
Political Interference on the Airwaves: The BBC Broadcasts to Portugal during the Second World War

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Abstract

The article analyses the impact of foreign broadcasts in Portugal during the Second World War as well as the communication strategies adopted by both German and British transmissions in the Portuguese language. After demonstrating that the broadcasts from the Axis powers were mainly composed of blatant propaganda, particular attention is given to the BBC. The British station, which was the most effective in reaching the Portuguese public, promoted itself as a credible source that offered reliable and unbiased news despite the fact that, as the article demonstrates, it trimmed its output to meet considerations imposed by the Foreign Office.

During the Second World War Portugal lived under a dictatorship known as the *Estado Novo* (or New State) led by Oliveira Salazar, who became Head of Government in 1933 following the coup d'état of 28 May 1926, which brought the First Republic to a close. Salazar's authoritarian regime was peculiar in several ways, including its media policies. Not only did it under-invest in radio broadcasting, it also fostered the position that the media should not be used to mobilize the masses. This was in clear contrast to the policies implemented by the other authoritarian and totalitarian regimes with which the *Estado Novo* had ideological connections.

Salazar aimed to create individuals who would take a passive stance, which was different to the approach taken by other European dictatorships at the time; Salazar was not keen on mobilizing the masses as a means of supporting the regime. For this reason, as happened during the entire period of the *Estado Novo*, Portugal in the 1930s and 1940s was 'protected' from the incursion of the masses into the political arena. This explains the lack of investment by the regime in radio broadcasting, despite the existence of a colonial empire which, according to many of the regime's intellectuals, urgently needed to be reached through radio.

The *Estado Novo*'s media policy was based more on control of information than investing in the creation of big events to be disseminated by the media, therefore

censorship had a central role to play. All the news published in the press and broadcast on the radio stations was controlled by the censors. Moreover, the news broadcast by the radio stations did not pose a serious danger to the regime during the 1930s because it occupied very small amounts of broadcasting time. In reality, broadcast news was quite tightly controlled and there was little margin for disseminating events that might displease the regime.

The control that the Lisbon regime exercised over broadcasting guaranteed political alignment with the Estado Novo's ideology and simultaneously made it impossible for the public to get up-to-date news on the war's military developments through local stations, since the censors tended to be very energetic in suppressing news, especially from the Eastern front, due to the regime's ideological opposition to communism. This led to the development of huge interest in foreign broadcasts in Portuguese, which put Portugal at the centre of the 'war of the airwaves' at a time when the development of international broadcasting was shaped by 'the perceived power of the medium to influence public opinion' (Hendy, 2004, 21). In fact, this perception explains why 'international radio broadcasting enjoyed an almost meteoric rise during the late 1930s and World War II' (Browne, 1982, 1).

The Soviets and the Dutch, who had pioneered transborder broadcasts in the late 1920s, were followed by other colonial powers that aimed to 'maintain and strengthen their ties with overseas possessions' (Wasburn, 1992, 5). France started its broadcasts to the colonies in 1931, the same year in which the Belgians began their transmissions to Congo. In the following year the BBC also started to operate its Empire Service in English at a time when both the Soviets and the Dutch were already broadcasting in several foreign languages. Moreover, Goebbels, who considered radio as the ideal medium to promote National Socialist views, besides investing in domestic broadcasts also developed a strategy for foreign transmissions starting in 1933 (Bergmeier and Lotz, 1997, 22). The messages aired by the Germans were consistent in describing their enemies as being immoral (Speier and Otis, 1944, 226), a strategy that was also used in the transmissions to Portugal (Ribeiro, 2005, 207–14).

Italy also invested heavily in shortwave broadcasts. In 1935, the year in which Mussolini invaded Ethiopia, a powerful station was built at Bari, where broadcasts in Arabic were transmitted to North Africa and the Middle East. In order to counterattack Radio Bari, the BBC started to operate its first foreign-language service in January 1938, with transmissions in Arabic. Broadcasts in Spanish and Portuguese would follow in March the same year, aimed at countering the anti-British propaganda that was being disseminated in Latin America by the Germans. Nevertheless, despite the existence of three hours of daily programmes to Latin America, only the news was aired in the two languages mentioned above, while most of the talks were transmitted in English (Whitton and Herz, 1942, 34).

