

Brazilian Diplomacy and Foreign Intervention in the Brazilian Naval Revolt, 1893-94

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RESUMEN

La historiografía escrita en inglés sobre la Rebelión Naval en Brasil de 1893 a 1894 ha hecho hincapié en el papel diplomático y naval que las potencias extranjeras jugaron para poner fin a la revuelta. Según esta aproximación, el gobierno brasileño del Mariscal Floriano Peixoto fue débil y no pudo controlar los acontecimientos. En realidad, fue la combinación de firmeza y habilidad diplomática mostrada por Peixoto y su gobierno más que la actividad de las potencias extranjeras, incluidos los Estados Unidos, el factor constante y más influyente que convirtió la Revuelta Naval en un enfrentamiento desigual e hizo que fuera una cuestión de tiempo el que los rebeldes capitularan y fracasara la rebelión.

Palabras clave: Brasil, revuelta naval, diplomacia, gobierno de Peixoto, historiografía.

ABSTRACT

Historical writing in English on the Brazilian Naval Revolt of 1893-1894 has stressed the vital diplomatic and naval role that the foreign powers played in bringing about the failure of the revolt. According to this view, the Brazilian government headed by Marshal Floriano Peixoto was weak and at the mercy of events beyond its control. In fact, it was the combination of firmness and skillful diplomacy shown by Floriano and his government rather than the activities of the foreign powers, including the United States, that was the constant and most influential factor which turned the Naval Revolt into an unequal contest and meant that it was only a matter of time before the rebels capitulated and brought their rebellion to an end.

Key words: Brazil, naval revolt, diplomacy, Peixoto Government, historiography.

On 6 September 1893 Admiral Custódio José de Melo seized command of the entire fleet of Brazilian warships stationed in the bay of Rio de Janeiro and demanded the resignation of the head of the federal government, Vice-President Floriano Vieira Peixoto, under threat of naval bombardment of the city. Contrary to Custódio's expectation, however, Floriano refused to resign. Despite his complete lack of available naval power to challenge Custódio at sea, the Vice-President acted vigorously in declaring a state of martial law and in ordering the army to occupy, fortify and guard the harbour and its landing-places. Consequently, what had been originally intended as no more than a brief military coup became transformed into the Brazilian Naval Revolt, a prolonged naval siege of Rio lasting from September 1893 to March 1894¹. Although the revolt arose directly from Brazilian internal politics and especially interservice rivalries between the army and the navy², most historical accounts of the episode have preferred to examine and highlight the significance of the diplomatic and military role assumed by the leading foreign powers, particularly the United States. «Rio was too important to be left to the Brazilians», sums up a recent study by Steven Topik and he adds: «the Great Powers felt it their duty and right to defend their commerce and

¹ Floriano's predecessor, President Manoel Deodoro da Fonseca, had resigned in almost identical circumstances less than two years previously in November 1891. Floriano replaced Deodoro as head of state, but chose to retain the title of Vice-President rather than submit himself to a special presidential election. The most detailed account of the Naval Revolt is FREIRE, Felisbello: *História da Revolta de 6 de Setembro de 1893*. Editora Universidade de Brasília. Brasília, 1982. This is a reprint of a work originally published in 1896. For a concise description of the military aspects see CLOWES, William L.: *Four Modern Naval Campaigns*. Unit Library. London, 1902, pp. 191-231.

² On interservice rivalries see HAHNER, June E.: *Civilian-Military Relations in Brazil, 1889-1898*. University of South Carolina Press. Columbia, South Carolina, 1969.

³ TOPIK, Steven C.: *Trade and Gunboats: The United States and Brazil in the Age of Empire*. Stanford University Press. Stanford, California, 1996, p. 132. The writings of Walter LaFeber have been notable in stressing the particularly prominent diplomatic role of the United States and that country's capacity to affect, if not determine the course and outcome of the revolt. In his view, the American secretary of state, Walter Q. Gresham, «did not hesitate to use United States warships to defeat the insurgents and maintain in power the pro-American established Brazilian government». See LAFEBER, Walter: *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion*. Cornell University Press. Ithaca, New York, 1963, p. 210. Among the many articles dealing specifically with American diplomacy see McCLOSKEY, Michael B.: «The United States and the Brazilian Naval Revolt, 1893-1894», *The Americas*, 2, 1946, pp. 296-321; LAFEBER, Walter: «United

citizens³». In reality, however, the foreign powers were never in control of events taking place at Rio and found themselves pursuing a reactive rather than a pro-active policy. Moreover, their actions were considerably affected and constrained by the firm attitude and skilful diplomacy displayed by Floriano and his government throughout the revolt. The importance of this factor has been largely neglected by historians⁴.

