

NAVAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND BRAZIL DURING THE COLD WAR: THE CASE OF THE PURCHASE OF THE VOSPER FRIGATES

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In this article we analyze the case of the acquisition of Vosper frigates by the Brazilian Navy in the early 1970's. We believe the process of purchase of these ships not only sheds light on naval issues, but also on foreign policy, by revealing the dispute for the Brazilian military market by the United Kingdom, since the late 1940's. Since then, it is clear that the United Kingdom did not conform with the United States monopoly in providing weapons to Brazil. In spite of adverse conditions, marked by the American willingness to provide obsolete ships for our navy through investments with no return, British diplomacy took care of relations with our naval force, carefully examining the signs of dissatisfaction in officers and waiting for the moment to resume old dating back to the time of our Independence. Although the issue does not appear in our international relations theory and text production, the purchase of the frigates was considered a strategic point for the relations between both Brazil and the United Kingdom. In our perspective, it anticipated in a few years the rapprochement with Europe, dated to the years in charge of President Geisel.²

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2 To address this issue, one must face the theme of the relationship between the Navy, technology and policy, which includes the understanding of naval decision-making process, the issue of innovation contained in the imports of naval equipment and relations between state and shipbuilding industry in developed countries. Our analysis is based both on official sources from the Brazilian Navy and interviews conducted by the author with the naval officers, as in British diplomatic documentation. This article was supported by FAPESP (process 2011/07520-4). The opinions, assumptions and conclusions or recommendations expressed

By ignoring the question of the purchase of weapons, the text production on Brazilian foreign policy in the dictatorial period missed an important aspect of the relationship between the authoritarian Brazil and the European democracies. The few authors who have focused on the so-called “European dimension” of our foreign policy tended to locate its emergence in a subsequent period to the purchase of the frigates. For them, it is a Geisel’s government phenomenon, with its foreign policy of detachment from the United States and its internal policy of detente. Thus, according to one of these authors:

The approach to the capitalist democracies of Western Europe had dual purpose: it meant a great relativization of the US presence on the domestic political scene (...) and indicated to the most favorable sectors to liberalization that the regime effectively was democratizing itself, so much that it was being accepted by important democratic governments.³

However, in the case of Britain, it is possible to say that a pinnacle in trade relations was in the Medici administration, when the sale of military equipment hereby mentioned happened. These trades represented a context of search for autonomy by many developing countries, which led them to seek an alternative to the transfer of obsolete naval material, American or Soviet.⁴

The domestic decision-making process

In the case of Navies such as the Brazilian, the relative autonomy enjoyed by the armed forces within the state and the lack of concern of society and non-military institutions with defense makes the decision-making process related to the purchase of warships and other equipment remain essentially a naval force task. In general, this process has its origins in ideas arising within the naval engineering sectors. Those manage or not to convince the upper echelons of the need to make acquisitions. Both from the engineers

hereby are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of FAPESP. The author is a researcher at CNPq. I thank Ludolf Waldmann for his careful reading of the first version.

3 Antonio C. M. Lessa, *Brasil, Estados Unidos e Europa Ocidental no contexto do nacional-desenvolvimentismo: estratégias de diversificação de parcerias: 1974-1979*. Masters dissertation, UNB, Brasília, 1994, p.94 and p.290.

4 Sami Faltas refers to “Indonesia and several Latin American countries” that “had turned to Western European sources to supplement their U.S-supplied equipment” anticipating an option later adopted by India, Taiwan and Egypt. See *Arms markets and armament policy: the changing structure of naval industries in Western Europe*, Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster, Martinus Nijhoff, 1986, p.59.

and from the hierarchy, generally divergent groups are formed around the options placed on the table and/or how to acquire them: by donation or purchase, in this or that country. These groups constitute what we will henceforth call the “technological parties”, which may or may not express deepest disagreements, being political differences or different naval strategies. Once approved by the Navy hierarchy, their aspirations are taken to the federal government. The case of the acquisition of the frigates was no different.⁵

After World War II, the Brazilian Navy started to receive secondhand American ships, mostly destroyers, practically donated to the country through the lend-lease arrangements made in the time of the conflict. Dissatisfaction with these ships, which at first was a significant technological advance for our Navy, was already visible in the late 1950’s, especially among Navy engineers. Thus, Admiral Coelho, chairman of the Frigates Construction Commission in the UK in the early 1970’s, argued that the US ships received during and after the Second World War “never represented necessarily what the Navy needed” mainly because they were designed for the needs of another country and in other strategic context.⁶ According to the Admiral, the US was surprised by Brazilian aspirations. Nonetheless, since 1961, the construction of escort vessels in the country started to be contained in plans of the General Staff of the Navy (EMA). This was followed by studies conducted at the Naval War School about the needs of ships for the Navy, within the maritime traffic protection strategy in the South Atlantic.

Under President João Goulart’s administration, the EMA and the Minister of the Navy, Admiral Paul Bosisio, approved studies that predicted the future need of 28 frigates to fulfill the mission. In late 1963, the Minister Sylvio Motta supported the idea of drawing up a multiannual program of investments and funding of defense, set up in the first naval Director Plan,

5 The frigates are escort vessels, both for anti-submarine use and general employment. Before its acquisition, the skeleton of the Brazilian fleet consisted of other escort ships, known during the war as escort destroyers and later simply as destroyers. These ships basically fulfilled typical functions of anti-submarine warfare, strategy attributed to Brazil by the United States in the context of South Atlantic defense in an eventual global war between the two sides of the Cold War. The Navy also had two cruisers - Barroso and Tamandaré - the first being the flagship of the fleet. The second hosted President Carlos Luz in the crisis that preceded the inauguration of Juscelino Kubitschek, known as the “General Lott’s preemptive strike”. See Julio de Sá Bierrenbach, *1954-1964: a political decade*, Rio de Janeiro, Public Domain, 1996, p.34.

6 Admiral Coelho started in 1959 the first contacts with the US Navy to build in Brazil, with US support, escort vessels better suited to Brazilian needs. See José Carlos Coelho de Sousa, *A History of the frigates*, Rio de Janeiro, Naval Club Publisher 2001, p.8. This book is the main source on the case examined here. It was supplemented with both interviews and questionnaires addressed to the official directly involved in the process, from a list obtained from the naval officers.

which despite its clear limitations, “was, after all, a basis of thought and action to the Navy in its entirety, not just a small group of potential leaders”, which for some officers would have been a plan “beyond political and ideological differences”.⁷

After the 1964 coup d'état, Admiral Mello Baptista replaced Admiral Motta and previous plans were temporarily suspended for having as patron an Admiral who was minister in the deposed regime. The Baptist administration expressed the views of the most radical sectors of the Navy. At the same time, President Marshal Castello Branco appointed former Minister Paulo Bosísio to the place of Marshal Taurino de Resende in the final stage of Investigations General Committee in charge of recommending political and military rights repeals to the ones accused of having ties to the Goulart government. In the context of the time, Bosísio was seen as a moderate.⁸

Soon after, in January 1965, the President brought him back to the ministry of the Navy, amid the crisis between the Navy and the Brazilian Air Force, given the presidential decision to destine the air parcel of the three forces to the Air Force - the so-called “ship aviation crisis” considered by Viana Filho the longest and most difficult crisis faced until then by the President.⁹ According to the chief of staff, the Admiral agreed with change proposed by the President: “For him, the solution met the principle of economy of means, avoiding the existence of aircraft from the Navy and from the Army, and ensured air coverage needed to the surface and sea forces of the Navy, since the planes of the Fleet, although belonging to the Air Force, obeyed the command of the Naval Force, while on operations”.¹⁰

7 Mozart Padilha de Souza, “O Plano Diretor: realidades e perspectivas da Marinha”, *Revista Marítima Brasileira*, 2. Trimester 1971, p.108-114, p.110.

