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DONALD D. HORWARD

Wellington and the Defence of Portugal

THE ROLE PLAYED by Sir Arthur Wellesley, first duke of Wellington, in the Peninsular War has been studied by historians with avid interest for the past 175 years. Considerable attention has been directed to his military operations and the strategy he employed to expel the French from Iberia, by such distinguished British historians as Sir Charles Oman and Sir John Fortescue. However, few efforts have been made to assess the political, economic, and social policies he introduced into Portugal to achieve his military goals. It was only through judicious co-ordination of the civil with the military that he succeeded in defending Portugal, prolonging the war in the Peninsula, and finally carrying the struggle into France.

* * *

In November 1807 the armies of Napoleon invaded the kingdom of Portugal in a bid to halt Portuguese trade with Great Britain and enforce the Continental System. For the next six years the Portuguese people committed their lives, fortunes, and energies to resistance against French domination, and with the support of their traditional ally, Great Britain, embarked upon a strategy that altered their political, social, economic, and military structure. They endured devastation, dislocation, and suffering, but at the close of the war in 1814 the kingdom was still free. In the achievement of this feat, Sir Arthur Wellesley, later duke of Wellington, played a major role, mobilizing the kingdom, turning back the armies of France, and preserving Portugal's independence. Consequently, Wellesley and Portugal are forever linked in the history of the struggle of free peoples to retain their independence.

When the French army, under General Jean Junot, occupied Lisbon in December 1807, the prince regent, later John VI, and the royal family, accompanied by the court and many of the most influential

nobles, sailed to Brazil with the royal treasury and as much as fifty per cent of the portable wealth of the kingdom. In Lisbon, meanwhile, Junot began to consolidate his power and strip the country of its remaining resources. A French receiver-general assumed control of the finances of the country, an 'Extraordinary Contribution' of 50 million francs was levied, and vast quantities of portable wealth were sent back to France. At the same time the economy was undermined by the British blockade, flooded with inflated paper money, and exhausted by the requisitions of the French army.¹

The French conquest also led to the disappearance of a large segment of the Portuguese ruling class. In addition to the hundreds of noble families accompanying the royal family to Brazil, many distinguished officers were sent off to France with a contingent of some 6,000 Portuguese troops for service with the armies of Napoleon. Other nobles in the civil and military departments of the government, whom Junot regarded as untrustworthy, were detained and then sent to France. The militia was abolished and the regular army disbanded; fortresses, depots, and military installations were placed under French command; the citizens were disarmed; and the Regency Council established by Prince John was dissolved, with Junot assuming the administration of the kingdom in the name of the emperor Napoleon.

A few months later Napoleon made his fateful decision to subjugate Spain, causing insurrection to erupt there and spread into Portugal. The Portuguese appealed to Great Britain for support and the foreign secretary, George Canning, agreed to send aid. Wellesley, a victor in India and the veteran of campaigns in the Low Countries and Denmark, was named by Viscount Castlereagh at the war office to assume command of an expeditionary force destined for Iberia.²

On 1 August 1808, Wellesley's army of some 9,500 men landed at Mondego Bay. Five days later 5,000 reinforcements arrived. Transportation was secured and the British army, supported by a small contingent of the recently reorganized Portuguese army, marched south along a coastal road towards Lisbon and the French army. Although Junot frantically laboured to concentrate his troops, less than half of them were available when he attacked Wellesley on the rolling hills of Vimeiro on

¹ Junot to Clarke, 8, 11, 28 Jan., 22 March 1808, France, Archives de la guerre, Service Historique de l'armée, Vincennes, MSS, Correspondance: Armée de Portugal, Décrets 3, 4, 15, 22 Dec. 1807, 15 Jan. 1808, carton C/7/16; Junot to Napoleon, 24 May 1808, Portugal, Biblioteca da Ajuda, Palacio da Ajuda, MSS, cod. 46, xiii. 29.

² Returns, 13 July 1808, *The Dispatches of Field Marshal the Duke of Wellington*, ed. Lt.-Col. Gurwood (13 vols., London, 1834-9), iv. 27 [hereafter *WD*]; Wellington to Cotton, 30 July 1808, *WD*, iv. 50-1.

21 August. Wellesley utilized the terrain so well when deploying his forces that each French attack was repulsed in succession. However, while Junot's defeated and demoralized army fell back towards Lisbon, Wellesley was superseded in command twice before he could complete his victory. An armistice was concluded, culminating in the convention of Cintra. The French army was embarked aboard 155 British merchantmen and by October, Portugal was free of French troops.³

Wellesley's success in Portugal received genuine acclaim at home, for in contrast to recent British failure in Holland, Italy, Sweden, and Argentina, Wellesley had brought decisive victory to British arms. Nevertheless, he was recalled to London, along with those who had superseded him, to answer for the humiliating convention of Cintra.