Later on, during the Munich crisis, Chamberlain's speech was broadcast on 27 September 1938 in French, German and Italian (Salt, 1942, 39). 'The BBC for the first time directly addressed Germans and Italians' (Whitton and Herz, 1942, 40) and from that date onwards broadcasts to Europe became regular and the Corporation finally established its European Service. Nevertheless, despite the multiple foreign services that were created, in the months that preceded the beginning of the Second World War the BBC had to deal with a lack of transmitters and also with a lack of qualified staff to work on the foreign broadcasts, namely 'English switch censors who could understand foreign languages and English sub-editors' (Briggs, 1970, 177).

Until the beginning of the war, there was 'a running debate inside and outside the Corporation as to whether propaganda was "a good thing"' (Briggs, 1970, 81). Despite the issues that were raised against the usage of radio as a propaganda weapon, the range of countries covered by the broadcasts rose from six to fourteen during 1939, including Portugal and Spain, with the aim being to counterattack the German Reichs-Rundfunk-Gesellschaft (RRG).

From the start of the BBC's involvement in the European 'war of words' the station considered its own chief objective to be 'to provide honest news, not propaganda' (Briggs, 1965, 342). Although the difference between the two is not always very clear, and was not at all clear at the Foreign Office, the BBC asserted that it understood the difference and later on used this distinction as an important weapon against the Germans. In other words, the so-called 'objectivity' of the BBC would become in itself a strong propaganda weapon due to the divergence established by the 'truth' transmitted by the British station as opposed to the 'untruth' and obvious propaganda broadcast by RRG. As stated by Philo Wasburn: 'German radio efforts might have been more effective had the state not been using broadcasting for obvious political purposes in Austria, Saar, and Olympic campaigns for six years before World War II began' (1992, 17).

In Portugal, the BBC soon became the main station listeners could rely on for news, a fact that was further bolstered by the mainly pro-British position held by the Portuguese public, and also because accurate news could not be obtained from the Portuguese media due to censorship. The extent to which the BBC gave in to political interference in its Portuguese Service is what will be discussed below, bearing in mind the fact that, during this period the BBC was an instrument of war. This was 'true for the Home Service and Forces programme broadcasting to British audiences at home' (Nicholas, 1996, 2) but it also applied to the transmissions to occupied and neutral countries. Moreover, BBC officials' initial resistance to the broadcasts becoming a propaganda weapon diminished after the fall of France:

Willingness to do the job grew and with it determination to do it properly.... MOI [Ministry of Information] Overseas Division exercised increased influence over these broadcasts, and plans were laid to employ more sophisticated methods to study both the techniques and effects of broadcast propaganda, in expectation that its importance would only increase as the war continued. (Cole, 1990, 40)

Despite the Ministry of Information's influence on the broadcasts, this seems not to have prevented the BBC from acquiring – as in its home broadcasts – a strong reputation for 'telling the truth when, in reality, the whole truth could not be told' (Taylor, 1999, 171), in a period when radio propaganda reached its apex with the development of international broadcasts, namely clandestine stations, operated both by the Axis and the Allies (Wasburn, 1992, 19–20).

Foreign Broadcasts Targeting Portugal

Despite early transmissions in Portuguese by Radio Moscow, the German broadcasts initiated in 1936, during the Olympic Games, were the first to have any sort of impact in Portugal. Used as a means of showing the world the supremacy of the Aryan race and the German system of organization, the Games were an incredible vehicle for propaganda, particularly since it was the first time arrangements had been made for the simultaneous reporting of the Games. 'During the 16 days of the Olympic Games 2500 reports were broadcast in 28 languages' (Zeman, 1964, 110), including Portuguese. After the end of the Olympics, the RRG resumed its broadcasts to Portugal the following year and, although there is not much evidence concerning its impact on the country until the beginning of 1939, correspondence sent from the British Embassy in Lisbon and the local press both mention, from 1939, that RRG was producing a news bulletin every evening that could be listened to in Portugal without major interference.

Both the German and the Italian broadcasts consisted mainly of propaganda and the news was not considered reliable by Portuguese listeners. Moreover, the RRG's authoritarian style and appeals for revolt against Britain did not attract the majority of the Portuguese, who were mostly pro-British. The German station insistently repeated the same ideas, thus complying with Hitler's belief that effective propaganda was based on repetition. Nevertheless, despite the low acceptance of RRG transmissions, the British diplomatic community in Lisbon feared that local public opinion could adhere to the National Socialist ideology because of the strong lead that the Germans had acquired in the propaganda field in Portugal. Not only was the RRG producing a daily news broadcast, but the German propaganda apparatus was also very active in Lisbon, placing poster displays in

windows throughout the city and promoting the projection of German films in local cinemas.