8 Luis Viana Filho characterized him as an “illustrious Navy official”, prudent and moderate and supporter of the measure taken by Castello Branco give the Air Force the exclusivity of carrier aviation, as appropriate action for the rationalizing of means. See *O governo Castelo Branco*, Rio de Janeiro, Biblioteca do Exército e Livraria José Olympio Editora, 1975, vol. I. p. 202. See also John W. Foster Dulles, *President Castello Branco: Brazilian Reformer*, College Station, Texas A & M University Press, 1980, p.78 et seq.

9 See op. cit., p.204. Dated January 6, 1965, US Embassy document to the State Department reported a conversation with Commander Julio Pessoa, a President Castelo Branco’s assistant. To Pessoa, “the President would not be popular in the Navy because he defends the creation of a Ministry of Defense”, but Castelo “does not feel that such dissatisfaction would rise to dangerous levels.” Also according to the American version of the conversation with the Brazilian official, President believed that the Ministry of Defense was an economic necessity and would eventually be created, but considered that the Navy opposition would be able to block it. By then, Castelo wanted to keep the minister Mello Baptista, despite rumors about his retirement. “Airgram n. A-697”, generously given to the author by researcher Carlos Fico.

10 Luís Viana Filho, op. cit., p.203. As result of the presidential decision, the Navy would main-

Notwithstanding, the Navy was in a tense situation. The inauguration of the Minister was marked by a violent speech by his predecessor. Bosísio took over defending the unity: “Two aspects - said while in his inauguration - will guide my administration: union and cohesion within the Navy and the union between the Navy and the other armed forces”.¹¹ Mello Baptista represented since the mid-1950’s the extreme right, more used to politics than to force modernization.¹² In June 1965, the main ally of Motta, Admiral Rademaker, was punished by the new Minister, with the support of significant sections of officialdom. He allegedly made critical comments on the Castello Branco administration.¹³

The inauguration of the former Minister of Goulart turned out to be an indispensable step towards naval modernization. The wider context was given by the progress of administrative methods adopted by the new regime, especially the concept of programme budgeting from the USA.¹⁴ In this context, the Minister Bosísio resumed the aforementioned Director Plan.¹⁵ Aside expertise boards in the Navy, a group was created just to take care of shipbuilding. This group should define, for the first time in Navy history, the type of ships that would be built, and should also budget the acquisition plan for sub-

tain the helicopters and the Armed Forces would be with fixed-wing aircraft.

11 Cited in Viana Filho, *op. cit.*, p.204. Also see Foster Dulles, *op. cit.*, p.114.

12 Former President Geisel recalled in his testimony to CPDOC researchers that the Admiral integrated, since the 1950’s, with his colleagues Rademaker, Aaron Reis, Saldanha da Gama and Mario Cavalcanti, the “group of Dionnes”, the most radical Navy group, referring to the five twins born in Canada. View Maria Celina D’Araujo and Celso Castro (eds.), *Ernesto Geisel*, Rio de Janeiro, Editora Fundação Getulio Vargas, 1997, p.219.

13 *Ibid*, p.142. Rademaker would later be Minister of the Navy of government Costa e Silva, composing in 1969 the military triumvirate that replaced the President when he turned away for health reasons, to the possession of the Médici general. In the government of Médici, he was Vice President.

14 For the Navy, such efforts were “precursors of its implementation in the Brazilian government, in anticipation of the adoption by the Executive”. See Mauro Brazil, “Considerações sobre o Plano Diretor da Marinha”, *Revista Marítima Brasileira*, 2. Trimester 1971, p.115-128, p.116.

15 According to a source from the Navy, “the emphasis on budget discipline and planning as a global instrument of action of the Government allowed it to be reborn as early as 1965 with enlarged prospects. New policies and guidelines had been established, guiding the formulation of Basic Plans. There was determined commitment to give the Plan a permanent structure, by developing a Systematic Detailed and setting up a Coordination and Control Group, subordinated to the Navy General Secretariat”, see Mozart Padilha de Souza, *op. cit.*, p.110. Another author points out that “at the end of 1966, a committee appointed by the then Minister of Marine devoted to the systematic revision in the Director Plan, in order to remove the flaws so far observed and harmonize the Navy plans with the proposed programme budget technique.” In this process, the PD is no longer seen as a document going to be seen as a systematic planning. Mauro Brazil, *op. cit.*, p.118.

mission to the Presidency.¹⁶ Hence arose the Ten-Year Navy Program of 1967. There is no evidence that this plan was linked to any revision of the naval strategic doctrine, then focused on anti-submarine warfare. The factors that originated it were more related to the difficulties posed by the United States to acquire modern equipment, visible especially after the obstacles placed by Congress on military sales to Latin America in the context of conflict between the legislative and executive powers, caused by the Vietnam War.¹⁷ Issues such as the ban on American equipment use against ships from the same source (even fishing boats), and the difficulty of getting spare parts for the old vessels transferred by the US also weighed in the decision.¹⁸

The Ten-Year Program envisaged the construction of 10 frigates, and 13 other types of boats.¹⁹ Regarding the former, the initial guideline of EMA stated that they should already be in service in their marines.²⁰ Shipyards in the Netherlands, Germany and the United States sent visit invitations to the Navy. In July 1967, the then commanders Coelho and Vidigal were appointed by Admiral Rademaker, then minister of the Navy under Costa e Silva admin-

16 Coelho de Sousa, op. cit., p.13-15.

17 See John Roberto Martins Filho, "As políticas militares dos EUA para a América Latina, 1947-1989", *Teoria & Pesquisa*, 46: 101-135, jan. 2005. Indeed, US diplomatic documents since 1966 show a tense climate between Brazil and the US on the issue of armaments. In late 1966, the Embassy of Brazil in Washington document, written in Portuguese and available in the US diplomatic files mentioned "the establishment of restrictions on military aid to Latin America imposed by Law 89-583 of 19 September 1966". See "Aide-Mémoire", Washington DC, in October 27, 1966, assigned to the author by Carlos Fico.