Following the French expulsion from Lisbon, a British army under the command of General Sir John Moore set out on a dangerous campaign in support of the resurrected Spanish armies against the 100,000 veterans Napoleon had marched into Spain to crush the mounting resistance there. Reaching Valladolid, Moore planned to threaten the French lines of communication but, receiving intelligence of the collapse of the Spanish armies and the fall of Madrid, he decided instead to attack an isolated French corps nearby. Napoleon soon learned of Moore's intentions and struck off across the snow-covered Guadarrama Mountains to take him in the rear, forcing Moore to turn north-west and race for the sea. The chase ended at Corunna where, after a sharp battle at Elvina, the British army escaped aboard ships of the Royal Navy, leaving behind a small force in Lisbon under General John Cradock – eventually to form the nucleus of Wellington's famed 'Peninsular army'.⁴

The Portuguese prince regent, far off in Brazil, was gratified to learn of the liberation of his people. To ensure their continued independence, he issued a proclamation exhorting them to support the restored Regency Council and co-operate with the British in resisting further French aggression. A *Carta Regia* was soon issued, designed to restore public finances: the tax structure was to be reformed, currency and coinage strengthened, rents from the crown and church lands collected, a stamp tax established, and various export duties abolished.⁵

Despite these well-intentioned proposals, the Portuguese had little success beyond the collection of private contributions. The British government, however, had already come to the aid of its ally; a subsidy

³ Donald D. Horward, 'Portugal and the Anglo-Russian Naval Crisis (1808)', *Naval War College Review*, xxxiv (1981), 60-71.

⁴ Donald D. Horward, 'British Sea Power and Its Influence on the Peninsular War (1808-1814)', *Naval War College Review*, xxxi (1978), 58-9.

⁵ Simão José da Luz Soriano, *História da Guerra civil ...* (Lisbon, 1866-92), *Ordem do Príncipe*, 2 Jan. 1809, Segunda Epocha, v. 282-302.

of £60,000, as well as clothing, 27,000 muskets, 17,000 pikes, a loan of £95,000, an army of 16,000 men under Wellesley, and the 'Red Squadron' commanded by Admiral Charles Cotton had all been made available by the summer of 1808. Four months later, a more definite commitment was made by Canning, on behalf of the British government, to provide a subsidy of £226,000 to maintain 10,000 Portuguese troops, and £135,000 to pay the officers of the army. In return, the prince regent agreed to permit the British minister at Lisbon, John Villiers, to attend the Regency Council whenever topics affecting the army were considered.⁶

In February 1809, the Regency Council requested that a British officer, preferably Wellesley, be appointed marshal and commander-in-chief of the Portuguese army. On Wellesley's recommendation they accepted instead William Carr Beresford, a strict disciplinarian and experienced administrator. Several weeks later the Portuguese subsidy was increased to £450,000 for the support of 20,000 Portuguese troops to serve with the British army. This was followed by Wellesley's return to Lisbon in April to assume command of a British army of almost 20,000 British soldiers, his first task being to expel a French army of some 22,000 men under the command of Marshal Nicolas Soult at Oporto.⁷

In this campaign Wellesley advanced directly on the French army and, after a surprise crossing of the Douro River, seized Oporto and hounded Soult's army out of Portugal, inflicting almost 5,000 casualties. Beresford with 8,500 Portuguese troops had supported Wellesley in an effort to block Soult's retreat, and although the manoeuvre failed, the Portuguese troops, who had had less than six weeks of training and were ill prepared for combat, nevertheless demonstrated their commitment and potential value.

Following the campaign, Beresford began to rebuild the Portuguese army. Armed with Wellesley's firm support, and the assurances of the prince regent that his decisions would not be subject to reversal or

⁶ *Ibid.*, Segunda Epoca, i. 606-12; John M. Sherwig, *Guineas and Gunpowder: British Foreign Aid in the Wars with France, 1793-1815* (Cambridge, 1969), p. 199, 43n; Memoranda on British aid to Portugal, 1809 to 1812, March 1813, *Supplementary Despatches and Memoranda of Field Marshal Arthur Duke of Wellington*, ed. 2d duke of Wellington (15 vols., London, 1858-72) [hereafter *WSD*], vii. 593-4; Canning to Villiers, 22 Nov. 1808, F[oreign] O[ffice Records] 63/74 [Public Record Office]; Mildred L. Fryman, 'Charles Stuart and the "Common Cause": The Anglo-Portuguese Alliance, 1810-1814' (Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1974), p. 158.