All this activity saw no response from the Allies before the outbreak of the war, which led the British Embassy to insistently call attention to the fact that a counterattack to Axis propaganda on the airwaves was urgent. This issue was also on the agenda of the Foreign Office, which deemed the expansion of shortwave broadcasts to Portugal as well as to other European countries to be essential.¹ While the BBC was waiting for the arrival of transmitters that would enable broadcasts to more countries, the Foreign Office did not want to wait and was very interested in the possibility of 'broadcasts in Portuguese for Portugal even before the new shortwave transmitters were available by the rearrangement of programmes'.² Finally, to the satisfaction of British diplomats in Lisbon, the BBC Portuguese Service was inaugurated on 4 June 1939 and, starting on this date, a news bulletin was provided daily during the evening.

BBC Broadcasts to Portugal: Credibility as a Propaganda Weapon

In the broadcasts to Portugal, as in its Home Service and other foreign services, the BBC focused on a strategy of self-promotion as a credible source. This was accomplished not only through news selection, including items that were not always favourable to the Allies, but was also backed up by propaganda activities carried out by the British Embassy in Lisbon. Besides the publication of advertisements in the local press in which the BBC was described as 'the voice of truth', embassy officials also cultivated good relations with newspaper editors and senior staff of the Emissora Nacional (Portuguese state radio). This enabled, among other victories, articles praising the BBC to be published in the papers – namely in the weekly magazine specializing in broadcasting, published by Portuguese state radio.

Due to the BBC's image of being an objective source, during the first months of the transmission of the Portuguese Service the news bulletins could be listened to not only through the shortwave transmissions but also in the regular broadcasts of Emissora Nacional. Although it might seem surprising, the official Portuguese station relayed the BBC's evening news bulletin every night at 11.30 p.m. This ensured that the bulletin reached a greater number of listeners since the nationwide reception conditions for Emissora Nacional were better than those that existed for the British station.

¹ See Minutes from the Foreign Office, January 1939, in the National Archives (Surrey), FO 395/625.

² See Letter from Leeper (FO) to Graves (BBC), 6 January 1939, in the National Archives, FO 395/625.

The Portuguese official station continued to relay the BBC news bulletins until 26 November, when transmission was suspended in order to avoid compromising the country's neutrality and good relations with Germany. It is possible to assume that the German Legation must have protested against the airing of the BBC news on Emissora Nacional, as it always protested against all the more visible actions of British propaganda that took place in Portugal during the war.

The period of time, almost six months, during which the Emissora Nacional relayed the BBC's Portuguese news, can only be explained bearing in mind the enormous credibility afforded to the BBC news in comparison with other sources. On the other hand, this privilege that was given to British news bulletins, with no parallel on the German side, was also a consequence of the pro-Anglophone tendencies of the senior management of Emissora Nacional, including among their number Henrique Galvão, Chairman of the Administrative Commission that ran the station. Moreover, the relay of the Corporation's news bulletin on Portuguese state radio also contributed to increasing credibility of the BBC among radio listeners in the country.

The BBC's strategy, backed by the British Embassy in Lisbon, of focusing on news and promoting its own credibility, proved to be very successful, and it became the only news source that Portuguese listeners considered unbiased. This fact, allied to the pro-British sentiment of the Portuguese, paved the way for the British broadcasts to become the most popular foreign radio service in the country (Telo, 1989, 9) and even allowed them to compete with domestic stations in terms of audiences. A report by Michael Winch, editor of the Portuguese Section, who visited Portugal to assess the impact of the broadcasts in the main cities and villages, concluded that the position of the BBC was extraordinary.³

Although there are no audience figures, the fact that the *Voz de Londres* (Voice of London) was 'by far the most popular of foreign broadcasting services'⁴ is confirmed in several documents produced by the Portuguese political police, the Foreign Office and the BBC.⁵ In 1943, the Ministry of Information estimated that 90 percent of wireless owners in Portugal listened regularly to the BBC evening news,⁶ while the Portuguese Intelligence Office in Lisbon considered that the

³ See Winch, 'Report on Conditions in Portugal with Special Reference to Broadcast Propaganda', January 1943, in the National Archives, FO 371/34691.

⁴ Internal report of the Foreign Office, in the National Archives, FO 371/39616, 1944.

⁵ See Letter from the Ministry of Information to Sir Alexander Cadogan (FO), 18 September 1940, in the National Archives, FO 371/24493; see also Winch, 'Report on Conditions in Portugal with Special Reference to Broadcast Propaganda', January 1943, in the National Archives, FO 371/34691; 'BBC Survey of European Audiences – Portugal', in the BBC Written Archives (Caversham).