18 For Commander Fernando, finding that the ban could create problems to the fishing inspection activities in Brazilian waters emerged from the so-called "lobster war" conflict by France, in the early 1960's. As for difficulties in the maintenance area, the same source mentioned the practice of the US Navy to move its inventory of parts of ships taken out of service to private dealers, which made the purchase very expensive. Testimony of Commander Fernando Costa to the author, Rio de Janeiro, Naval Club, July 15, 2008. Ludolf Waldmann Junior remembered that, with the lobster war, the US ended up in an unusual situation: either supported France - then part of NATO - or Brazil by the Rio Treaty. Eventually require that Brazil did not use the leased ships. Brazil rejected the demand mentioning the Rio Treaty in its defense. See "Tecnologia naval e política: o caso da Marinha brasileira na era dos contratorpedeiros, 1942-1970", Masters dissertation, UFSCAR, 2013, p.119.

19 For the then captain of corvette Lafayette Paulo Pinto the initial program involved the acquisition of 20 frigates. The official presented comparative tables of the original plans and what was actually approved by the government Castello Branco in em "A Marinha e a construção de navios de guerra no Brasil", *Revista Marítima Brasileira*, 2. Trimester 1974, pp. 19-44. According to the captain Fernando Costa, chief of staff of the head of EMA, Admiral Moreira Maia at the time, the approval of the program was "the last government act signed by President Castelo Branco and was brought to him by the minister Roberto Campos." Testimony quoted.

20 Coelho de Sousa, op.cit.,p.16.

istration, to visit four countries.²¹ In August, at a meeting with the Minister, it is decided to make contact with the US Navy in order to establish the manufacture of two Bronstein frigates in Brazil.

At that time, it started to become clear to the involved officers that the United States, having proved to be unwilling to solve the problem of financing, had no interest in meeting the Brazilian expectations. In this context, the general secretary of the Navy, Admiral Adalberto Nunes de Barros, formed a working group with representatives from all sectors of government that would have to approve the external financing. The working group became then an inter-ministerial commission. In August 1968, a year after the choice of Bronstein, the US had not yet presented a proposal for funding. According to Admiral Coelho's report, the support of Admiral Nunes (now the head of EMA) and Admirals Carlos Auto and Hernani Goulart Fortuna (EMA members) was decisive for the decision to review the idea of acquiring frigates already in use. They decided then to purchase a new design of ship, with equipments identified as state of the art.²²

The decision was a landmark in the history of the Navy.²³ New negotiations with the United States confirmed that the question of funding would not be solved, strengthening the pro-European position of Admiral Nunes.²⁴ With the succession crisis of President Costa e Silva, in September-October 1969, the last decision of the Minister Rademaker was the cancellation of the choice of Bronstein and the breach of the American option.²⁵

Early in the Medici government, thanks to the work of the aforementioned officers, the then Minister Adalberto Nunes drafted an explanatory

21 On that occasion, the Hamilton frigates were examined (USA), Leander (Great Britain), but not Van Speik (Netherlands) and Cologne (Germany), which were not in the port. *Idem*, p.22-25. In this text we will follow the usual naval formality of calling "lieutenants" the initial three stations of career; of "commanders" the corvette captain stations, frigate captain and captain of sea and war and "admirals" the three general officer of the Navy posts.

22 Basically, this meant that the propulsion was the mixed CODOG (Combined Diesel or Gas Turbine), and the frigate would feature computerized naval tactical systems, Ikara rocket launchers, anti-submarine helicopters with MK-44 torpedoes, advanced sonar systems, anti-submarine torpedoes, Seacat anti-air defense missiles. Sousa Coelho, *op. cit.*, p.33-37.

23 For Sousa Coelho, it was over, thus, "with guinea complex, which in the past led to excessively timid and ultra-conservative choices". See *op. cit.*, p.33.

24 Believing in the British diplomatic documents that will be later examined, Admiral Nunes was not only pro-Europe but decidedly pro-British. Anyway, he was a firm supporter of autonomy from the United States. In the inaugural lecture which issued the April 30, 1970 at the Naval War College, he alluded "to the demands imposed by the need to create an effective naval power and of our own (emphasis given by him) - consistent with reality and national possibilities" for defend the optimization of administrative processes. See Mauro Brazil, *op. cit.*, p.116.

25 *Idem*, p. 38.

memorandum requesting authorization to hire financing of up to US\$ 250 million for the purchase of 10 frigates. As we shall see further in the text, in diplomatic backstage, Britain had already presented attractive terms of financing, in the midst of negotiations for the purchase by Brazil of the Oberon class submarines. The President gave the green light. The EMA then approved the data-sheet, sent to shipyards abroad. The subject interested the main European shipyards.²⁶ After further visits to European shipyards, the Navy Material General Direction chose as finalists the firms Vickers, Yarrow, Vosper Thornicroft and Blohm und Voss. It is clear by then that the US\$ 25 million available for acquisitions would be enough only for the purchase of six frigates. In the end, according to the official version of the Navy, the financing conditions were the most important: it was decided that English frigates would be bought, in a negotiation with the Vosper shipyard.²⁷ However, this version should be taken with caution. In large naval acquisitions, this rationality not always prevails. As we shall see, by examining the British diplomatic documents, influential sectors of the Navy had always preferred Vosper.

In June 1970, a Brazilian delegation went to England to inform Vosper of the intention to acquire six frigates. It consisted of Admirals Coelho and Alcantara and members of the inter-ministerial group aforementioned. According to the first, the decision to build two frigates in the country, in response to the shipyard posture, which stated that it had no interest in building more than four vessels to a single client, was an impromptu decision and did not constitute intentional aspect of technological autonomy policy.²⁸ Thus, out of six frigates, four would be manufactured in Woolston shipyard, near Southampton, and two in the Navy Arsenal of Rio de Janeiro (AMRJ). On further examination of the British documentation that aspect would be confirmed.

In August, the final version of the contract was concluded and signed with pomp and a big ceremony, as we shall see in the next part. The deal was

26 In the UK, Swan Hunter, Cammell Laird, Scotts, Yarrow, Vosper Thornicroft and Vickers; in Germany, Blohm und Voss associated with its biggest rival Howaldtswerke-Deutsche Werft; Italy, Vantieri navale del Tirreni and Riuniti, and the Netherlands the Verolme. Ibid, p.40.

27 Idem, p.40-45. For Commander Fernando, “what came here to be traded was not the Mark-10 frigate, but the Mark-11 frigate, which is the class bought by Argentina, Hercules class. This was the project that Vosper was developing with the MOD - I embarked in one of these frigates, Amazon class, project that was purchased and commissioned and worked a long time for the British Navy. The Mark-11 was a little larger than the Mark-10. The difference was more about concept, arms, etc., but it was a project given by the MOD to Vosper. The Brazilian option was the Mark-10 “. Statement given to the author.