Brazil had only recently become a republic in 1889 after overthrowing a monarchy which had ruled the country for most of the nineteenth-century. The foreign powers were dismayed by another major political crisis in Brazil and from the outset disclaimed any intention of taking sides in the Naval Revolt. The desire to remain detached, however, was outweighed by humanitarian and economic concerns. Citing the right to enforce international rules of civilized behaviour, the foreign powers wished to prevent indiscriminate bombardment of a capital city which contained a considerable civilian population and was regarded as virtually defenceless. There was also anxiety that Brazil's leading port would be closed with consequent disruption and damage to commerce with the outside world. In attempting to secure their objectives the foreign powers used diplomatic pressure and the implicit threat of «gunboat diplomacy». Military intervention was made feasible because Rio was such a natural and popular stopping-off point for world shipping in the South Atlantic that a number of warships from Britain, France, Italy and Portugal were coincidentally in the bay at the start of the revolt. They were subsequently joined by ships from Germany and notably five warships from the United

States Depression Diplomacy and the Brazilian Revolution, 1893-1894», *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 40, 1960, pp. 107-18; VIVIAN, James F.: «United States Policy during the Brazilian Naval Revolt 1893-94: The Case for American Neutrality», *American Neptune*, 41, 1981, pp. 245-61; CALHOUN, Charles W.: «American Policy toward the Brazilian Naval Revolt of 1893-1894: A Re-examination», *Diplomatic History*, 4, 1981, pp. 39-56. For a Brazilian view which agrees that the Naval Revolt was resolved «more in Washington than in Rio de Janeiro» see MONIZ BANDEIRA: *Presença dos Estados Unidos no Brasil*. Editora Civilização Brasileira. Rio de Janeiro, 1973, p. 144. British diplomacy is examined in SMITH, Joseph: «Britain and the Brazilian Naval Revolt of 1893-94», *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 2, 1970, pp. 175-98.

⁴ The balance has already been partly redressed in the excellent article of VIVIAN, «United States Policy during the Brazilian Naval Revolt». See also the work of Brazilian scholars in CORR A. DA COSTA, Sérgio: *A Diplomacia do Marechal: Intervenção Estrangeira na Revolta da Armada*. Editora Universidade de Brasília. Brasília, 1979, and BUENO, Clodoaldo: *A República e Sua Política Exterior (1889 a 1902)*. Editora UNESP. São Paulo, 1995.

States, four of which were powerful armoured cruisers. In fact, the American squadron that assembled at Rio in January 1894 was superior to the whole rebel fleet in terms of total firepower and armour.

Supported by this substantial naval presence, the foreign powers sought to place restrictions on the military activities of both the government and the rebels. The stated purpose was neither to end the revolt nor prohibit actual hostilities but to limit firing upon the city especially in the area of the docks so that foreign merchant ships could exercise their legal right to conduct normal commercial business. A direct clash between the foreign and rebel warships was avoided until 29 January 1894 when the American naval squadron, commanded by Admiral Andrew Benham, briefly exchanged shots as it successfully escorted an American merchant ship safely to the docks. By refusing to allow any interference with American shipping, Benham effectively prevented the rebels from establishing a legal blockade of the port of Rio. The intervention was applauded in the United States where Congress quickly approved a resolution expressing pleasure «at the prompt and energetic action» of Admiral Benham⁵. «We sent to Brazil a fleet which by its presence constituted the one formidable naval demonstration in foreign waters in our recent history, and it ended that rebellion and restored peace to Brazil», later remarked Senator Anthony Higgins of Delaware⁶. In Rio, however, the immediate response was quite different. The British minister at Rio, Hugh Wyndham, reported that Benham's action had «produced a bad effect on shore and afloat amongst the Brazilians as it is looked upon as a blow to the prestige of both parties; a humiliation to the insurgents, and an open exemplification of the powerlessness of the government in the Bay⁷».

The Brazilian Naval Revolt provides, therefore, an illustration of how the nations of Latin America at the close of the nineteenth century were subjected to humiliating treatment not only by the European powers but also by the United States⁸. The inferior status accorded to Brazil was demonstrated at the very beginning of the revolt in September 1893 when

⁵ See 53rd Congress, 2nd Session, House Report n.º 391.

⁶ Congressional Record, 53rd Congress, 3rd Session, 2 March 1895, p. 3109.

⁷ Wyndham to Rosebery, n.º 48, 5 February 1894, London, Public Record Office, Foreign Office [hereafter cited as FO] 13/724.

⁸ For examples of European «chastisement» of Latin American countries see PERKINS, Dexter: *The Monroe Doctrine, 1867-1907*. Johns Hopkins University Press. Baltimore, 1937, pp. 121-2.

the representatives of the foreign powers in Rio behaved in a condescending and superior manner towards both the Brazilian government and the naval rebels. On the morning after Custódio's seizure of the fleet, Floriano invited the diplomatic corps, consisting of the representatives of Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the United States, to a conference at the presidential palace to discuss collective measures to safeguard merchant shipping. The British minister and doyen of the foreign diplomatic corps, Hugh Wyndham, expressed the common opinion of his colleagues when he described the request as a ruse to make it appear that the foreign powers were siding with the government. The diplomats, consequently, delivered a snub to Floriano by unanimously refusing the invitation on the grounds that to accept would be a departure from the standing instructions from their governments to maintain a policy of strict neutrality in the internal affairs of Brazil⁹. But neutrality did not mean inaction. Instead of going to the presidential palace, the foreign diplomats consulted their respective naval commanders and over the next few weeks prepared a series of formal notes which were presented to both Floriano and Custódio. The notes stated that merchant ships flying foreign flags should continue to go about their business in the bay and would be protected by their respective national warships. It was also hoped that shelling of the capital would not take place, but should Custódio intend to do so, he was requested to give up to 48 hours prior warning to the foreign naval commanders in order that ships could be moved away from the line of fire¹⁰. To reduce the risk of naval bombardment and also to maintain what they regarded as their even-handed stance, the diplomatic representatives undertook to seek an equivalent assurance from Floriano that no new offensive fortifications would be erected within the city. Should serious fighting erupt and

⁹ Wyndham to Rosebery, 10 September 1893, FO 13/705. The opinion of the foreign diplomats is explained by the Portuguese minister in Conde de PAÇO D'ARCOS: *Missão Diplomática do Conde do Paço D'Arcos no Brasil, 1891 a 1893*. Lisbon, 1974, pp. 257-64.