⁶ Letter from the Ministry of Information to Sir Alexander Cadogan (F.O.), see note 5.

number would oscillate between 75 and 100 percent depending on the interest of the news.⁷

The idea that the BBC was listened to by almost all those who possessed radio sets is also expressed by Artur Agostinho, one of the most emblematic announcers of Portuguese radio, who worked in several Lisbon stations during the war before joining the Emissora Nacional station in 1945:

The BBC had a large audience. It had a lot of impact. It was listened to a lot. As soon as it had [the announcer] Fernando Pessa it was listened to more than ever.... The public was fundamentally pro-Allies.... German broadcasts never had a large audience and had, compared to the BBC, much less influence.... The BBC was deemed to be the 'voice of truth'.... It had a great deal of credibility.... BBC meant 'you can believe it' and the BBC's impact was very different to that of the German broadcaster which, as a matter of fact, was hardly listened to in Portugal.⁸

This testimony clearly demonstrates the extent to which the BBC's promotion as a credible source paid off for the Corporation, leading to it being known among many listeners as the 'voice of truth'. In fact, for many listeners it became a habit to check the newspapers' articles against what was aired on the BBC. The investment made in the promotion of the news bulletins' independence was of interest to both the British government and those at the Corporation, who struggled to impose a professional ethos on their work. Among the latter was John Salt, Director of the European Service, for whom the station's reputation was very important for it to be able to accomplish its aim: 'News ranks first in any foreign service. The aim throughout must be to create and maintain an unrivalled reputation for prompt and reliable news' (Salt, 1942, 40).

The BBC's credibility, then, was perceived as an important patrimony that could not be compromised, which led the station to be very cautious whenever reporting British victories, avoiding an excess of enthusiasm in relation to the advances of the Allied forces (Wasburn, 1992, 18). Simultaneously with the work being done on air in order to reinforce the BBC's image of credibility, the British Embassy in Lisbon was also struggling to provide a contribution in this field. Besides investing in the promotion of the news bulletins in local newspapers, the embassy published several brochures exalting the high quality of the news provided by the Corporation:

⁷ Letter from Broughton (Portuguese Intelligence Office) to Roberts (F.O.), 23 April 1943, in the BBC Written Archives, EI/1162.

⁸ Artur Agostinho, interviewed by the author on 9 June 2006.

The 'filtering' is meticulously performed by specialised editors who separate truth from rumour, biased information from a fairer view. The policy of impartiality and independence that has marked the B.B.C. for more than 20 years, with all the rigour of British fair-play, has been perfected to the most rigorous and accurate pinnacle; the descriptive and artificial sensationalism, and fantasy are all implacably separated out. (BBC, 1940, 13)

The good relations that then existed between the British authorities in Lisbon and Portuguese state radio also enabled the BBC's credibility and independence from political power to be promoted in articles published during the first few months of the war in *Emissora Nacional's* official paper. The head of Portuguese public radio was clearly pro-British, which explains the publication of texts such as the one that follows, clearly praising the British station:

In England, the radio organisation known as the B.B.C.... is acknowledged as being of public utility.... Its management is wholly independent from the State, and a curious example of this independence is the fact that when the State Budget is annually presented and its content explained by a member of the Government over the microphones of the B.B.C., the heads of the parliamentary opposition parties are also entitled to put over their points of view on the same, using the same means.⁹

The description by James Curran and Jean Seaton (1985) of the importance given by the BBC to the credibility of its news bulletins can be proven with reference to the Portuguese Section. In April 1941, when German propaganda was becoming more visible than ever in Portugal, Colonel Pope, who acted as an 'unofficial Press Attaché in Lisbon',¹⁰ suggested that the BBC should take action on its news service. In a reply to his remark, Pope was informed by the head of the Portuguese Service, R.G. Broughton, that the service he was running would in fact take some action against the German propaganda, but not through the news service since its image of objectivity was too important to be sacrificed:

As you are aware it has always been the policy of the BBC that its bulletins should be confined to straight and authenticated news.... The replying to German propaganda is more the function of the Talks Department which in the Portuguese Section will be under our Programme Organiser. As soon as we get our Programme Department going I think you will find that we shall parry every German thrust and give them some hard knocks as well. Until then, we have decided, when necessary, to cut down our news bulletins by 5 minutes and to give a short talk on whatever subject may require to be dealt with promptly.¹¹

⁹ *Rádio Nacional*, 31 December 1939.

¹⁰ See BBC Written Archives R13/199/3 2, March 1943.