⁷ Luz Soriano, *Guerra Civil*, 'Nomeação de sir Guilherme Carr Beresford para comandante em chefe do exercito portuguez', Segunda Epoca, v. 390-1; Wellington to Castlereagh, 27 April 1809, *WD*, iv. 271-2.

appeal, Beresford moved rapidly to dismiss many of the high-ranking nobles because of absenteeism, dereliction of duty, old age, physical impairment, and incompetence, in favour of young, enthusiastic, dedicated soldiers, without regard to social status. Within four months, between March and July 1809, 215 officers were cashiered while 64 younger officers, many of them commoners, were promoted. Wellesley also encouraged several score British officers to transfer into the Portuguese army to assume direct or indirect command of the various regiments, brigades, and divisions.⁸ Through these reforms, considerable social mobility was introduced into the army at the expense of the old noble class. The same effect was discernible in the ranks of the civil administration in which a sizable number of commoners reached positions of the highest authority, including the Regency Council itself.

While Beresford initiated his army reforms, Wellesley, in co-operation with a Spanish army, launched a drive on Madrid in mid-July, which culminated in the savage battle of Talavera. Despite Spanish bungling, his army repulsed a numerically superior force under King Joseph Bonaparte. In northern Portugal, meanwhile, the Lusitanian army was suffering from an acute lack of food, supplies, and transportation. Without adequate funding, it all but collapsed and most of the men abandoned their duties to forage for food. Fortunately, the British government had already agreed to make a loan of £600,000, in addition to the subsidy, to enable its ally to carry on the struggle. As a consequence, the prince regent agreed to permit Wellesley, now Viscount Wellington, or his representative to attend all sessions of the Regency Council that dealt with financial as well as military matters.⁹

By June 1809 Wellington was familiar enough with the idiosyncrasies of the Portuguese economy to advise the Regency Council to raise additional revenue for the war effort by imposing an 'Extraordinary Contribution for Defence' which was, in fact, a forced loan on various segments of Portuguese society. He also suggested a tax increase on land and property along with a graduated income tax on the professional and merchant classes. Few of these imposts, however, were enacted before 1810.¹⁰

⁸ Beresford to Forjaz 1 Nov. 1809, [Portugal,] A[rquivo] H[istorico] M[ilitar], MSS 1/14, caixa 37; Forjaz to Beresford, 15 April 1809, AHM 1/14, caixa 36; Wellington to Dundas, 7 June 1809, *WD*, iv. 393-6.

⁹ *Ordem do Dia*, 14 Aug. 1809, William Carr Beresford, *Collecção das Ordens do Dia, Anno 1809* (Lisbon, 1809), p. 93; Wellington to Castlereagh, 25 Aug. 1809, *WD*, v. 382-90; Wellington to Beresford, 19 Aug. 1809, *ibid.*, 53-5; Sherwig, *Guineas and Gunpowder*, p. 218.

¹⁰ Decree, 7 June 1809, 'Contribuição extraordinária', Claudio de Chaby, *Excerptos Historicos e Collecção de Documentos relativos a Guerra Denominada da Península* (Lisbon, 1882), iv. 105-88.

As the Peninsular struggle dragged on without foreseeable end, Napoleon envisioned a personal campaign against Wellington in the autumn of 1809 to end the resistance in the Peninsula. However, pressing problems facing the Empire forced him to appoint instead his most distinguished commander, André Masséna, to take command of the newly formed army of Portugal. With some 65,000 men, Masséna was expected to invade Portugal in mid-1810, drive the Anglo-Portuguese army into the sea, and end the Peninsular War.¹¹

Wellington, well aware of Napoleon's intentions, had already begun to develop a defensive strategy to transform Portugal into an armed camp. In the autumn of 1809 he had received detailed plans drawn up by a Portuguese major, José das Neves Costa, proposing the construction of lines of fortification across the Peninsula north of Lisbon.¹² Accompanied by the commander of the Royal Engineers, Lt.-Col. Richard Fletcher, Wellington surveyed the terrain with Neves Costa's plans in hand, then drew up his famous memorandum of 20 October 1809, outlining the construction of what became one of the most important fortified lines ever constructed.

Initially Wellington visualized two defensive lines constructed on the heights north of Lisbon to control the approaches to the city. When these elaborate plans were completed, however, three lines of fortifications, known as the Lines of Torres Vedras, extended from the Tagus River across the 29-mile Peninsula to the Atlantic Ocean. These independent fortifications, adapted to the surrounding countryside, varied in size, shape, and firepower but each was constructed with five-foot parapets, banquettes, a ditch, palisades, and a garrison varying from fifty to five thousand men to service as many as forty cannon. Several fortifications were actually small forts defended by fifty cannon and over a thousand soldiers.¹³

The roads approaching the Lines were cut and barricaded; valleys were blocked with abatis; trenches were dug and hills scarped; rocky slopes were blasted into perpendicular precipices; trees obstructing the field of fire were felled; bridges were mined; and rivers were dammed

¹¹ Imperial Decree, 17 April 1810, *Correspondance de Napoléon 1er publiée par order de l'Empereur Napoléon III* (Paris, 1858-69), xx. 338; *The French Campaign in Portugal, 1810-1811: An Account by Jean Jacques Pelet*, ed. Donald D. Horward (Minneapolis, 1973), p. 17, 16n.