¹⁰ Wyndham to Rosebery, n.º 122, 18 September 1893, FO 13/705. The German diplomatic and naval representatives did not join the concerted action on the grounds that the presentation of notes represented a departure from the policy of neutrality. Indeed, the notes were ambiguous in that they concentrated on sparing Rio from bombardment and did not seek to extend their restrictions to the city of Niterói at the other side of the bay. Niterói was subsequently attacked on a number of occasions during the revolt.

disorder break out on shore a contingency plan was devised to land marines to secure the protection and evacuation of foreign nationals and their property¹¹.

Although the European powers and the United States claimed to be neutral, the notes presented to Floriano and Custódio constituted external interference in the revolt because they clearly sought to restrict the military activities of both sides. They also represented a direct infringement of Brazil's national sovereignty and provoked local resentment¹². The controversy over the notes, however, was reduced because they unintentionally proved to be helpful to the government. While the arrogant refusal of the diplomatic corps to attend the conference at the presidential palace was interpreted as a humiliating set-back to Floriano¹³ he could hardly have expected the foreign powers to take his side openly and compensate him for his lack of a navy by using their ships in the harbour against the rebels. On the other hand, Floriano's request had fortuitously engaged the foreign representatives in a round of diplomatic activity which had contributed to preventing Custódio from taking advantage of the element of surprise that the revolt had initially possessed and proceeding with his threat to launch an early assault upon the city. «Although the foreign ministers and ships of war have not interfered in this Revolution», remarked Wyndham, «I consider that the presence of foreign ships of war has had a most salutary effect and may have prevented a serious bombardment of the town»¹⁴. In its first reporting of the revolt *The Times* was critical of the «not infrequent revolutions in Brazil» and adopted a forthright tone endorsing the possible use of gunboat diplomacy. «The foreign admirals, acting on the initiative of the French commander», declared an editorial,

¹¹ The Latin American diplomats in Rio were pointedly not consulted over the contingency plan. See BUENO, 1995, p. 176.

¹² The Floriano government complained that the foreign powers were engaging in «unofficial intervention». See PAÇO D'ARCOS, 1974, p. 275. For the view that the foreign powers were treating Brazil as they would deal with «an internal or tribal convulsion» in an African or Asian country see BUENO, 1995, p. 176.

¹³ Floriano informed the foreign diplomats that he regarded their refusal of his invitation as support for the rebels. See MINISTÉRIO DAS RELAÇÕES EXTERIORES: *Relatório Apresentado ao Vice-Presidente da República dos Estados Unidos do Brasil pelo Alexandre Cassiano do Nascimento em Maio de 1894*. Imprensa Nacional. Rio de Janeiro, 1894, p. 5.

¹⁴ Wyndham to Rosebery, 10 September 1893, FO 13/705.

«have decided to prevent the threatened bombardment»¹⁵. On 13 September the rebel ships did spontaneously engage in a limited amount of firing at military fortifications close to the docks, but pressure from the foreign naval commanders persuaded Custódio to desist from implementing his announced intention to bombard the city on 18 September. Two weeks later, however, the recurrence of sporadic firing from the rebels prompted the naval commanders to write to Custódio and formally state that «they would oppose by force if necessary, any act of hostility directed against the city of Rio de Janeiro»¹⁶. Although they claimed to be pursuing a policy of non-interference, the foreign powers were essentially aiding Floriano by threatening to use their naval forces against the rebels.

While Custódio attempted to comply with the wishes of the foreign naval commanders, Floriano ignored the requests of the foreign diplomats not to strengthen the city's fortifications. In fact, the government's military weakness and Rio's vulnerability to attack had been exaggerated. Just after the outbreak of the revolt Wyndham noted that the town «can hardly be considered a defenceless town as the quays are lined with troops and guns». He later reported information from the British naval commander, Captain W. M. Lang, that rather than a dismantling of the artillery batteries on shore «they [the naval commanders] had observed with much astonishment that not only had no such measures been adopted but that fresh earthworks were under construction, and that more guns were being mounted, thereby giving the insurgent admiral the pretext to open fire upon the town»¹⁷. The foreign diplomats duly conveyed the «great astonishment» of their naval colleagues to the Brazilian foreign office and pointed out that, instead of being removed, the existing fortifications were being strengthened and extended. Floriano assertively replied, however, that the naval commanders were «not well-informed». Furthermore, the artillery batteries in question were intended to be purely defensive so that his government could not therefore accept what he described as merely an «invitation» to remove them¹⁸. The Portuguese minister, the Conde de

¹⁵ *The Times* [London], 9 September 1893.

¹⁶ The note is cited in BUENO, 1995, p. 177. For Custódio's response see CORR A DA COSTA, 1979, p. 38.

¹⁷ Wyndham to Rosebery, 10 September and n.º 143, 9 October 1893, FO 13/705.