¹¹ Broughton, 'Replies to German Radio Propaganda in BBC Broadcasts', BBC internal document, 29 April 1941, in the BBC Written Archives, EI/1165/2.

Despite the fact that British support of Russia did have some negative impact on the BBC's acceptance among regular listeners, its news bulletins would continue to be the most important source of news concerning international events. 'The BBC's emphasis on "truth" and "consistency" ... produced long-term dividends as the war continued' (Briggs, 1970, 8) and enabled the station to maintain its elevated credibility, as recognized by the Portuguese Ambassador in London in a speech given on the fourth anniversary of broadcasts to Portugal:

Let's suppose, for an instant, that the BBC did not make itself heard in Portugal and the country, placed between powerful rival forces, was abandoned to the daily barrage of propaganda from one single source. Isn't it true that, in these disturbing and unsettled times that we are negotiating, the transmissions of the BBC supply a precious element, one of precious counterevidence – often just the bare truth – for the just evaluation of circumstances and possibilities?¹²

As the war evolved, besides not allowing the press and the Emissora Nacional to publish or broadcast news items concerning the resistance, the censorship apparatus in Portugal also maintained its policy of cutting much of the news that was at the time coming from the Russian front. This fact provided even more fuel to the feeling that the only reliable source for news was the BBC. In fact, one of the most important consequences of censorship was that it discredited the Portuguese media and greatly contributed to the general public seeking out news from foreign sources, particularly the broadcasts from London. This became even more evident towards the end of the war, when the Portuguese government adopted a more defensive communication strategy, increasing the number of news items that were censored.

Many crucial war developments first reached the Portuguese public through the BBC. This was the case of Mussolini's overthrow, which created a great sensation among the station's regular listeners. The Corporation's Lisbon representative, Margery Whithers, described the 'tremendous enthusiasm' that was visible among those learning the news: 'People who heard the news in the Spanish and Portuguese transmissions on the night of July 25th rushed joyously into the streets and into cafés, or ran to telephone their friends.'¹³

This excitement was, nevertheless, contained since the police forces 'took the necessary measures to see that there was no undue display of public enthusiasm'.¹⁴

¹² Monteiro, speech broadcast on 4 June 1943 on the BBC Portuguese Service, in the Historical Diplomatic Archive M. 179 CP.

¹³ 'BBC Survey of European Audiences – Portugal', 10 September 1943, in the BBC Written Archives.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 30 October 1943, in the BBC Written Archives.

Later on, on 8 September 1943, there were also reports of gatherings in public places by BBC listeners who received the news of Italy's surrender. One letter sent to the BBC described the reaction to the news in the town of Loures (near Lisbon):

The first news of Italy's surrender has been received earlier in the evening of September 8th and spread like wildfire all over the town.... When the time for the BBC broadcast drew near, hundreds of people began to assemble in the public square which was soon closely packed.... When the news of Italy's surrender was announced, there was a roar of cheering for the United Nations and their leaders, while simultaneously thousands of rockets and fireworks were let off in the air. The police attempted to intervene, but they were in insufficient numbers and had to return to their barracks.¹⁵

This description of the reaction to Italy's surrender in Loures is similar to reports sent to the BBC from listeners living in other regions of the country, namely Lisbon and Porto. In the capital a number of people concentrated in the main centre of the city and 'in spite of the presence of the police and members of the Legion, the people made a sort of a demonstration and all congratulated each other'.¹⁶

Listening regularly to the BBC enabled the listeners to become local opinion makers, as described by Lazarsfeld et al (1944), since they were given access to information that had not yet reached local communities. This feeling of pride at being the ones to disseminate information in their local villages was expressed by several panel listeners, including a Cartaxo listener who wrote to the BBC in January 1943: 'Grand news from Russia which I was the first to spread in this locality'.¹⁷

It was in fact common for people to gather and discuss the news they heard on the BBC, as mentioned by an Englishman in Lisbon, who wrote to the Corporation in September 1943: 'You have no idea of the number of people (workers and the simplest people imaginable) who listen regularly to the Portuguese broadcasts and discuss them in detail afterwards'.¹⁸

The BBC's news bulletins 'always arouse the greatest interest and merit general credence',¹⁹ not only because of the international events reported but also because

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ 'BBC Survey of European Audiences – Portugal', 25 March 1943, in the BBC Written Archives.

¹⁸ Ibid., 30 October 1943, in the BBC Written Archives.