28 Idem, p.64-66. To Admiral Armando Vidigal, “the decision, therefore, was not the result of a deliberate attempt to acquire the building technology of these vessels.” See *A evolução do pensamento naval estratégico brasileiro: meados das décadas de 70 até os dias atuais*, Rio de Janeiro, Clube Naval, 2002 p.11.

seen at the time as “the largest made by South Coast shipyards and probably the largest by any British firm”, providing work in those facilities until 1979. A consortium of eight British banks provided the financing of around 100 million pounds.²⁹ The frigate Niterói (F-40), which gave its name to the class in Brazil, was thrown overboard in February 8, 1974 and incorporated in November 20, 1976, followed later by the Defender (F-41), Constitution (F-42) and Liberal (F-43). In Brazil, Independence (F-44) and the EU (F-45) were built later. The names paid homage to vessels that participated in the war for independence in 1822 and 1823. Some might sound ironic, though, given the political regime in Brazil then.

From the United States to the United Kingdom

The purchase of the ships in Britain marked the end of an era. For the first time since the beginning of World War II, ships that would constitute the foundation of the Brazilian fleet were to be purchased in Europe, ending a period of obsolete destroyers transferred to the country by lend-lease.³⁰ One could say that the acquisition of the frigates was a return to the period before World War I, when Brazil purchased the battleships Minas Gerais and São Paulo in England.³¹ As occurred in the early twentieth century, in the early 1970’s, naval purchases constituted an important issue in relations between Brazil and Great Britain.

As stated in his memoirs, the British ambassador to Brazil at the time affirmed that British exports doubled in the passage from the 1960s to the 1970s, and “this was helped a lot by such governmental purchases as, for example, those made by the Brazilian Navy”. In the same book, the diplomat celebrates the restoration of the relation between the Brazilian Navy and the British: “This admirable service is not only modeled very closely on the Royal Navy in matters of uniform but also has a great tradition of buying ships from Britain. When they decided to replace obsolete ships, we were fortunate in having an excellent type of frigate which was just what the Brazilians needed; they also bought three submarines from us”.³²

More than two decades earlier, in early 1948, after selling 130 new

29 “Vosper to sell Brazilian Navy £100m frigates”, *The Times*, September 30 1970.

30 As we shall see, an exception to this rule was the sale to Brazil in the mid-1950s Leviathan aircraft carrier, under construction, here baptized Minas Gerais.

31 See João Roberto Martins Filho, *A Marinha brasileira na era dos encouraçados, 1895-1910*, Rio de Janeiro, FGV, 2010.

32 Sir David Hunt, *Memoirs: military and diplomatic*, London, Trigraph, 2006, p. 311.

military airplanes to Argentina, the British diplomacy pointed out the new situation: “By this policy of practically giving away war material, it looks as if the US Services Departments had found a means of cutting the ground from under the feet of any competitor and so ensuring that LA shall be re-armed exclusively with US equipment”.³³ The British dilemma as faced in Latin America was resumed by the British diplomacy like this: “Few of the larger countries will want to tie themselves exclusively to the US chariot wheels. The problem for us is to retain a reasonable share of the trade in arms with LA without unduly indisposing the Americans”.³⁴

During the Dutra administration (1945-1950), however, it was not possible to change the new framework. Only with the election of Vargas the British ambassador saw an outlook of improvement.³⁵ However, with the signing of the Brazil-US Military Agreement, in March 15, 1952, it would soon become clear that the new superpower was not willing to allow Britain to regain its former position as arms supplier to Brazil. On the other hand, the obsolete nature of the equipment assigned to Brazil would stimulate the Foreign Office not to abandon their expectations of exporting more modern military equipment for our country. The effort eventually resulted, at the end of 1952, in the sale of 70 Meteor airplanes to the Brazilian Air Force.³⁶ Regarding the Navy, at the same time, the British naval attaché in Rio de Janeiro assessed: “We can not expect the US Naval Mission in Brazil to welcome our competition, but there is no reason why we should lose good business on account of the susceptibilities of the Americans”.³⁷

In March 1945, the Foreign Office stated that it was essential to maintain a naval attaché in Brazil. With the creation of this post, Brazil was able to have its own naval attaché in London.³⁸ However, in the early years after the

33 FO371 / 68277, cited in Moura, “From ‘automatic alignment’ to ‘difficult pragmatism’: shifts in Brazilian foreign policy and Their impact on Anglo-Brazilian military contacts, 1945-1954”, London School of Economics & Political Science, MA International History, September, 1994, p.11. In its report for the period from January 1946 to March 1947, the British air attaché in our country mentioned possible outcomes of contacts to be made between the naval former attaché of Great Britain in Brazil, now representative of Hawker and senior FAB (FO371 / 61215, cited in Leandro Moura, p.12. In the same attaché report for 1949, there were new hopes of sales of aeronautical equipment to Brazil (FO371 / 81290, cited in idem).

34 FO371/61305, cited in Leandro Moura, op. cit., p.9.

35 Commenting an interview with the elected President in October 1950, in which he suggested that Brazil could seek to Europe when it was not attended by the US in its economic assistance and technical expectations. Moura, op. cit., p.12.

36 Moura, op. cit., p.15.

37 ADM166/6065, citado em Moura, op. cit., p.16.

38 Moura, op. cit., p.7.

war, the attaché plowed into infertile soil, though not without better future harvest expectations. In his report on the period from January 1946 to June 1947, he referred to the rumors that Brazil would be interested in acquiring “a small modern aircraft carrier”, seen as “an absolute necessity for the requirements of their Navy,” although nothing concrete had been done.³⁹ In February 1952, Her Majesty’s naval attaché referred to the Brazilian interest in fulfilling its shipbuilding program, which, in the view of the Brazilians, could “re-establish the political tradition of having units of the Brazilian Navy built once again in the British shipyards”.⁴⁰ The program cited included the purchase of two light cruisers, one or two aircraft carriers, 6 destroyers and 10 minesweepers.

Indeed, the late 1952 marked the exchange of letters between the naval attaché in Rio de Janeiro, H.C. Ranald⁴¹, and various government departments in London - Foreign Office, Admiralty, Ministry of Defence, the Treasury Department - on the subject of selling six destroyers and the competition posed mainly by France, which would be willing to conduct business with the use of “barter with compensation”, which means that a part of the payment would be received in the form of goods, an option not offered by the British government. At that time, the attaché also considered as competitors of his country the Netherlands and the US. Three British shipyards - Armstrong, Yarrow and Samuel White - joined forces to present a proposal to Brazil⁴², but negotiations did not progress and the program was canceled.