¹⁸ See MINISTÉRIO DAS RELAÇÕES EXTERIORES, 1894, pp. 5-7.

Paço D'Arcos, lamented that Floriano's «reluctance to disarm» made diplomatic negotiations «extremely difficult»¹⁹.

In effect, the Vice-President's deliberate non-cooperation compelled the foreign naval commanders to withdraw their threat to oppose Custódio's bombardment of Rio. «We cannot», summed up a British Foreign Office official, «unduly interfere to prevent the insurgent ships from firing upon batteries which are being constructed for the express purpose of sinking their ships»²⁰. Although Custódio refrained from retaliating with a full-scale bombardment, his ships began to engage in what became a frequent exchange of firing with the troops and fortifications on land. «Many persons are injured daily in this city as a result of the rifle and machine-gun fire», gloomily reported Charles Akers, the Special Correspondent of *The Times*²¹. The loss of life, however, did not lead to foreign military intervention. Such an operation was neither militarily feasible nor sensible. Indeed, it might have resulted in substantial foreign casualties because Floriano was reported to have defiantly declared that any landing by foreign marines on Brazilian soil would be met with «bullets»²². Moreover, as Wyndham privately confided to a local British businessman, even if Floriano and the rebel leaders were somehow removed, «there would be no guarantee that another civil war would not break out immediately afterwards»²³.

Despite Floriano's bridling against alleged external interference, the policy pursued by the foreign representatives of insisting that trade be allowed to continue in the bay was actually advantageous to his cause because it prevented the rebels from closing the port and establishing a legal blockade²⁴. So long as a safe landing-place for goods could not be secured, commercial activities were placed at risk and were often conducted in extremely difficult and hazardous circumstances. «Business

¹⁹ PAÇO D'ARCOS, 1974, p. 282.

²⁰ Minute on Wyndham to Rosebery, n.º 31, 2 October, 1893, FO 13/707.

²¹ *The Times* [London], 28 November 1893.

²² See BUENO, Clodoaldo: «A Diplomacia da “Consolidação”: A Intervenção Estrangeira na Revolta da Armada (1893/94)», *História*, São Paulo, 3, 1984, p. 46.

²³ Wyndham to Rosebery, n.º 260, 20 December 1893, FO 13/707. Wyndham also pointed out that, if it was to be effective, foreign military intervention could not just be limited to Rio and might have to be extended to southern Brazil.

²⁴ The Brazilian diplomat, Joaquim Nabuco, considered that the policy of the foreign naval commanders was of «immense advantage» to Floriano. See NABUCO. Joaquim: *A Intervenção Estrangeira durante A Revolta de 1893*. Companhia Editora Nacional. São Paulo, 1939, p. 48.

here is suffering greatly», remarked Charles Akers²⁵. In fact, it was the foreign merchants and shipping interests who suffered most and complained the loudest. The foreign naval commanders found themselves in an acute dilemma. Unless they were prepared to intervene actively they could do nothing to prevent injury to foreign nationals and their property from the firing that regularly took place between the rebel ships and the harbour fortifications. However, as the American commander, Captain Henry Picking explained, any forceful action must inevitably assist one side against the other and would be construed as a departure from the policy of noninterference in the domestic affairs of Brazil²⁶. Picking's cautious attitude was shared by his British colleague, Captain Lang, who similarly stated that «it was impossible to grant protection against the crossfire of the government and insurgent forces». To do so would have meant risking the lives of his officers and men²⁷. Far from being in control of events at Rio, the foreign powers had to endure what the British prime minister, William Gladstone described as «a lamentable state of affairs» which would not change so long as «the two contending parties are firing at each other»²⁸.

Throughout the confusion of the Naval Revolt the single constant theme was the insistence of Floriano that he represented the one and only legal government of Brazil. The naval rebels were denounced not only as traitors to the Brazilian nation, but in terms of international law they were declared to be pirates and should be treated as such. The official line was faithfully relayed to Washington from the American minister at Rio, Thomas S. Thompson, in his first telegram mentioning the revolt. «On September 6», he reported, «a note was received from the foreign minister informing me that a part of the squadron had revolted, manifesting hostility against the legal government of Brazil»²⁹. As Thompson's telegram indicates, despite the snub to Floriano's invitation to a meeting on 7 September and the effort to appear to be neutral, the foreign diplomatic corps could not avoid being in regular professional contact with officials of the foreign ministry. By

²⁵ *The Times* [London], 28 November 1893.

²⁶ Picking to Herbert, 28 December 1893, Washington, National Archives, Records of the Department of the Navy, Record Group 45, area 4, microfilm roll no. 26.

²⁷ Lang to the Admiralty, 17 December 1893, FO 13/733.

²⁸ *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, vol. 20, 2 January 1894, p. 656.

²⁹ Thompson to Gresham, 6 September 1893, Washington, National Archives, Records of the Department of State, Record Group [hereafter cited as RG] 59, Brazil, *Dispatches*, vol. 54.

contrast, the naval rebels lacked similar diplomatic status and were compelled to resort to sending their official communications to the ranking foreign naval commanders in the bay who passed these on to their respective diplomatic officials in Rio³⁰. Any departure from this convoluted procedure was seized upon by the Brazilian government and quickly brought to the attention of the official's own government.