¹⁹ Letter addressed to the BBC by a Chemist's Assistant in Vendas de Grijó, 3 September 1943, quoted in 'BBC Survey of European Audiences – Portugal', 30 October 1943, in the BBC Written Archives.

of national news items which were censored in the national press and radio bulletins: 'All sorts of exciting things seem to happen in Lisbon, about which we know nothing until we hear from the BBC.'²⁰

The BBC evening news bulletin, besides being widely listened to and discussed, was also usually checked against the news in the next morning's newspapers. A Lisbon listener wrote:

A few days ago, some papers published the news of the landing of Russian forces in the Crimea and of the Allies in the Cyclades. Very well ... this news had no market because it was not broadcast by you, from which everyone unfortunately concluded that it was not true.²¹

An Englishman in Porto in a letter addressed to a relative in England also mentioned the high credibility the BBC had acquired among its regular listeners: "It is the only news they [the Portuguese] will accept as authentic, and it doesn't matter what they hear on other broadcasts. It is every time a case of waiting for the BBC to confirm or otherwise."²²

This huge reliance on the BBC news remained almost totally unaltered until the end of the war, despite the Germans' attempts to undermine the Portuguese Service's credibility through attacks on the newsreaders and on the Corporation itself. The RRG broadcasts, as well as the propaganda activities by the German Legation in Lisbon, strongly pushed the idea that the British were only interested in using Portugal's neutrality for their own gain and to fulfil this propaganda strategy the BBC was using Portuguese newsreaders who, according to the German propaganda, were betraying their own country.

This line of attack on the British station can be seen as an almost desperate attempt to undermine the huge acceptance that the BBC had gained in the country. The main announcer of the Portuguese Service, Fernando Pessa, who had been a well-known announcer at Emissora Nacional before joining the Corporation, made an important contribution to that popularity. The RRG, unable to win against the British in terms of broadcasting appealing content, struggled to discredit its counterpart. It was, however, a strategy that proved to be very unsuccessful, primarily because the Corporation's strategy of promoting itself as an objective source really paid off during the war.

²⁰ 'BBC Survey of European Audiences – Portugal', 30 October 1943, in the BBC Written Archives.

²¹ Ibid.

²² 'BBC Survey of European Audiences – Portugal', 9 October 1944, in the BBC Written Archives.

Political Interference on the ‘Voice of Truth’

Until the end of the war the BBC would continue to be known by many of its regular listeners as the ‘voice of truth’, which did not mean that it aired straightforward news. On the contrary, the Portuguese broadcasts, following instructions from both the British Ministry of Information and the Foreign Office, were concerned with not annoying the Lisbon regime. This led the Service to avoid pieces on democracy, communism and social instability in Portugal, both on its news bulletins and in its talks. News from Moscow, which did not reach the Portuguese media due to the action of the local censors, was a sensitive matter for Salazar, which led the British Ambassador in Lisbon, Ronald Campbell, to advise the BBC not to address issues related to the Soviet Union. On one occasion he even protested against the importance attributed by the BBC to the arrival of a Russian mission in London during July 1941.²³

The editorial line of the BBC Portuguese Service concerned the Foreign Office. The matter was discussed on a number of occasions during the war. On one such occasion a set of ‘Guidelines for Broadcasts to Portugal’ was produced, in which the objectives of the transmissions were redefined:

The basic object of our broadcasts to Portugal is to present the war through British eyes, to convince the Portuguese of the justice of our cause, to show that our institutions and our ways of life are to be admired, to bring home to the listener that whilst a German victory would mean the dismemberment of the Portuguese Empire by the Axis powers, a British victory ... is a guarantee of the integrity and independence of Portugal and her Empire.²⁴

Theoretically, the news bulletins should be ‘factual and objective in tone’,²⁵ and no news item with news value should be excluded just because it was believed that it would be embarrassing to the Portuguese government, particularly if it served the basic propaganda themes. Nevertheless, the guidance given to those working at the Portuguese Service was to avoid selecting items that would be ‘gratuitously offensive to the Portuguese Government or Portuguese listeners or which could be interpreted as interference in Portuguese internal affairs’.²⁶ On several occasions the Foreign Office even gave in to pressure from the Portuguese regime and, in order to avoid the suppressing of British propaganda that circulated in Portugal, made sure that the BBC aired talks and news pieces that would be agreeable to Salazar (Ribeiro, 2010).

²³ See Telegram from Sir Ronald Campbell to the Foreign Office and Ministry of Information, 9 July 1941, in the National Archives, FO 371/26818.