In April 1954, the British Embassy in Brazil acknowledged the discussed terms. In the letter accompanying the British attaché’s annual report, the Ambassador in Rio de Janeiro, Sir Geoffrey Thompson, admitted that, in his opinion, our Navy had no strategic relevance whatsoever to the Queen’s

39 Moura, op. cit., p.12. Ludolf Waldmann noted that, in 1944, Getúlio Vargas urged the United States to transfer two aircraft carriers. It is the first time the acquisition of that ship appears from the then minister of naval program of the Navy, Admiral Alexandrino, in 1922. Then, in his ministerial report of 1945, Guilhem Admiral presented a naval program that included the acquisition of two passenger ships airfields Independence class by US transfer. See op. cit., pp. 86-88.

40 ADM116/6065, citado em Moura, op. cit, p.14.

41 In a document from 1954, there is allusion to this oficial as naval, military and aeronautic attaché.

42 At the time, the usual accusations of corrupt practices in the negotiations were made by attache: “The most important fact that has come to light since my report of November 4 was the agreement by the three British agents to divert one percent of the contract value for the man who is in a position to advise the Minister of the Navy on the proposal to be accepted “(HBM Naval Attaché, Rio de Janeiro to The Director of Naval Intelligence, Admiralty, 10th December, 1952). See offices in ADM 1-23976, *Sale of British warships to Brazilian Navy*.

plans, “since the United States had undertaken the primary responsibility for the reorganization of the defence of this part of the world”. As he concluded, “at present, therefore, the Brazilian Navy is primarily of interest to us as a possible market for the sale of British warships and auxiliary vessels”. Then the ambassador summed up the general framework of Anglo-Brazilian naval relations after the signing of the Brazil-US military agreements:

The chief difficulty in offering to sell ships and other naval equipment to the Brazilian navy is that the United States, who are anxious to keep the Brazilian Navy closely tied to their own, are likely as soon as they hear of British competition to offer similar equipment at knock-down prices and if they do there is nothing clearly that we or any other European power can do about it. Nonetheless, I think that it is worth while for us to continue to make bid as occasion offers, since it is always possible that the Brazilian navy may place an order in the United Kingdom, and, if or when this occurs, we benefit economically and also earn some small dividend in a slight increase in influence.⁴³

Finally, Ambassador talked about the good relations between the two Navies, using as an example the Brazilian good will to allow in their ports the stopover of British ships in transit to and from the Falkland Islands, unlike what happened with the Chilean Navy, and obviously, with the Argentinian. In a report of the end of March 1954, the attaché expressed the dismay of a naval force, which had already been the most powerful in the world and now had to content with a subordinate place against the US naval power:

The Navy is very pro-British and has a great respect and admiration for the Royal Navy and its traditions. The Brazilian Navy would like to model itself on ours because it realises that apart from tradition and experience our methods are very economical in manpower and therefore more suited to Brazil’s needs. In the circumstances this is not possible and the Brazilian Navy is now heavily indoctrinated with American ideas.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, the beginning of 1954 marked the question of the possible purchase of a light aircraft carrier by the Navy of Brazil. The strategic

43 “British Embassy, Rio de Janeiro, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Office”, April 12, 1954. FO 371-108850, Annual reports for 1953 and 1954 for Brazilian Navy. In the report of March 31, 1954, the attaché showed concern and rumored about offers from France (destroyers and aircraft carriers), Netherlands (destroyers), Japan (aircraft carrier), Italy (submarines) and the United Kingdom itself (the six vessels mentioned above and “incomplete hull of the Leviathan light aircraft carrier”).

44 “Naval attaché, British Embassy, Rio de Janeiro to British Ambassador, Sir Geoffrey Thompson”, FO 371-108850.

reasons for the acquisition were explained to the Foreign Office by the British ambassador in Rio de Janeiro:

The chances of this going through still seem remote, but from the political point of view it should be born in mind that that Brazil is very anxious to achieve a status of a major power and that the addition of an aircraft carrier to the Brazilian fleet would contribute substantially and strikingly to this end and would enable them to be one up on the Argentines.⁴⁵

Indeed, in January 1954, the British naval attaché reported to the Department of Naval Intelligence in London contacts from the EMA in order to probe the British Navy on whether to offer the aircraft carrier Hercules to Brazil.⁴⁶ For the attaché, the main reasons for this option were: 1) that such a ship would be essential for a modern Navy; 2) prestige (not acknowledged); 3) the quality of British ships; 4) the affordability of Hercules; 5) the possibility of extending the payment period.⁴⁷ According to the British official, the head of EMA, Admiral Atila Monteiro Aché, urgently needed a letter from the attaché explaining the offer of Hercules, which he intended to present to Minister Guillobel, as part of a document that exposed points that should be changed in the Ministry policy, in the view of the EMA Admirals. The attaché's response once again brings to light the Anglo-American naval tensions: according to the British official, he explained to the Brazilian Admiral that if the Admiralty authorized him to write the letter, it would be implicit that the letter "would not be used as a red cloak to infuriate the American Bull into offering a Carrier free, or cheap, or on loan for 20 years as I have heard rumours of such proposals".

In response, the Brazilian Admiral supposedly said that the US never

45 "British Embassy, Rio de Janeiro to American Department, Foreign Office", January 8 1954. FO 371-108849, *Negotiation for sale of aircraft carrier to BN*.

46 The ship was valued at £ 2 million in state he was in. It was expected that over 4 million pounds would be needed to complete it, which should only occur in late 1957 as the attaché claimed to have unofficially reported to the Navy Brazilian months before.

47 According to the attaché, the messenger of the EMA was the Director of Naval Aviation, Admiral Olavo de Araujo, for whom Guillobel Minister was becoming "too political, despite of the real interests of the Navy." The main point of attack was the construction of numerous naval bases, even if the Navy had no ships to use them, rather than the acquisition of 10 helicopters and aircraft carriers. For the attaché, the revelation of these differences was much more than expected to hear. "Naval Attaché, Rio de Janeiro, to The Director of Naval Intelligence, Admiralty", 11th December 1953. For a defense of the construction of these bases ("for the future strength, own a great naval power and not to the current Brazil"), see Renato de Almeida Guillobel, *Some assessments of the naval administration*, Rio de Janeiro, Naval Press, 1959, p.16. The bases in question were built in Val De Cans (Pará), Recife, Natal and Aratú (Bahia).

would provide the carrier to Brazil, for they had already made clear that, in their view, “Brazil did not need naval aviation, let alone an aircraft carrier”. Such a statement would be anchored in the American strategy to get Brazil only to escort convoys from its coast, to the Caribbean, leaving the rest to the US Navy and would be seen by Brazilians as a “selfish and arrogant” attitude. For His Majesty’s attaché, “the Brazilian Navy does not want to be treated purely as a naval tool of the U.S.A. and considers that Brazil must be suitably armed to fight private wars if she wishes to do so, without American help”.⁴⁸ Finally, the attaché gave an assessment of Guillobel minister’s stance, divided, in his view, between the desire to mark his administration either for the purchase of the desired carrier or for the pressures of the head of American naval mission, Admiral Whitehead, as part of shortage of reserves, which put the Ministry of the Navy against the Ministry of Finance.