The most celebrated incident involved a senior American naval officer. Shortly after arriving at Rio on 19 October to take up command of the American naval squadron, Commodore Oscar Stanton ordered an exchange of salutes and visits with Custódio. The action appeared harmless. «We are advised that these calls were of the briefest character and were devoid of all political interest», noted the *Rio News*³¹. However, no other foreign commander had acted so openly in this way and Floriano sought to exploit the incident to the full. The result was a diplomatic furore in which Floriano accused the American commander of deliberate collusion with the rebels. The Brazilian minister at Washington, Salvador de Mendonça, was cabled to make an immediate protest. Stanton was soon recalled by the Navy Department and later reprimanded for «a grave error of judgment»³². The American press interpreted the recall as an indication that the Cleveland administration was sympathetic to Floriano. However, the abrupt dismissal of a high-ranking American naval officer at the request of a foreign government was a notable and most unusual event in its own right. It was certainly not an initiative emanating from Washington and was a direct consequence of Floriano's firmness and insistence that his government be recognized as the sole legitimate government of Brazil. In addition, Floriano's supporters shrewdly used the news of Stanton's recall to organize a public demonstration in Rio praising Cleveland's «noble and correct attitude»³³.

³⁰ The presentation of notes to Custódio by the foreign naval commanders did not signify diplomatic recognition. «We in no way recognized Admiral de Mello as a belligerent», stated the British minister. See Wyndham to Rosebery, n.º 122, 18 September 1893, FO 13/705.

³¹ *Rio News*, 31 October 1893.

³² Salvador de Mendonça a Itamarati, n.º 1, 23 de dezembro de 1894, quoted in MENDONÇA AZEVEDO, José Afonso: *Vida e Obra de Salvador de Mendonça*. Ministério das Relações Exteriores. Rio de Janeiro, 1971, pp. 271-2. See also VIVIAN, 1981, p. 253. Captain Henry Picking was placed in temporary command of the American squadron until the arrival of Admiral Andrew Benham in early-January 1894.

³³ *Rio News*, 7 November 1893.

The furore over Stanton is often regarded by historians as an unfortunate but an isolated incident which was terminated satisfactorily and did not occur again. In fact, Floriano elicited a similar response from the British government even before Stanton had arrived in Rio. When it was rumoured in September that Hugh Wyndham was personally sympathetic to the rebels, the Brazilian foreign ministry cabled a telegram to its minister in London instructing him to raise the matter immediately at the Foreign Office. Within 24 hours the British foreign secretary, Lord Rosebery, sent the following telegram to Wyndham: «Brazilian Govt. have telegraphed privately here that they suspect you of being favorable to Mello. This of course I do not credit, but be careful to avoid giving the slightest ground for such a charge. You should be absolutely neutral»³⁴. On receiving the message Wyndham speedily visited the Brazilian foreign minister to give a personal denial of the reports³⁵. The sensitivities of the Brazilian government also extended far beyond Rio. For example, a few weeks later the foreign ministry complained to Wyndham that the British vice-consul in the northeastern state of Ceará was «mixing in politics». Brazilian diplomacy was, therefore, highly effective in reminding the local foreign representatives that their behaviour was subject to close scrutiny³⁶.

Another important instrument of Floriano's policy was strict censorship of the local press. In fact, the Rio press was generally hostile to foreigners during the revolt. «Most unjustifiable attacks have been made on foreign ministers and commanders of foreign warships by the portion of the press in favour of Marshal Peixoto», remarked Charles Akers³⁷. The only English-language weekly in Rio, the *Rio News*, was accused of anti-government bias and compelled to cease publication. In addition to its influence over the press, the government controlled telegraphic communications transmitted to and from Rio. While foreign

³⁴ Foreign Office to Wyndham, n.º 20, 6 October 1893, FO 13/708. For the telegram instructing Sousa Corrêa to raise the matter see Carlos de Carvalho a Sousa Corrêa, 6 de outubro de 1893, Rio de Janeiro, Missões Diplomáticas Brasileiras, Ofícios, Arquivo Histórico do Itamarati [hereafter cited as AHI] 217/2/3.

³⁵ Wyndham to Rosebery, n.º 147, 11 October 1893, FO 13/705.

³⁶ Wyndham to Rosebery, n.º 14, 13 November 1893, FO 13/706.

³⁷ *The Times* [London], 18 December 1893. The Portuguese representatives and residents in Rio were a particular target of criticism and denunciation. See HAHNER, June: «Floriano Peixoto, Brazil's «Iron Marshal»: A Re-evaluation», *The Americas*, 31, 1975, p. 263. The Portuguese minister lamented that press criticism made his position «untenable». See PAÇO D'ARCOS, 1974, p. 333.

representatives and press correspondents could see for themselves what was happening in the bay and on shore at Rio, they had to rely upon official government reports for the most recent news of developments in the rest of the country. This information was significant because armed opposition to the federal government had already broken out in various parts of the republic, most notably in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul³⁸. Custódio had links with the separatist forces fighting in the south and sought a formal alliance. On 24 October he announced the formation of a provisional rebel government in the southern state of Santa Catarina and requested diplomatic recognition from the foreign powers. The Brazilian government ensured that very little was known about the provisional government and only released information to the press that was extremely negative in tone.