²⁴ BBC internal document ‘Guiding line for Broadcasts to Portugal’, 7 November 1941, in the National Archives, FO 371/26819.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Besides avoiding news on matters that were considered problematic for the Estado Novo, keeping good relations with Salazar also led the BBC to pay particular attention to news items that would help make it clear that, despite British support for Russia in the war against Germany, the communist system was not being supported by the British Government.²⁷ Moreover, where talks were concerned, instructions were given for the authors to flatter Salazar and his regime whenever possible.²⁸

The recommendations, produced in November 1941, were given to the Portuguese Service during what can be considered one of the tensest periods of relations between the two countries. Negotiations concerning a plan for the Lisbon government to retreat to the Azores in the event of an Axis invasion failed to reach a consensus, due to two main points of divergence. The first concerned the timing for Portugal to abandon its neutral position in the war. Salazar wanted that to take place only in the event of direct aggression against Portugal, while the British wanted it to happen as soon as the Germans attacked the Iberian Peninsula. Second, it was also proving to be difficult to reach agreement on the extent of the destruction of strategic infrastructures to be carried out in Portugal in order to make it more difficult for the Germans (Rosas, 1994, 307–8).

The disembarkation of Dutch and Australian troops in Timor, which took place in November 1941, without any authorization from the Portuguese government, besides deeply wounding national pride (Cole, 1990, 109) also introduced a new ‘political factor in worsening Anglo-Portuguese relations, which then reached a point of complete rupture’ (Cole, 1990, 308). This led the Foreign Office to be even more cautious in relation to the tone of BBC broadcasts, particularly since Salazar had already demonstrated that, whenever he felt that the London transmissions were not satisfactory, he would take action by cutting all the British propaganda that was being disseminated in the country. This had been the case during the crises that had arisen between the BBC and the Estado Novo in the preceding months, fuelled by the fact that the Corporation was employing Portuguese political refugee Armando Cortesão. The episode, which came to a climax with the dismissal of Cortesão from the BBC (Ribeiro, 2010), had a significant impact, with the Corporation being forced to be more careful in order not to displease Salazar, as demonstrated by the guidelines that were put together in November 1941.

Furthermore, in order to understand the motivations that led the Foreign Office to put pressure on the BBC not to displease the Lisbon government, one must bear

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ See *ibid.*

in mind that, for British diplomacy at the time, Portugal played a crucial role in terms of influencing Franco's Spain. Maintaining the pro-British attitude of the Portuguese was thus a clear objective of the Portuguese Service, which would in fact be drawn up by the Ministry of Information in a new Propaganda Plan for Portugal presented in January 1943:

Aims. Our propaganda to Portugal must maintain and deepen the present pro-British attitude of the Portuguese:

- a) So that Portuguese goodwill to Britain will influence other neutral countries, especially Spain;
- b) So that travellers to and from enemy and enemy-occupied countries will be suitably influenced;
- c) So that, in the event of a German invasion, the Portuguese Government will offer token resistance by removing abroad, without endangering its moral authority over the people.²⁹

During the entire war period, when large numbers of Portuguese would gather in shops and cafés to listen to the BBC, mainly to the evening transmission, the British station never adopted a tone that could be construed as attacking the Estado Novo. On several occasions it even trimmed its output to meet the concerns of the British Foreign Office, which was obsessed with not confronting the Portuguese regime. This policy remained mostly unchanged even towards the end of the war. The new propaganda plan for Portugal approved by the Foreign Office in 1943 clearly shows the British concern with not causing any discomfort to Salazar and his regime. On the contrary, the BBC broadcasts continually disseminated the assurance that the defeat of the Axis Powers would not 'mean communism or social upheaval in Portugal'³⁰ and, on the contrary, it would bring benefits to the Peninsula. Moreover, the plan also suggested that British propaganda should convey the idea that the Portuguese government was respected by Britain and that the 'collapse of European fascism would not mean the end of the New State [Estado Novo]'.³¹

Despite never attacking the Portuguese regime, the BBC did address subjects that annoyed Salazar, from the last quarter of 1943 onwards. The amount of news and talks concerning Russia increased and, in the following year, the exports of tungsten from Portugal to Germany, which had been ongoing since the beginning of the war, were also addressed. In January 1944, the Minister of Information, answering a question in Parliament, stated that the BBC was 'taking steps to

²⁹ Plan of Propaganda for Portugal elaborated by the Ministry of Information and approved by the Foreign Office, 14 January 1943, in the National Archives, FO 371/34691.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

acquaint the Portuguese people with the dissatisfaction felt in the United Kingdom on account of Portuguese exports of tungsten to Germany'.³²

Ten days after 'D-day', when the BBC resumed broadcasting talks to Portugal (only news had been aired during the previous few days), democracy became a core topic along with criticism of the fascist regimes. Prior to that point in time, the BBC had avoided the concept of democracy in its broadcasts to Portugal, in compliance with Ambassador Ronald Campbell's recommendation that the Corporation 'avoid the word "democracy"' ³³ in its broadcasts.