The attaché’s office requested approval of the Admiralty and the Office for him to write the required letter, and concluded alluding to air material purchases that should follow the purchase of the carrier. A few days later, the embassy in Rio de Janeiro wrote to the Foreign Office warning that the delay in response placed the attaché in bad situation with the head of EMA. Demonstrating the importance that the British government gave to the sale, London’s answer came out immediately: “You may tell Brazilians that Leviathan is available.”⁴⁹ Three weeks later, the embassy informed London that in February 4, President Vargas had authorized the Minister of the Navy to buy the Leviathan at a cost of 7 million pounds.⁵⁰ This was followed by an intense exchange of correspondence between Rio and London given the fact that the correct price was 9.9 million pounds, which shocked the EMA. Finally, in February 25, 1954, the Brazilian Navy received the Admiralty’s memorandum formally offering the ship.⁵¹ In December 1956, already in the Kubitschek ad-

48 In 1969, a US report would state that the Brazilian naval force had expectations of becoming a small force, but a modern one, and mentioned the opinion of at least one top naval officers, for whom “Brazil’s Navy officers could not sit on the beach and watch US Navy units patrolling its waters.” See US Department of State, Director of Intelligence and Research, Research Memorandum, RAR-14, August 25 1969. Ten years earlier, the holder of the Navy folder on the second Vargas referred to the commitments made by Americans during World War II , “of which, with the passage of time, and well according to your usual procedure for us, they so easily forgot.” See Guillobel, op. cit. , P.6.

49 “From Rio de Janeiro to Foreign Office”, January 15 1954 e “From Foreign Office to Rio de Janeiro”, January 15, 1954. FO 371-108849.

50 “From Rio de Janeiro do Foreign Office”, February 9, 1954. FO 371-108849.

51 “Admiralty to the Foreign Office”, 25th February, 1954. In March of that year, the Admiralty, making the reservation that it should be heard in the choosing, listed the shipyards in the UK with experience in building aircraft carriers, which could finalize the Leviathan: Harland & Wolff (Belfast), Vickers Armstrong (both in Barrow as in Tyne), Fairfield, Swan Hunter &

ministration, the acquisition of a ship of the same class, the *Vengeance*, here baptized *Minas Gerais*, was completed.⁵²

In the new British Naval attaché's report for the year of 1954, besides reporting positive changes occurred in the command of the Navy after Getulio Vargas's suicide, talks about the alleged desire from a part of naval officers to escape the straitjacket of US aid returned: "There is a growing feeling amongst a number of Brazilian Naval officers, in particular the more far seeing Captains and Commanders, that they should once again model themselves upon the Royal Navy rather than upon the Navy of the United States". To the official, the Brazilians resented the wasteful methods from the US Navy, and showed themselves susceptible in front of the arrogance of the Americans, who seemed likely to dictate the direction of the Brazilian Navy. However, he admitted that any change in the current situation could only be gradual and would depend on a reduction of size of the US naval mission in Brazil.⁵³

The Anglo-American tensions reappeared in 1963 when the British naval attaché in Rio de Janeiro received the request of the firm Shorts, from Belfast, who had been contacted by the Brazilian Navy, interested to know whether the missile *Seacat* could be installed on destroyers assigned by the USA. Consulted by the Foreign Office, in May, the Admiralty replied that "in general, it is not our policy actively to promote missile sales to Latin American countries", but "as regards SEACAT for Brazil, it would be difficult to refuse a direct request for its sale if a firm order where to be placed". It was suggested that the information should be provided without greater commitment, with the warning that some consideration should be given "to U.S. susceptibilities on this subject", once "their policy statements indicate that they are opposed to the export of sophisticated weaponry to Latin America countries". The document concluded with doubts about whether Brazil was able to buy the missiles, given the political and economic instability of the country.

In September, Shorts Brothers warned the authorities that it had received an urgent request from Brazil to present a proposal of sale of the *Sea-*

Wigham, Carmell Laird, John Brown, Alex Stephens & Sons and Hawthorne Leslie. See "Foreign Office to Naval Attaché", 15th March, 1954. FO 371-108849.

52 Ludolf Waldmann Júnior, *op. cit.*, p.110.

53 The report is signed by the master J.C.Cockburn. Unlike the praise made by former attaché to the Minister of Marine Vargas, Renato de Almeida Guillobel, Cockburn depreciates him, praising the new minister, Admiral Edmundo Jordan Amorim do Valle, appointed by Café Filho. See "Naval Attaché, British Embassy, Rio de Janeiro, to British Ambassador", December 23, 1954, FO 371-108850. The captain of the British Navy is equivalent to our captain of sea and war.

cats. In the following month, Ambassador Fry himself argued that the deal would be hard to refuse, given similar contacts with Chile and Argentina, but the internal situation in Brazil, “which some believe is now near to civil war”, could be an obstacle. The diplomat reminded that the weapons in question were basically defensive and that the Americans would not like it, but neither did the British government like it when they sold to aircraft the Australian. In 23 October, the Embassy reported that a group of Brazilian officials would visit the firm in Belfast and called for a clear position of London on the sale. The response of the Foreign Office came a week later:

For the moment, we cannot go further than the present formula that Shorts may tender subject to the approval of the UK government to supply. The Americans still take the view that Seacat contains American know-how and that we cannot release them to a third power without their permission on security grounds. Although we are in effect sidestepping their objections in the case of Chile, the Americans had not yet yielded.

The dispatch concluded with the observation that if a firm order from Brazil was presented, it would be necessary to consult the Americans and, “if the reaction is negative, take a decision whether we can ignore American objections”.⁵⁴ With the advent of the military coup in Brazil, the deal was postponed. Finally, the country lowers its original ambitions to buy three Seacats missile stations, to be installed in Minas Gerais, and bought only one unit, which was installed in 1966, in the destroyer Mariz e Barros.⁵⁵

In September 1965, the Arms Working Party, inter-ministerial organization overseeing arms sales in the British government, discussed the information from the naval attaché in Rio de Janeiro that the Brazilian Navy was interested in acquiring 12 antisubmarine frigates. For the attaché, Brazil would build the hulls and buy engines and equipment in the UK. At the time, the AWP discussed the objections of the Treasury, based on the economic situation in Brazil and the assent of the Foreign Office, according to which if the UK did not sell to Brazil, another country would do and the British Navy was interested in selling ship to our country.⁵⁶ In 29 September, the British Embassy reported to London that a representative of Yarrow made in Rio de Janeiro a presentation of a frigate to the Shipbuilding Committee of the Brazilian Navy. At the meeting, the Brazilians have confirmed their interest in 12

⁵⁴ About the dispatches referred to in this paragraph see FO 371-167927, *Supply of arms to Brazilian Navy*, 1963.

⁵⁵ Ludolf Waldmann Júnior, op. cit., p.127.