The success of Floriano's government in managing the news was evident in the material contained in the dispatches sent from Rio by the American minister, Thomas Thompson. Thompson was particularly impressionable. A journalist from California, he was a political appointment and a novice in the diplomatic world. He was also new to Brazil and had arrived in Rio only a few days before the Naval Revolt occurred. On the crucial issue of whether the United States should recognize the provisional government formed by the rebels and in doing so grant them belligerent rights to enforce a legal blockade at Rio, Thompson simply and uncritically passed on information given to him by the Brazilian government. Two days before Custódio's request for recognition and at a time when the British correspondent, Charles Akers, was describing the fighting in Rio as «a very half-hearted affair» in which neither side was making much headway, the American minister telegraphed Secretary of State Walter Q. Gresham to report that the position of the insurgents in the harbour at Rio was «becoming desperate». Using information that he could only have been given from official sources, Thompson subsequently stated that the Uruguayan government had refused to receive a deputation sent by the rebels operating in southern Brazil³⁹. Gresham duly replied that recognition by the United States of the provisional government was not justified and that

³⁸ See LOVE, Joseph L.: *Rio Grande do Sul and Brazilian Regionalism, 1882-1930*. Stanford University Press. Stanford, California, 1971.

³⁹ *The Times* [London], 17 November 1893; Thompson to Gresham, telegrams, 22 and 24 October 1893, RG 59, Brazil, *Dispatches*, vol. 55.

it would be «an unfriendly act toward Brazil»⁴⁰. Thompson's subsequent dispatches continued to be dismissive of the rebels. On 9 November he stated that they were «in the spirit of desperation» and a day later «latest reports» were cited which indicated that Floriano's troops had defeated the rebel forces in Santa Catarina⁴¹. «Latest reports» referred to statements received from the Brazilian foreign ministry. In fact, the American minister was well aware that the news was being manipulated and that he might have been deliberately misinformed. In one telegram he noted «what appears to be a disastrous defeat of the revolutionary forces in the South» and revealingly added: «But, as I have before stated, information from the outside comes entirely through agencies controlled by the Government and is no doubt often colored in its interests»⁴².

As part of its strategy to win over opinion to its cause, the Brazilian government frequently alluded to the monarchist motives of the rebels. The charge that the rebels intended to destroy the republic and restore the monarchy was designed to win support primarily within Brazil, but it was realized that it might also influence the attitudes of the foreign powers, especially the United States. Thompson duly conformed to the American anti-monarchical tradition in that he was quick to see the spectre of monarchist plots. As early as 3 October he recounted a private conversation in which the Minister of Finance assured him that the government possessed «indubitable proof of intention on the part of the revolutionists to reestablish a monarchy»⁴³. No doubt, in an attempt by the Brazilians to incite Anglo-American rivalry, Thompson was later informed that the British were directly implicated in the monarchist threat and were secretly collaborating with the Germans to provide financial aid to Custódio⁴⁴. The allegations of British intrigues were repeated almost two months later on 13 December and resulted in

⁴⁰ Gresham to Thompson, telegram, 25 October 1894, *ibidem* This decision was announced on the very same day that Gresham was meeting with Salvador to respond to Brazilian complaints over the conduct of Commodore Stanton. It would be logical to infer that the reference to an «unfriendly act to Brazil» meant, in effect, the desire of the United States not to upset Floriano's government any further. See MENDONÇA AZEVEDO, 1971, p. 271.

⁴¹ Thompson to Gresham, telegram, 9 November and n.º 68, 10 November 1893, 1893, RG 59, Brazil, *Dispatches*, vol. 55.

⁴² Thompson to Gresham, n.º 141, 26 January 1894, *ibidem*, vol. 56.

⁴³ Thompson to Gresham, telegram, October 3, 1893, *ibidem*, vol. 55.

⁴⁴ Thompson to Gresham, telegram, 22 October 1893, *ibidem*.

Thompson immediately cabling Gresham to report that the Brazilian foreign minister claimed to possess proof in the form of an affidavit stating that British naval forces were giving material support to the rebels in order to bring about the restoration of the empire. It was no coincidence that the Brazilian government decided to reveal the existence of the affidavit at a critical time only days after Admiral Luís Felipe Saldanha da Gama had joined the revolt on the side of the rebels. Saldanha replaced Custódio as commander of the rebel fleet and announced his intention of instituting a more vigorous prosecution of the naval siege⁴⁵.

In addition to exploiting the anti-monarchical and anti-British attitude of Thompson⁴⁶, the Brazilian government also directly sought to influence American policy and public opinion in the United States. Its most valuable asset in this respect was the Brazilian minister in Washington, Salvador de Mendonça. Salvador had represented Brazil in the United States since 1875 and was a well-established and popular figure in political and social circles in Washington and New York. His loyalty to the Brazilian republic was indisputable and he worked assiduously to present his government's case. In her biography of her husband, Matilda Gresham noted that the Brazilian minister called almost daily at their home during the critical period after Saldanha da Gama had joined the revolt⁴⁷. The impact of Salvador's «personal diplomacy» was most apparent in the Stanton incident and especially in the case of the affidavit alleging British intrigue to bring back the Brazilian monarchy. In effect, Salvador was able to tell Gresham personally about the existence of the affidavit at the same time as Thompson's telegram on this subject was

⁴⁵ Thompson to Gresham, telegram, 13 December 1893, *ibidem*.

