstream to the Tete district and downstream along the southern bank of the Zambezi. It was caused by excessive taxation and the ever-greater recruitment of men, both to work on road projects (Tete–Salisbury) and to serve as porters in the war effort.²⁷ One historian has called this revolt “a pan-Zambezian movement to destroy the

repressive colonial system".²⁸

Arrival and Training of the CEP

The CEP began to arrive, belatedly, in early February 1917, thereafter embarking on a period of practical training and gradual adaptation to trench [warfare](#). A politically divided force, it would never cohere as hoped by its commander, General [Fernando Tamagnini de Abreu e Silva \(1856-1924\)](#),²⁹ and it would never really be seen as anything other than an obstacle, or even a danger, by the British High Command. British instructors and the officers of the XI Army Corps, of which the 1st Portuguese Division would be a part, were deeply troubled by the negligent attitude of the officers towards their men, the centralization of authority in a figure that was clearly hostile to British interests ([Major Roberto Baptista \(1874-1932\)](#), the CEP's first Chief of Staff) and an apparent unwillingness to learn from their British peers.³⁰ Cultural differences between the two sides were exacerbated by the generalized belief, within the British army, that – as had supposedly been shown during the Peninsular Campaign of the Napoleonic wars – Portuguese soldiers performed at their best when led by British officers. The damage caused by this belief would be acknowledged by General Charles Ker, head of the British Military Mission to the CEP, but only long after the war's end.³¹

Despite these difficulties, the CEP's expansion continued apace, so that a 2nd Division began to be despatched to France even as the 1st remained incomplete. Other manpower commitments were also entered into, such as the creation of a Heavy [Artillery](#) Corps (Corpo de Artilharia Pesada, CAP) to fight in the French sector and the supply of labourers for the British and French home fronts. British military concerns with the CEP's performance led to the attempt by [Edward George Villiers Stanley, Lord Derby \(1865-1948\)](#), Secretary of State for War, to convince Norton de Matos to accept a drastic reform of the unit, which would see only one division at the front at any given time and, more controversially, the allocation of British officers to the CEP. If better led, the British believed, the CEP's various components might be turned into a useful force. But the proposal seemed to confirm the worst suspicions of Portuguese republicans about British intentions, being interpreted as an attempt to reduce Portugal to protectorate status. As a result, it was roundly rejected by the Portuguese Minister of War.³²

Despite the large numbers of ships that the Portuguese government seized from Germany, the CEP relied on British vessels for the transports of its troops, be they part of the expansion to an Army Corps, or the normal reinforcements. This was a vital lifeline over which Lisbon had no control, and which was cut off soon after the failure to implement the Derby plan, in

the face of Norton de Matos' opposition. The timing naturally raises important questions, since the decision naturally meant that losses suffered at the front could not be replaced.

Surprisingly, therefore, the decision was taken to move the 2nd Division to the front, alongside the 1st – even though there were significant gaps the ranks of both – and a Portuguese sector was unveiled in November. No longer a part of the British XI Corps, the CEP remained a part of the British First Army.

The loss of the British ships, and its impact on the supply of reinforcements, was one more blow to the already shaken morale of the CEP. Political divisions, the general negligence of the needs of the men, the restriction of home leave to officers, the climate, British rations, and difficult relations with the civilian population led to a situation in which Portuguese soldiers felt increasingly abandoned. As 1917 came to an end, and, for some, a second harsh winter was embarked upon, morale dipped, even as military proficiency increased. This dip in morale was matched, as we have seen, by the worsening situation in Portugal. In response, Afonso Costa appealed to British, French and American solidarity to resolve his country's problems at the Inter-Allied Conference held in Paris, in November to December 1917. He would later claim to have secured regular shipments of coal and wheat until the war's end, as well as a return of a number of ex-German ships.³³