¹² Donald D. Horward, *Napoleon and Iberia: The Twin Sieges of Ciudad Rodrigo and Almeida, 1810* (Tallahassee, 1984), pp. 28-9.

¹³ John T. Jones, *Memoranda Relative to the Lines Thrown up to Cover Lisbon in 1810* (London, 1829); Pelet, ed. Horward, pp. 222-78; Christovam Ayres de Magalhaes Sepulveda, *Historia ... do Exercito Portuguez* (Lisbon, 1896-1932), xiii. 3-14; Horward, 'British Sea Power', pp. 59-61.

and flooded. To facilitate the rapid movement of troops and communications, lateral roads (some of stone) were constructed, the Royal Navy established a telegraph system along the Lines, gunboats were anchored in the Tagus to cover the flanks, and construction workers, numbering in the thousands, were conscripted from as far away as fifty miles. By October 1810 the Lines included 126 redoubts and 249 guns manned by 29,750 men, supplemented by Wellington's entire field army of 60,000 men, ready to plug any gaps created by an enemy attack. It was unquestionably a novel scheme. If successful, Portugal would be saved; if a failure, Wellington's army would be driven into the sea, captured, or forced to take refuge on ships of the Royal Navy, leaving British foreign policy in a shambles.¹⁴

To supplement the Lines, the major fortresses were refurbished, resupplied, and reinforced. All roads over which the French might pass were destroyed, while those necessary for the movement of the allied army were repaired. Fortifications were raised at many defensible sites along the expected French invasion route, while river boats were registered and the boat bridges on the major rivers withdrawn. Orders were issued for the withdrawal of carts, mules, and other means of transport that might be useful to the enemy during an invasion.¹⁵ All available able-bodied men, age 16 to 60, were called up for service in the *ordenanza* (a Portuguese *levée en masse*) 'to do the enemy all the mischief in their power ... by impeding his communications, by firing upon him from the mountains and strong passes ... and by annoying his foraging and other parties he [might] send out'.¹⁶

The militia regiments were activated to garrison the frontier fortresses. In a proclamation issued by Wellington on 4 August 1810, the inhabitants in the areas threatened by the French were instructed to retire with their belongings. In effect, Wellington was preparing to devastate central Portugal by ordering the peasants to adopt a 'scorched earth' policy as the only certain means of saving their country. Those who refused to obey were to be hanged.¹⁷ These unprecedented measures held the promise of success, but the cost to the Portuguese people in social, political, and economic stability would be staggering. Yet Wellington refused to modify his strategy and, armed with the authority granted by the prince

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Wellington to Beresford, 23 Jan. 1810, *WD*, v. 436-7; same to Bacellar, 26 Jan. 1810, *WD*, v. 457-8; same to Hill, 27 Feb. 1810, *WD*, v. 528-9.

¹⁶ Wellington to Leite, 28 Feb. 1810, *WD*, v. 529-30; same to Bacellar, 1 March 1810, *WD*, v. 534-6.

¹⁷ Wellington to Cotton, 4 Aug. 1810, *WD*, vi. 324.

regent, was determined to adopt whatever measures were necessary to defend the kingdom.

Much to Wellington's dismay, the Portuguese economy continued to languish. Despite the British subsidy which was increased in October 1809 to £980,000 to fund 30,000 soldiers, the Regency Council had to find an additional £1,000,000 in 1810 to maintain 74,000 militia and line regiments, prepare the defences of the kingdom, and maintain the civil and administrative operations of the country. Consequently, Wellington pressed the council for economic reform through its British representative, John Villiers, and after February 1810, Charles Stuart. The subsidy became a matter of continual review; whenever the Regency Council appealed for additional aid, Wellington and Stuart demanded tax and administrative reform. Supported by Dom Miguel Pereira Forjaz, who was secretary to the Regency Council as well as secretary for war and marine, Stuart carried out Wellington's instructions, arguing for tax reforms to increase revenue for the Portuguese war effort.¹⁸ They proposed a tax on all imported goods, while the prince regent requested increased assessments on ecclesiastical rents and crown lands (together with the sale of some of the latter), a stamp tax, a reduction in the number of imported British manufactured goods, and the establishment of a lottery. Most of these proposals were only implemented under mounting pressure from Wellington and his supporters over a period of years.¹⁹ In constant pursuit of his primary goal – the defence of Portugal – Wellington proved very adept in the political arena.