⁴⁶ Thompson also frequently expressed anti-British views in his dispatches to Washington. «It has been very plain to me», he remarked, «that Europeans especially the English people, sympathize with the revolvers and hope for the establishment of a monarchy upon the ruins of the Republic». See Thompson to Gresham, n.º 150, 1 February 1894, *ibidem*, vol. 45. The American minister was aware that he was regarded as being prejudiced against the rebels. Denouncing such views as a «tissue of falsehoods», he wrote to Gresham: «Espousing the cause of neither side my attitude has been that of an indifferent spectator». See Thompson to Gresham, n.º 189, 4 March 1894, *ibid*. Hugh Wyndham, however, once observed that Thompson was «constantly at the ministry for foreign affairs». See Wyndham to Rosebery, n.º 49, 6 February 1894, FO 13/724.

⁴⁷ GRESHAM, Matilda: *The Life of Walter Quintin Gresham, 1832-1895*, 2 vols. Rand, McNally. Chicago, 1919, II, p. 777.

arriving at the State Department. The resulting diplomatic activity must have been pleasing to Salvador because Gresham wrote shortly afterwards to the American ambassador in London, Thomas Bayard, specifically mentioning the information given by the Brazilian minister and asking Bayard to investigate its veracity⁴⁸.

Salvador did not just lobby Gresham and his many political friends and associates⁴⁹. The Brazilian minister also embarked on a personal publicity campaign sending a stream of letters for publication in prominent American newspapers in which he emphasized the positive aspects of the Floriano government while predicting the inevitable collapse of the revolt. A major public relations success was the appearance of two articles entitled «Republicanism in Brazil» and «Latest Aspects of the Brazilian Revolution» in the *North American Review*⁵⁰, a magazine which the Brazilian minister described as «a most influential publication read by the most eminent men in political life»⁵¹. In these articles Salvador astutely appealed to the well-established American preference for the republican form of government. «Were the [Brazilian] republic as bad as its worst enemies paint it», he contended, «it would still be preferable to any monarchy that could be set up on its ruins»⁵². He also singled out the rebel leaders for personal criticism, accusing Custódio of «personal ambition» and Rui Barbosa of going into «hiding» at the beginning of the revolt until he was able to flee to Montevideo. As for the provisional government which the rebels claimed had been set up in Santa Catarina, Salvador derided it as a «Robinson Crusoe government»⁵³.

⁴⁸ See Gresham to Bayard, 18 December 1893, RG 59, Great Britain, Instructions, vol. 30.

⁴⁹ Salvador had a particularly close relationship with the American businessman, Charles Flint. The latter was instrumental in providing Floriano with a fleet of 12 ships which arrived at Rio in March 1894. See TOPIK, 1996, pp. 154-77.

⁵⁰ SALVADOR DE MENDONÇA: «Republicanism in Brazil» and «Latest Aspects of the Brazilian Revolution», *North American Review*, 158, 1894, pp. 8-15, 164-74.

⁵¹ See MENDONÇA AZEVEDO, 1971, p. 273.

⁵² SALVADOR DE MENDONÇA, 1894, p. 15.

⁵³ SALVADOR DE MENDONÇA, 1894, p. 171. Rui Barbosa was a leading political figure who had formerly served as Minister of Finance in the government of Deodoro da Fonseca. While in exile in Buenos Aires, Rui wrote articles on Brazilian affairs which were published in the *New York Herald*. Although he denied active personal involvement in the Naval Revolt, Rui's writings were highly critical of Floriano and military rule.

Less high-profile but similar sterling service for the Floriano government was being performed in London by the Brazilian minister to Britain, João Artur de Sousa Corrêa. A professional diplomat, Sousa Corrêa was described by one British newspaper as «a portly distinguished-looking gentleman of middle-age, whose geniality and courteous bearing make him popular in the diplomatic circle». The article was written in late-September 1893 and also observed that «during the past few days the Brazilian Legation in Curzon Street has known no idle moment»⁵⁴. Like Salvador at the State Department in the United States, Sousa Corrêa was a busy diplomat and a frequent visitor to the British Foreign Office during the Naval Revolt. He also had regular meetings with the British foreign secretary, Lord Rosebery. Their contact was invariably friendly and even extended to Rosebery showing Sousa Corrêa the latest telegraphic correspondence sent from the Foreign Office to Wyndham at Rio⁵⁵. Further evidence of a personal rapport was demonstrated when the rumour of Wyndham's pro-rebel sympathies was raised in October and Rosebery was quick to inform the Brazilian minister personally that there was no truth in the allegation. Consequently, in his dispatches to Rio, Sousa Corrêa was able to reassure his government that Britain would not «interfere in any way» in the revolt⁵⁶. Even when events in Rio took a more critical turn after the adherence of Saldanha to the rebel side in December and speculation was rife that Britain was secretly backing the rebels, Sousa Corrêa was still able to confirm that the official British attitude of «absolute neutrality» was unchanged. The Brazilian minister was particularly encouraged by the content of a speech made by the British prime minister, William Gladstone, to the House of Commons on 2 January 1894. Gladstone's words that «we have no intention, and are advised that we have no right to interfere in the quarrel» were described by Sousa Corrêa as a «categorical» statement of British policy⁵⁷.

While he confidently believed that the British government would maintain its policy of neutrality, Sousa Corrêa was concerned that a small number of British newspapers were openly critical of Floriano and

⁵⁴ *The Globe* [London], 21 September 1893.