Cultural Mobilization

Portugal's wartime uniqueness – as a cash-strapped colonial power unable to mobilize the empire to its defence, or as a latecomer to the war whose belligerence was dependent on the whim of an ally – is also applicable to those issues which have focused the attention of cultural historians since the 1990s, most notably mobilization and [demobilization](#). The creation and exploitation of a war culture in a country where the majority of the population was both [rural](#) and illiterate was always to prove challenging.³⁴ This structural difficulty was compounded by a general lack of popular animosity towards Germany. But other aspects of Portugal's – and the Republic's – existence made the development of a war culture practically impossible. No distinctively republican model of waging war was developed. Portugal's administrative apparatus, made up of provincial civil governors and municipal administrators, was designed and staffed primarily with the aim of allowing sitting governments to win elections. Ensuring equality of sacrifice, by combating practices such as shirking (at times with the connivance of medical authorities), desertion, the black market and illegal exports to Spain,³⁵ was beyond its ability and that of the understaffed and badly paid security services. More importantly, no attempt was made, despite a number of suggestions, to use the war to widen the appeal of the Republic, if nothing else through a simple widening of the suffrage.³⁶

Republicans described Portuguese peasants as patriotic to the core, considered them willing to die for the *Pátria*, and mobilized them for war – all the while denying them the status of active citizens.³⁷ The same consideration applied to [women](#), despite the war enthusiasm of a small number of committed feminists whose calls for greater educational and labour opportunities, as well as equal political rights, in return for a great campaign of political education, fell on deaf ears.³⁸

While the government's propaganda initiatives were few and far between, if occasionally innovative,³⁹ self-mobilization was essentially restricted to the Democratic Party and its related associations and supporting groups. Proficient – for a time – at keeping the party's electorate enthused, it singularly failed to reach out to a wider audience. Significantly, no attempt was made to address the difficult relationship with the Catholic Church. The divisive 1911 Law of the Separation of State and the Churches, drafted by Afonso Costa, was left untouched. An attitude of contempt for the Church was manifested many times during the war, and an unequivocal offer of participation in the 1916 Sacred Union by Portuguese Catholics was dismissed; even the provision of Catholic chaplains was rendered difficult by the Government's actions.⁴⁰ The state's repressive apparatus kept a close watch over Catholic associations during the war, while the republican press denounced a clerical campaign allegedly taking place against the regime. Not necessarily a product of a deliberate counter-mobilization campaign by the regime's allies, as was alleged at the time, events at Fátima in 1917 showed the true extent of the divorce between the Republic and the people it purported to embody, and whose reaction to war, poverty and a seemingly disinterested government was to seek refuge in the supernatural.⁴¹ The Virgin's message, as relayed in the wake of the final apparition, in October, was unequivocal: the war was over and the men were coming home.⁴²

Unable to even begin a dialogue with large swathes of the population, much less develop a consensual explanation about the reason for the war and its ensuing sacrifices, the Sacred Union governments were then challenged by a counter-mobilization campaign which further obscured the issue, sowing doubt about the real reasons for the war and channelling popular discontent against leading interventionists and their cause. In parliament and in the [press](#), denunciations were made of the impact in Portugal of German gold, portrayed as the source of all the country's difficulties. No doubt exaggerated, they contained a grain of truth; the same [espionage](#) network on which Germany depended to keep [Spain neutral](#) was used to destabilize Portugal.⁴³ Spanish newspapers relaying German-supplied news items played an important role in this campaign; so too, it seems, did direct action through the distribution of propaganda aimed at different sectors (including soldiers), the encouragement of strikes,

sabotage and violent demonstrations, and the sponsorship of a coup, for which 200,000 *pesetas* were allotted in 1916.⁴⁴

Sidónio Pais Takes Over

Afonso Costa's efforts in Paris, at the end of November 1917, came too late. The following month [Sidónio Pais \(1872-1918\)](#), former minister at Berlin, overthrew the government with the aid of a small military force. Costa was detained on his return from France. Norton de Matos and other interventionist figures were also arrested or sent into exile, being joined there by President Bernadino Machado, quickly deposed. Sidónio Pais' victorious forces contained soldiers earmarked for departure to France, and in the confusion that ensued little thought was spared for the CEP and its needs. The British were guided by advice from General Barnardiston, who, still in Lisbon, believed that Pais could be trusted despite his time in Berlin. London now proposed a revised version of the Derby Plan, quickly accepted by Pais. This kept only one Portuguese division on the front lines, as part of a British Army Corps, with the second in the rear, operating as a reserve and training force.⁴⁵ The Allied manpower crisis, worsened by the need to divert troops to [Italy](#) after [Caporetto](#) and the expectation of a major German offensive on the Western Front, meant, however, that the two Divisions remained side by side at the front, increasingly exhausted and short of personnel.