⁵⁶ “Extract from the minutes of Arms Working Party Meeting of 2-9-65”, FO 371-179273, *Construction of Yarrow Frigates in Brazil*.

antisubmarine frigates and suggested the British firm to present a proposal for sale. According to this source, the Brazilian Navy officers were interested in building one ship in the UK and the rest in Brazil, and mentioned the Mauá, Verolme, Ishikavajima shipyards, besides the Navy Arsenal itself. The representative of the English shipyard would have supposedly visited these firms.⁵⁷ The subject returned to the AWP later that month and it was decided “to invite the Navy Department to continue their negotiations with the Brazilians and to report developments to the Arms Working Party before entering into any firm commitments”.⁵⁸

The British and the frigates sale

It took four years so that indications would come up that the laboriously maintained contacts after World War II were about to give more concrete results. In 1970, the British defense attaché, by introducing his annual report for 1969, after noting that the presence of the United States “has also largely dictated Brazilian choice in the organisation and equipment of their Armed Forces”, announced: “There are now signs that the Brazilians want to look elsewhere”.⁵⁹ To the official, given the limitations of the national technology, the Armed Forces would be breaking free of the American straight-jacket. For instance, in the naval plan, there would be orders for two submarines of the Oberon class, built by Vickers in Barrow-in-Furness, here baptized Humaitá and Tonelero. Later in the same document, it was stated that relations with the US Navy would be “on the whole, good but there are signs of growing impatience with avuncular patronage”. Relations with the British Navy were seen as “very cordial”.

57 “British Embassy to Foreign Office”, 29 September, 1965, FO 371-179273.

58 “Extract from minutes of Arms Working Party meeting of 28/9/65”, FO 371-179273.

59 “Report on Brazil Armed Forces”, FCO 7-1512, 1969. Later, he complimented: “The services will continue to be oriented USA and, one suspects, irritated at the same time”. On the American side, in early 1968, a letter sent to the Secretary of State in charge of the Latin American region suggested that he informed the Brazilian ambassador, Leitão da Cunha Vasco “the difficult problems we are facing with Congress due to acquisition certain types of military equipment by Brazil and other countries in the Hemisphere”, while states: “We are hopeful that we can have a favorable determination soon, which will allow cooperation with Brazil in the construction of two destroyers of Bronstein class.” In the same text, it is clear that the American concern was the purchase of Brazilian jets in other countries, given the difficulties to acquire the F-5 Americans, suggesting to the Secretary to make clear to the ambassador that “all of our aid program external will be seriously affected by the Brazilian decision.” See ARA Covey T. Oliver to The Secretary, “Briefing Memorandum”, March 22, 1968, also assigned to the author by Carlos Fico.

However, the most important was the selection of frigates from particular requirements, which, as expected by the attaché, British industry would be able to attend. In the part of the report dedicated to the Brazilian Navy, the attaché wrote down: “It is expected that during the 70’s about 50% of the present fleet will be scrapped while 56 new vessels should be commissioned”, and described the beginning of the acquisitions planned by the Ten-Year Programme 1967-77, featuring orders for two minesweepers *Schutze* and the start of construction of six patrol boats in the Arsenal of Rio Navy, besides the rumours of modernization - with new electronics and possibly with missiles – of the aircraft carrier *Minas Gerais* and cruisers *Tamandaré* and *Barroso*. In the report body, the official reaffirmed the same: “there is the prospect of the UK selling a frigate design”. And he stated: “‘First of class’ construction would be in UK - thereafter the remainder would be made in Brazil, possibly with outside assistance”.⁶⁰

It also said that the decision on the frigates was delayed by the departure of President Costa e Silva, in August 1969 (due to a stroke). With the tenure of General Medici, there were signs that the new Minister of Navy, Admiral Adalberto Nunes de Barros had urgency to resolve the issue. However, he recognized that the choice was complex because it involved financial terms offered by the supplier nations, in this case the United Kingdom, the United States and Germany.⁶¹

For the British, the Navy was divided between two “schools of thought”, presented as follows: “The conservative one urging the selection of a well tried conventional design, and the more realistic on which wants to buy a modern design with a reasonably long expectation of useful life”.⁶² For the British officer, there were no significant political divisions in the Navy, summing up the internal tensions to possible conflicts of personalities.⁶³

60 FCO 7-1512.

61 In the list of finalists, there were *Bronstein*, *Leander*, *Köln*, *Mackenzie*, *Type 21* and *Yarrow Mark 8*. For a detailed description of the basic design of this frigate (Mark 1), see the probably paid article “A fragata *Yarrow*”, published in the journal *Revista Marítima Brasileira*, 2. Quarter 1970, pp.126-133.

62 In the diplomatic documents exchanged between Rio and London, starting in July 1970, referring to the final financial arrangements for the sale of the frigates, one of the arguments used to convince London’s financial authorities on the need for flexibility in negotiations was the presence of a supposed “British faction” in the Brazilian Navy, which prefer “to order from countries Whose industry is strongly established locally”. See “*Britnavatt, Rio de Janeiro to MOD*”, 31 July 1970 *Naval sales from United Kingdom*, FCO 7-1511.

63 In his assessment, the Brazilian naval force admittedly had superior preparation than other Latin American navies, but the obsolete floating material harmed their performance. The Navy was considered as the most efficient of the three Brazilian armed forces.

In the mid 1970's, at the final stage of financial terms adjustments, there were intense exchange of telegrams between the embassy and several British government departments (besides the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defense and the Export Credits Guarantee Department, and Treasury, which sent a representative to Rio) focusing on issues such as the increase of the maximum established for British exports to a particular country, the inclusion in the funding of costs of frigates to be built in Brazil, the inclusion of the funding of the Australian missile Ikara, and the total period of payment by Brazil. There were tripartite negotiations involving the ECGD, the Vosper's shipyard, and the Finance Ministry and the Navy in Brazil, represented by Admiral Alcantara (Director General of Naval Material). In correspondence, the embassy insisted that the business of frigates was the largest made by the UK in recent years and that Brazil had increasingly solid economic and financial conditions. According to Brazilian sources, it involved 98.65 million pounds, and the fourth English frigate delivery time would be 351 weeks from the date of January 8, 1971.⁶⁴

It is clear from the documentation that the idea to build two frigates in Brazil originated in Vosper's lack of interest in compromising its shipyard with the construction of six ships for just one client, as well as the impossibility of another English shipyard (Vickers, mainly, whose representative in Rio also participated in some of the talks) to take part in the order. Still, resurfaced allusions to different positions within the Navy. In a telegram from the beginning of August, Ambassador Hunt reports to London the results of the aforementioned negotiations, saying that because of the ministerial decision by the formula 4 + 2, there were two streams of opinion in the naval force: on the one hand, older admirals denoted "strong preference" for the construction of all six frigates in the UK; on the other, there was "a small group of opinion, basically composed of young officers, to promote local construction because of nationalist reasons." The letter concluded: "In the absence of any offer to build ships NOS 5 and 6 in the United Kingdom, the Navy resorted to local construction as the only solution which would allow one submission to the minister of finance in the near future".⁶⁵

Another important theme to be addressed in the same telegram was the need of the MOD to act more decisively towards the Vickers firm, for it to manifest as soon as possible about its interest in building the two frigates, so this issue could come to an end. It was clear at that time that the shipyard Vosper was only concerned with the four frigates under its responsibility, not

64 Fernando Moraes Baptista da Costa, "Fragatas classe *Niterói* – 25 anos depois", *Revista Marítima Brasileira*, I. Trimester 1997:111-137, p.112.