In addition to the problems of mobilizing Portugal and reforming the economy, Wellington also had to keep a watchful eye on the British government in London. When he gave orders for the construction of the Lines of Torres Vedras, he assured the secretary for war and the colonies, the earl of Liverpool, that the French would be unable to subdue Portugal with 'an army of 70,000, or even of 80,000 men' unless they attacked by February 1810.²⁰ As supplies and reinforcements poured into Lisbon and the Portuguese army improved in discipline, resources, and organization, Wellington became more confident, convinced that he could successfully defend Portugal against all but a massive French army. As early as 10 January 1810, he wrote to Villiers claiming that, with 30,000 British troops in the field, he would fight a 'good battle' for Portugal. He promised: 'if the Portuguese do their duty, I shall have

¹⁸ Memoranda on British Aids to Portugal, March 1813, *WSD*, vii. 593-4.

¹⁹ Wellington to Stuart, 22 Feb. 1810, *WD*, v. 516-17.

²⁰ Wellington to Liverpool, 14 Nov. 1809, *WD*, v. 280-2.

enough [troops] to maintain it; if they do not, nothing that Great Britain can afford can save the country.²¹

Keenly aware that Liverpool and the government were preoccupied with the safety of the army, Wellington sent a series of letters to London detailing the precautions he had taken to ensure it. On 1 March he argued persuasively: 'The British army ought to remain in the field in Portugal as long as may be practicable, and consistent with its safety.' Hoping to reassure Liverpool, he requested transports totalling 45,000 tons to evacuate the Anglo-Portuguese army in the event of a reversal.²² Liverpool was not reassured, however, and continued to press Wellington, describing the 'very considerable degree of alarm' that existed in England. He suggested that Portugal should be abandoned sooner, rather than expose the army 'to those risks from which no military operation can be wholly exempt'.²³

Wellington resented this continual interference and continued to make his plans undeterred. He wrote to Forjaz: 'I believe that if we are able to maintain ourselves in Portugal, the war will not end in the Peninsula.' Referring to the Lines of Torres Vedras, he concluded: 'If the enemy is not able to force us, or make us retire from this position, he will be obliged to retreat ... [and] abandon all the Portuguese territory. If we are forced to abandon this position, we will always have the means to embark in the Tagus.'²⁴ To that end, transports and men-of-war sailed for Portugal; by the end of January ships totalling 50,000 tons were *en route* or anchored in Lisbon harbour. Army baggage was loaded aboard the transports and by May each vessel had been revictualled, numbered, assigned anchorage, and prepared to embark a specific regiment.²⁵ Considering Wellington's precarious position, facing the might of the French armies in Iberia, he had come to a perceptive and courageous decision – which would ultimately save the Peninsula.

Nevertheless, Wellington's strategy was still under attack in London by admirers of Sir John Moore, who had claimed that Portugal was indefensible. Wellington pointed out that Moore, being dead, could know nothing of the present state of Portugal. Wellington himself grasped its strategic significance and its role in the Peninsular War as did few of his contemporaries. 'As long as we shall remain in a state of

²¹ Wellington to Villiers, 14 Jan. 1810, *WD*, v. 424-6.

²² Wellington to Liverpool, 1 March 1810, *WD*, v. 538-42.

²³ Liverpool to Wellington, 31 March 1810, *WSD*, vi. 493-4.

²⁴ Wellington to Forjaz, 8 March 1810, *WD*, v. 556-9.

²⁵ Liverpool to Wellington, 6, 7 March 1810 W[ar] O[ffice Records] 6/50 [Public Record Office]; Wellington to Berkeley, 24 Jan. 1810, *WD*, v. 442-3; same to Stuart, 6 May 1810, *WD*, vi. 93-4.

activity in Portugal, the contest must continue in Spain,' he said, and promised, 'I shall delay the embarkation as long as it is in my power, and shall do every thing in my power to avert the necessity of embarking at all.' If the French invaded with less than a massive and overpowering force, he declared, 'I shall fight a battle to save the country ... and if the results should not be successful ... I shall still be able to retire and embark the army.'²⁶

As the weeks passed and criticism mounted, an exasperated Wellington wrote to Liverpool: 'I am willing to be responsible for the evacuation of Portugal ... Depend upon it, whatever people may tell you.'²⁷ In a letter to Admiral Charles Berkeley a week later he struck back at his critics: 'The Government are terribly afraid that I shall get them, and myself, in a scrape. But what can be expected from men who are beaten in the House of Commons three times a week? A great deal might be done now, if there existed in England less party, and more public sentiment, and if there was any government.'²⁸ The attacks continued until the end of April when Colonel Herbert Taylor, private secretary to George III, wrote to Liverpool promising royal support, 'unfettered by any particular instructions which might embarrass [Wellington] in the execution of his general plan of operations'.²⁹ So Wellington's perseverance and judgement had triumphed; the government had little option but to acquiesce in his strategy or recall its most successful general.