⁵⁵ Sousa Corrêa a Felipe Pereira, n.º 36, 22 de setembro de 1893, AHI 217/2/3.

⁵⁶ Sousa Corrêa a Carlos de Carvalho, telegrama, 2 de novembro de 1893, *ibid.*

⁵⁷ Sousa Corrêa a Alexandre Cassiano do Nascimento, n.º 1, 6 de janeiro, AHI 217/2/4. For Gladstone's speech see *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, vol. 20, 2 January 1894, p. 656.

sympathetic to the rebels. Unfortunately these included *The Times*, which he regarded as one of the leading newspapers not only in Britain but in «the entire world»⁵⁸. The Brazilian minister described the first editorial in *The Times* on the revolt as «violent and unjust to us»⁵⁹. The subsequent reports of the newspaper's Special Correspondent at Rio, Charles Akers, were regarded as particularly inaccurate and biased⁶⁰. The pertinent diplomatic question, however, was whether these articles exerted influence on the policy of the British government towards the revolt. One advantage enjoyed by Sousa Corrêa in his dealings with British officials was that the credibility of Akers was sometimes undermined by the fact that he had to send his reports by sea mail so that they often contained information which had become obsolete and superseded by events. The most critical moment occurred in early-February 1894. In an article reporting an interview held with Saldanha on 9 January, which was published in *The Times* on 6 February, the British correspondent mentioned the admiral's expectation that troops from the separatist forces in the south had reached São Paulo and would soon be approaching Rio. On this occasion the timing of the publication of the article was significant because it was known that the Foreign Office was currently giving serious consideration to granting diplomatic recognition to the rebels. Sousa Corrêa informed the Brazilian foreign ministry that Rosebery had actually read the article by Akers, but he was gratified to report that the British government had concluded that the rebels do not have «the quality of belligerents»⁶¹.

The rebel fleet finally surrendered in mid-March 1894 thereby effectively bringing the Naval Revolt to an end and conceding victory to

⁵⁸ Sousa Corrêa a Ministério das Relações Exteriores, n.º 48, 9 de dezembro de 1893, AHI 217/2/4.

⁵⁹ Sousa Corrêa a Felipe Pereira, n.º 35, 15 de setembro de 1893, *ibid.* The reference was to an editorial in *The Times* [London], 9 September, 1893.

⁶⁰ The Brazilian minister lamented that Akers reported rumours that could not be verified. See Sousa Corrêa a Ministério das Relações Exteriores, n.º 48, 9 de dezembro de 1893, AHI 217/2/3. Akers, himself, was only too aware of Brazilian sensitivity. He wrote from Rio on 5 November 1893: «The press of this city, with the exception of the *Jornal do Commercio*, is extremely bitter in denouncing foreigners as enemies to Brazil. The smallest incident is twisted and turned in such a manner as a directly hostile act towards the Government». See *The Times* [London], 28 November, 1893.

⁶¹ Sousa Corrêa a Ministério das Relações Exteriores, n.º 3, 9 de fevereiro de 1894, AHI 217/2/3.

Floriano⁶². At the beginning of the revolt the foreign representatives at Rio had automatically arrogated to themselves a superior role and appeared to take charge as they dictated the precise terms of military engagement to both Floriano and Custódio. They were soon reminded, however, that they were dealing with a sovereign state whose leader never wavered from the policy of insisting that his government be recognized and treated respectfully. In fact, Floriano directly influenced the policies and actions of the foreign powers by his success in managing the flow of information about events at Rio and in ensuring that foreign representatives, both diplomatic and naval, did not openly sympathize with his enemies. By contrast, the naval rebels remained in virtual diplomatic isolation. Moreover, their cause was crucially undermined by the so-called «neutrality» of the foreign powers which prevented a major bombardment of Rio and the establishment of a legal blockade to close the port. Foreign interference was humiliating to Brazilians, but in the case of the Naval Revolt it was invariably advantageous to Floriano. This was particularly exemplified by Benham's naval intervention which, despite initially arousing Brazilian nationalist sensitivities, actually dealt a severe blow to the rebels for which the Floriano government was very appreciative⁶³. But the revolt was not ended by Benham on 29 January. While the actions of the foreign powers exerted influence on events at Rio, they only contributed to rather than determined the eventual outcome. A more significant factor was the combination of firmness and skilful diplomacy shown by Floriano and his government which not only constrained the actions of the foreign powers but also succeeded in turning the Naval Revolt into an unequal contest so that it was only a matter of time before the rebels capitulated.

⁶² Floriano's term of office came to an end in November 1894 when Prudente de Moraes was inaugurated as the first civilian president of the republic. Saldanha da Gama joined the rebel forces in the south and was killed in June 1895. Custódio de Melo had left Rio earlier in December 1893. He withdrew from the conflict and sought political asylum in Argentina in April 1894.

⁶³ SALVADOR DE MENDONÇA: *A situação internacional do Brasil*. Garnier. Paris, 1913, pp. 208-9. For the view that there may well have been collusion between the Brazilian government and Admiral Benham see TOPIK, 1996, pp. 148-51. The affirmations of friendliness between Brazil and the United States contrasted starkly with Floriano's decision to break off diplomatic relations with Portugal in retaliation against assistance given by Portuguese warships which allowed the rebels to escape from the harbour.