The Portuguese Service clearly followed the directives of the Ministry of Information and adapted its content to the aims determined by the British government, exercising more or less pressure on Salazar as and when the British government deemed most appropriate. It must not be forgotten that during the war, and despite the existence of several different phases, the BBC was under the scrutiny of the ministry, which led the Governors of the BBC to state that, after the war, all foreign-language services under their control would be 'objective and non-propagandist' (BBC, 1946, 7). Nevertheless, this was not the case during the war and until the end of the military conflict the Foreign Office always pressurized the BBC into ensuring that the broadcasts maintained their flattering – or at least non-threatening – tone towards Salazar, in order to avoid retaliation that might lead to restrictions on British propaganda activities in Portugal. Such activities were considered crucial at that time, due to the country's strategic geographical location and the influence that the Portuguese pro-British sentiment could have on Spain ruled by Franco.

Conclusion

During the Second World War Portugal was at the centre of the war of the airwaves. Unlike Soviet, German and Italian transmissions, which had started long before the war, the BBC began the operation of its Portuguese Service only a few months before the outbreak of the war. The British station, however, would follow its own strategy, focusing on the promotion of its independence and objectivity as opposed to the transmissions by the Axis powers that were mainly characterized by the airing of blatant propaganda. The idea that the transmissions from London were totally unbiased was promoted not only on the air but also in propaganda that circulated in the country.

Portuguese public opinion proved to be highly receptive to the broadcasts from London. Besides the pro-British sentiment that existed in the country, the fact that

³² Hansard, House of Commons, 26 January 1944, vol. 296, cc669-70.

³³ Letter from Campbell to Strang, 12 May 1941, in the National Archives, FO 371/26818.

the local censorship apparatus became even more energetic in editing news after the outbreak of war created a thirst for news that could not be satisfied by the Portuguese media. If it had not been for the censorship-based media policies, the Portuguese public could have relied on news aired by the local stations or published in the local press. However, since both newspapers and radio stations reported only the news permitted by the censors, news of war developments was first known through the broadcasts from foreign stations. Among these, the BBC was the favourite of the Portuguese since the RRG's credibility was very low. People would gather in private houses and public places at the time of evening broadcasts to listen to the news from London, and an analysis of documents produced by listeners and by the political police shows that the BBC was considered by many as broadcasting 'the truth'.

The huge acceptance of the Voice of London among the public led to its broadcasts being attentively monitored by both the British and Portuguese governments. While the British Foreign Office and the Ministry of Information struggled to ensure that the service's editorial line remained in harmony with the interests of British diplomacy, the Estado Novo used both diplomatic pressure and other measures to control British propaganda in Portugal, and to prevent the BBC from addressing themes that the Portuguese regime considered too controversial. The need to maintain a neutral Peninsula led the British government to ensure that Salazar and his regime were not annoyed, which explains the pressures placed on the BBC, during most of the war, to avoid broadcasting talks and news items that directly addressed themes that would irritate the dictator. Towards the end of the war the strategy would, nevertheless, undergo a subtle change. With the need to pressurize Salazar into halting the exports of tungsten to Germany, talks on communism and democracy, that had been avoided prior to that time, were aired by the Portuguese Service. This fact clearly proves that the Portuguese Service was carefully used as a weapon to defend the interests of the British government.

Political interference in the broadcasts of the Voz de Londres [Voice of London] was a fundamental paradox of the 'war of words' that took place in Portugal during the Second World War. The BBC, trusted for being truthful, was actually infiltrated and influenced by both the British and Portuguese governments. The fact that the control over the BBC was more camouflaged compared to the control exerted on broadcasting by the authoritarian regimes of the time seems to have been one of the main reasons for the Corporation's success. This lesson was certainly learned by political elites and it has been applied during other military conflicts subsequent to the Second World War. It then became evidently reasonable for democratic regimes' political powers to interfere in the media's output during wartime. Even for the British, who had begun the Second World War under the cloud of a colossal discussion concerning the re-establishment of

the Ministry of Information, any misgivings were rapidly swept aside and broadcasting quickly became part of the country's propaganda strategy.

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