As the British and Portuguese engineers laboured frantically to complete the Lines of Torres Vedras during the summer of 1810, André Masséna assumed command of the army of Portugal. Rather than mask the frontier fortresses of Ciudad Rodrigo and Almeida and advance directly on Lisbon, Napoleon committed a major strategic error by instructing Masséna to besiege and capture them; he was then to invade Portugal and drive the 'British leopard into the sea'. This ill-conceived strategy gave Wellington and his forces the entire summer to complete their mobilization plans.³⁰

In the midst of the invasion threat and the economic crisis, Wellington also became involved in a bitter struggle over his policies with two members of the Regency Council – José António de Meneses e Sousa, known as the Principal Sousa, and the Patriarch, António de Castro –

²⁶ Wellington to Liverpool, 2 April 1810, *WD*, vi. 5-10.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Wellington to Berkeley, 7 April 1810, *WD*, vi. 21-2.

²⁹ Taylor to Liverpool, 5 April 1810, *WSD*, vi. 515; Liverpool to Wellington, 25 April 1810, *WSD*, vi. 515.

³⁰ Horward, *Napoleon and Iberia*, pp. 114-15, 322-3.

who vehemently opposed his strategy, especially the 'scorched earth' policy which threatened to turn Portugal into a wasteland. To many patriotic Portuguese, it appeared that the British were prepared to sacrifice Portugal's population and resources to British safety and security.³¹ Sousa and Castro attempted to thwart Wellington's strategy in the Regency Council by continual confrontations with Stuart over British strategy, tax reform, the underpayment of the British subsidy, administrative reform, and British influence in domestic political affairs.

In mid-September the long-awaited French invasion began with the advance of Masséna and 65,000 men into Portugal. The allied army retired 120 miles to one of the most formidable positions in Portugal – the Serra de Bussaco – where it prepared to meet the French advance. Various motives have been ascribed to Wellington to explain his decision; he himself said, 'I shall do every thing in my power to stop the enemy here.'³² Apparently his own military instincts, seconded by the pleas of the Portuguese, had convinced him that if he could stop the French at Bussaco, the invasion would be halted and the hardships and devastation endured by the people of central Portugal would come to an end. It was a courageous decision and his army fought a superb battle, implementing many of the principles of war pioneered by the young Bonaparte in Italy in 1796. The French were repulsed, after a gallant attack, on 27 September 1810, Wellington's army suffering the loss of 1,252 men while the French lost 4,480. Despite this tactical victory, however, Masséna's cavalry found a flanking road, forcing Wellington to withdraw towards Lisbon.³³

For the next two weeks, Masséna's advance guard chased Wellington's retreating army until, on 12 October, within twenty miles of Lisbon, the confident French were brought up short by the formidable Lines of Torres Vedras stretching across their path as far as the eye could see. After probing the Lines for a few days, Masséna, remembering his troops' repulse at Bussaco, convinced himself that an assault was impossible without reinforcements and siege artillery. A divisional general, Maximilien Foy, was sent back to Paris with an appeal for reinforcements and a siege train, and Masséna's army settled down before the Lines to wait. A month later Masséna withdrew his forces to more

³¹ Wellington to Forjaz, 6 Sept. 1810, *WD*, vi. 408-9; same to Stuart, 11 Sept. 1810, *WD*, vi. 427-30.

³² Wellington to Stuart, 24 Sept. 1810, *WD*, vi. 466-7.

³³ Donald D. Horward, *The Battle of Bussaco: Masséna vs. Wellington* (Tallahassee, 1965), pp. 133-41; Pelet, ed. Horward, pp. 157-91.

defensible positions around Santarém, where his army would wait and starve for over a hundred days.³⁴

As fall passed into winter, Wellington began to worry about the decline of the tax base with 60,000 Frenchmen occupying the Portuguese heartland; moreover, the Portuguese army was without adequate food, supplies, or transport as it faced the French across the Lines. Exasperated by the intolerable situation, and blaming the inadequacies of the Portuguese tax structure for his plight, he complained to Stuart: 'You are quite right in tracing all the failures of the Government to the want of money, which ... could be supplied, I am convinced, by the means in their own power ... I am very much dissatisfied with them; and unless they adopt a new system entirely, I shall state my opinion to our own Government that the war cannot be carried on as long as things remain as they are.'³⁵

With Portugal now suffering from an annual deficit of £1 million, Wellington proposed the establishment of a tax on male servants, an excise tax (*alcabaca*) on wine, modification in their occupation tax (*mancio*), and the minting of brass coins from unused artillery in government arsenals. Several members of the Regency Council were unwilling to consider these proposals as Wellington's defensive strategy was still in question. Wellington complained to the prince regent and threatened to evacuate Portugal unless his two bitter critics, the Principal Sousa and the Patriarch, were removed from the Regency Council. But the prince regent refused to consider such a proposal unless Stuart and Forjaz were also removed.³⁶

Wellington was unwilling to sacrifice his invaluable allies and continued to insist on tax reform and additional revenue to enhance the war effort. Despite a further increase in the deficit, the visible decline of Masséna's forces at Santarém at last encouraged his opponents to cooperate; progress was soon made and most of the requested taxes were enacted in the spring of 1811. On another front, Wellington was bombarding London with complaints and appeals for increased aid. His description of 12,000 to 14,000 Portuguese 'literally starving' for lack of supplies, and soldiers dying in the hospitals for lack of medicine, had the desired effect on the government; Liverpool presented a bill in parliament for an increase in the Portuguese subsidy. In February 1811 a subsidy totalling £2 million was approved by the house of commons

³⁴ *Pelet*, ed. Horward, pp. 192-362.