The coup in Portugal had other consequences; devoid of political protection, interventionist officers were suddenly exposed to the criticism of their peers; political tensions rose as the Democrats' enemies celebrated. Moreover, Sidónio Pais, who did not have a powerful party behind him, was desperate for qualified men who might replace deposed politicians at national and local level; he thus turned to the armed forces for help, and was not above employing officers on leave from the front, which further depressed not only morale but also the fighting ability of the CEP.

The Battle of La Lys and Beyond: 9 April 1918

It was only after the March 1918 [German offensive](#) had been contained that the British High Command found the time to implement the revised Derby Plan, withdrawing most of the exhausted 1st Portuguese Division to the rear while leaving a reinforced 2nd Division holding the Portuguese front. Upon integrating this division into his XI British Army Corps, and after a quick visit, General Sir [Richard Haking \(1862-1945\)](#), who knew the CEP well, decided that the force was now a liability to the security of his sector.⁴⁶ A first mutiny by troops refusing to return to the front lines served notice that the CEP was close to breaking point. The replacement of the 2nd Division by a British formation was scheduled for the night of 9-10

April. In the early hours of 9 April, however, the German army launched the second of its [spring offensives](#), choosing the Portuguese sector as the site of its principal thrust. After an initial heavy bombardment which mixed explosive and [gas](#) shells, and targeted command and control centres, German [storm troopers](#), protected by dense fog, infiltrated the Portuguese sector, causing panic and a sudden retreat.⁴⁷ The divisional commander, General [Manuel de Oliveira Gomes da Costa \(1863-1929\)](#), found it impossible to contact his front-line brigades, much less coordinate their action; for the most part, the reserve brigade, ordered forward to the agreed line of defence, achieved little. Sir [Douglas Haig \(1861-1928\)](#) wrote, in his diary,

As previously arranged, British Divisions in reserve moved up on each side and rear of the Portuguese. The latter retired (or to be more exact, 'ran away') through the British taking their guns with them ...⁴⁸

An argument developed in time over whether the Portuguese had indeed given way so easily, or had in fact been forced to retreat after a British withdrawal on their left flank. However, casualty figures tell an important tale, with the number of prisoners (both officers and other ranks) towering over the number of those killed in action. There was no final stand in the face of the German assault. After the debacle at [La Lys](#), the British High Command was resolute in its opposition to any reconstitution of the CEP, as even Sidónio Pais' government seemed to suggest was necessary. A new commander-in-chief, General [Garcia Rosado \(1864-1937\)](#), failed to make headway in talks in London about such an eventuality. And when Haig finally relented, under pressure from the Foreign Office, the lack of shipping to transport soldiers to France continued to constrain decision-making. For the most part the remaining troops were used to build trenches and fortifications. With Garcia Rosado's encouragement and British permission, some interventionist officers set about, in the autumn of 1918, readying a number of battalions for a return to the front line. This initiative, which those officers viewed as the moral rehabilitation of the Portuguese army, resulted in a wave of mutinies as soldiers initially refused orders to return to a battle footing.

Conclusion

Total [wartime casualties](#) – between 7,000 and 8,000 killed, including all battlefields (with the majority of deaths occurring in Africa) – were not sufficiently high to create a sense of a “lost generation” in the post war years, and the Republic would find it difficult to generate an agreed account of the war's meaning in order to guide [commemoration](#) ceremonies.⁴⁹ The battle between interventionists and their opponents was thus continued in the [post-war period](#), as different sides vied with each other to establish a dominant narrative over the war

effort and its achievements. The military coup of May 1926 would, not surprisingly, enshrine the army's own account: of a brave defence in foreign and colonial battlefields of the country's honour, in a war that it need not have been fought but which, once declared, could not be shirked. This coup represented the final failure of the interventionist project: rather than strengthened, the Republic and its reformist project emerged from the war greatly enfeebled and unable to reach out to the great mass of the population in order to secure allies against a mounting conservative, even reactionary, backlash.

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Notes

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