³⁵ Wellington to Stuart, 27 Dec. 1810, *WD*, vii. 79-80.

³⁶ Wellington to Stuart, 6 Oct. 1810, *WD*, vi. 494-5; same to Stuart, 1, 5 Jan., and 6 May 1811, *WD*, vii. 96-8, 107-9, and 518-19.

'for the military effort and for other contingencies'. Realizing the influence he might exert if he controlled the subsidy, Wellington wrote to Stuart that the Regency 'should not be informed of this addition to the subsidy till it shall be absolutely necessary'.³⁷

With the additional funds now available, Wellington resolved to seek more effective control of the Portuguese economy. He declared to Stuart that the subsidy would be withheld 'till they shall change their mode of proceeding in respect to commissariat, medical department, arsenal, transportation, etc. All that I can say is ... unless the changes which I have pointed out are made ... it only takes up your time and mine unnecessarily.' He concluded bluntly: 'It is much better to let them go to the devil in their own way than to give ourselves further trouble about them.'³⁸ It took several months of judiciously applied pressure and delays in the payment of the subsidy, but by the beginning of 1812 significant progress had been made.

On the war front, as the harsh winter months passed, Wellington watched with amazement as the tenacious Masséna remained before the Lines; he had predicted a French withdrawal almost three months earlier but they were still before him in March 1811.³⁹ There was, however, crisis in the French camp over future operations. Masséna's army was starving and now numbered fewer than 42,000 effectives. Work had begun in October on the construction of a pontoon bridge across the Tagus to secure food and threaten Wellington's flank. Over eighty boats had been completed, and many officers supported a river crossing; others called for withdrawal. These found an ally in General Foy, who on his return from Paris misrepresented Napoleon's intentions by urging a retreat. As a result, a detailed and dangerous plan for disengagement and retreat, drawn up by Masséna's aide-de-camp, Jean-Jacques Pelet, was implemented, with precision and dispatch, on 5-6 March 1811.⁴⁰

On the morning of 6 March, word of the French retreat spread through the allied army and into Lisbon. There was rejoicing in the streets of the capital and neighbouring villages as the church bells pealed out across the land; at British headquarters, there was satisfaction, relief, and a realization that despite the nagging attacks on Wellington

³⁷ Wellington to Wellesley, 26 Jan. 1811, *WD*, vii. 191-6; Memoranda, *WSD*, vii. 593-4; Wellington to Stuart, 26 March 1810, *WD*, vii. 403-7.

³⁸ Wellington to Stuart, 12 May 1811, *WD*, vii. 548-9.

³⁹ Wellington to Liverpool, 21 Dec. 1810, *WD*, vii. 56-60; Donald D. Horward, 'André Masséna, Marshal of France', *The John Biggs Cincinnati Lectures in Military Leadership and Command* (Lexington, Va., 1986), pp. 77-8.

⁴⁰ Pelet, ed. Horward, pp. 403-33.

from London, Lisbon, and even within the army, his judgement had been vindicated.

During the French retreat, Wellington proved himself a first-rate tactician as he took up the chase against a master of the rear guard, Marshal Michel Ney, who defended each town, village, and position with extraordinary skill. Despite Ney's stubborn resistance at Pombal, Redinha, and Condeixa, for example, Wellington forced him to retreat by enveloping his flanks in position after position. Beyond Condeixa, British cavalry surprised and almost captured Masséna and his headquarters at Fonte Coberta on 13 March; two days later Wellington overtook Ney's rear guard deployed astride the Arouce and drove it across the river, inflicting over 200 casualties.

The French accelerated their march as they neared the Spanish frontier, while Wellington's troops, especially the Portuguese, outmarched their supply trains and were forced to halt. Nevertheless, Wellington had achieved his goal in a splendid operation; his relentless pursuit had so forced Masséna from one position to another that the French were unable to halt and take up defensive positions. At last, in a surprise move, Masséna turned south to retain a foothold in Portugal. It was a misdirected manoeuvre: Wellington seized the opportunity to overtake one French corps and punish it severely at Sobral on 28 March. With the loss of almost 800 men, Masséna withdrew into Spain.⁴¹

By the beginning of April, all Portuguese territory had been recovered by the Anglo-Portuguese army, with the exception of the fortress of Almeida, still held by a French garrison. Masséna was prompted to attempt one last incursion into Portugal on 3 May to relieve it. At Fuentes de Oñoro, Wellington sought to block Masséna's advance and two days of bitter fighting raged along the Spanish-Portuguese border. Losses were heavy on both sides – 2,600 Frenchmen and 1,800 allied troops – but Wellington's army won the day. The French garrison at Almeida escaped, and the last of Napoleon's soldiers had left Portuguese soil forever.⁴²

Although the first phase of this monumental struggle – the liberation of Portugal – had been completed, Wellington was keenly aware that French forces would continue to be a threat to Portugal and to British interests in the Peninsula. Realizing also that the British army could not remain in Iberia without the effective support of a viable Portuguese army, he moved to assure its continued existence. With the help of such

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 433-95; Charles Oman, *A History of the Peninsular War* (Oxford, 1902-30), iv. 131-205.

⁴² Jean Sarramon, 'Campagne de Funes de Oñoro 15 avril-11 mai 1811', *Carnet de la Sabretache*, cdxxv (1962), 1-88.

a force, he could not only defend Portugal, but could also strike into Spain and take the war to the enemy. Consequently, he continued to press his tax reforms and over the next two years radically transformed the Portuguese tax structure, threatening otherwise to withdraw his army or withhold the subsidy. It is noteworthy that in 1813 he finally produced the seemingly unattainable balanced budget. Even more impressive was his success in employing the Portuguese forces beyond the frontiers of the kingdom. When the drive on Madrid began in the summer of 1812, one-third of Wellington's army was Portuguese. At the crucial battles of Salamanca in 1812 and Vitoria in 1813, his army included 18,000 and 30,000 Portuguese respectively.⁴³

The British subsidy continued into 1814, but as the threat to Portugal receded, the size of the army declined proportionally. The Regency Council and even Wellington's staunch ally, Forjaz, became apprehensive about Great Britain's influence in the political, economic, and military life of the kingdom. Portuguese financial support was curtailed in 1814 and the pay of their troops was eight months in arrears. Receiving only paper money, worthless outside Portugal, Beresford admitted 'that by reason of the absolute lack of means that the army finds itself, it will not be able to maintain itself any longer'.⁴⁴ In fact, fewer than 14,000 Lusitanians fought alongside Wellington's army at Toulouse in 1814. Thus ended a remarkable alliance that achieved extraordinary success against overwhelming odds through the determination of two peoples bound together by their confidence in one man – Wellington.

In evaluating Wellington's impact on the Portuguese war effort, it is clear that he served as the catalyst in mobilizing the country against the enemy. By exercising absolute power, he demanded more than any nation had to that time endured to preserve its independence. From fewer than three million people, the Portuguese provided a staggering force of 110,000 men in addition to the *ordenanza*; they endured the devastation of their homeland under the pressure of their ally and the pillage of their enemy; and to retain their independence, they reluctantly accepted the transformation of their institutions – social, political, economic, and military – according to Wellington's plan. The cost in human suffering and destruction was incalculable and there remain to this day scars of the struggle. The prince regent unhappily recognized that the

⁴³ J.P. Longford and Peter Young, *Wellington's Masterpiece: The Battle and Campaign of Salamanca* (London, 1973), p. 308; Luz Soriano, *Guerra civil, Segunda Epoca*, iv. 472.

⁴⁴ Beresford to Forjaz, 2 Jan. 1814 AHM, caixa 33, no. 1; Francisco de la Fuente, 'Dom Miguel Pereira Forjaz: His Early Career and Role in the Mobilization and Defence of Portugal during the Peninsular War, 1807-14' (Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1980), p. 428; Oman, *Peninsular War*, vii. 286-7.

only salvation for his country rested in the British alliance. Consequently, the interests of his people were subjugated to a policy developed and implemented by Wellington with little regard for Portugal's domestic interests.

For all its resources, Great Britain also experienced a constant drain in manpower and economic resources, compounded by a serious economic crisis as the government sought to contain French expansion by subsidizing half of Europe. Yet both nations maintained their commitment, and Wellington's strategy, brilliantly conceived and implemented, preserved Portuguese independence and assured the success of British foreign policy.

In the final analysis, it was Wellington's courageous decisions and practical leadership, Great Britain's resources and determination, and, above all, the devotion and commitment of the Portuguese people that saved Portugal from foreign domination. Of paramount importance too were Napoleon's strategic miscalculations, which condemned his armies to a tragedy of errors in a war that he never really understood. Napoleon never appreciated the abilities of Wellington or the fighting qualities of the British army, and he regarded the Portuguese with disdain. Yet it was this unlikely combination that set off the backlash that would sweep across Europe and ultimately destroy his empire.

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