65 Telegram from Sir David Hunt to ECGD, 4 de agosto de 1970 em FCO 7-1511.

caring whether the other two would be made in Brazil or in the UK. The broader interests of the British government and the most immediate targets of the shipyards were quite clear.

Indeed, the British diplomacy had clear interest that the six ships were made in the UK. According to the ambassador, the Minister of the Navy's decision to make two ships in Rio de Janeiro represented "a less satisfactory position for us than the total supply, both military and tradewise."⁶⁶ However, once the decision to do two frigates in Rio was taken, there was an attempt to convince the financial experts in London to rethink the negotiations, describing the differences within the Brazilian government, divided, he said, between the clear choice of the Navy in favor of the UK, and the arguments of the Brazilian economic area, mainly the Finance Minister Delfim Netto, on whether to consider other suppliers.

The possibility of reopening the bidding constituted a strong argument from the Ambassador to convince the trade officials to give in on minor points. Vigorous supporter of diplomacy as the preferred vehicle of the commercial interests of his country, Sir David Hunt made clear his position on the importance of giving in to close the deal, "particularly when we consider that this would be a massive military engineering and technical consolidation of the trading bridgehead we have just recently established after a long time out of the market in these latter areas".⁶⁷ On the same day, the diplomat wrote to the Foreign Office:

The frigate deal is not only important in itself because of its size, but it is, in my view, the biggest single factor which will swing the decision whether we succeed in regaining our old position in Brazil. The Navy's decision to come to us for their re-equipment has tremendous economic and political consequences.⁶⁸

Referring to the good condition of the Anglo-Brazilian relations in the early 1970's, he would claim some time later: "All this was much to my taste because, for some years now, I had been convinced that economics were really more important than politics". And completed: "As I used to say to my staff: 'It is trade that pays for our salaries'".⁶⁹ Soon after, the British Treasury

66 *Idem* in FCO 7-1511.

67 *Idem*, in FCO 7-1511.

68 See telegram of 6 August FCO 7-1511. Twenty days later, celebrating the closing of the deal, Sir David Hunt wrote to FCO: "There should be a lot of naval sales to come, apart from the inevitable replacement business." See telegram of August 25, 1970 in *idem*.

69 See Sir David Hunt, *op. cit.*, p.311.

Department gave the green light for the funding, with payment deadline of eight years, “as long as the contract is signed immediately.” On the same day, the ambassador in Rio referred to the desire expressed by Admiral de Sousa Coelho, appointed head of the frigates acquisition commission in the UK. His desire was that before the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding, the MOD advised the Navy in their subsequent relations with Vosper shipyard service that would be paid by Brazil.⁷⁰

From there, the embassy became concerned in convincing London on the need to meet national expectations about the pomp and ceremony of signing the contract. “The Brazilian Navy attach considerable historical and emotional significance to this transaction which is the first major phase of the modernisation of their fleet”, said Hunt. And advised: “I support their attitude: the decision to by British was not an easy one for them in view of their close relationship with the United States”. Based on this, the Ambassador suggested “that formal signature take place in the most impressive of circumstances you can arrange”, referring to the possibility of a meeting with the Queen.⁷¹

London, however, doubted that the involvement of the royal family was practicable, given scheduling difficulties (it would be the Monarch vacations) and the level of the Brazilian authorities. In 21 August, the Ministry of Defense supported the position of his colleagues in the FCO. In the end, the contract was signed in 29 September at the Admiralty House in London, attended by the Minister Delfim Netto and the Minister of Defence, and the high command of the Navy from that country.

Arms and foreign policy

In his report sent shortly after to London, Ambassador Hunt evaluated in triumphal terms the size and prospects of the business. Alluding to the sale of submarines, a year earlier, he said: “These two transactions, in addition to contributing massively to our growing exports to Brazil, should also if properly handled establish a dominant British technical influence in the Brazilian Navy for the next twenty years”. Further, he described the historical trajectory of the Brazilian option for the British ships, citing the difficulties posed by the Americans to the most obvious option from Brazil to use their resources

70 See telegram of 6 August FCO 7-1511. Totalling over 100 million pounds, the payments would be made every six months, in sixteen installments, the equivalent of 80% of the total price, starting on 01/04/76 and ending on 10/01/83. See telegram of August 26, 1970 in FCO 7-1511.

71 Hunt to Foreign Office. October 5, 1970 in FCO 7-1511.

to get the Bronstein frigate. Also alluding to the success of the official visit of Queen Elizabeth to Brazil in November 1968, accompanied by two Leander frigates of the Royal Navy, followed next year by the visit of a British squadron, which included two submarines of the Oberon class, the same class as those that would be built for our navy.

According to the ambassador, later negotiations on the purchase of submarines of this class included the proposal of binding the signing of the contracts “to a promise of advantageous financing for frigates and components supplied from Britain including local cost credits for some Brazilian construction” by the office of the British Embassy business. The proposal would have been formalized with the Brazilian Ministry of Finance on March 18, 1969 “in a lettre handed to Admiral Adalberto Nunes, then Chief of the Brazilian Naval Staff”.⁷²

The balance sheet was marked by vainglorious assessment of the Ambassador about the prospects opened up by the purchase of the frigates by the Brazilian Navy. He said: “The decision to adopt British designs as standard for the largest units in the new Brazilian fleet involves a decisive switch from U.S. to Brazilian standards and equipment not only in the ships themselves but in armament, supporting services and training systems”, what could mean “a proliferation of British export opportunities in many fields outside those covered by the main contracts”. “No less important”, he continued, “will be the renewal of close contacts between the two navies”, that could already be seen in the process of building of the submarines. “If we handle these opportunities well the next generation of Brazilian naval officers should speak English with the accents of Southampton or Barrow just as, almost to a man, as the present Captains and Commanders speak it (when they speak it at all) with those of Brooklyn and Newport News”.⁷³

Such hopes were not limited to the naval sphere. For Sir David, “these contacts may assume increasing political importance” in the tables of Brazilian tendency towards a “Southern Hemisphere Strategy”, which would involve

72 See *idem*, p.5. It should be noted that this part of the negotiations is a new element, not mentioned until today in the official history of the Brazilian Navy. In the same document, Sir David Hunt mentions a story in which German option was impaired during the visit of German ships to Brazil. On the occasion, when asked by Brazilian officials of how he evaluated his frigate, the captain of the German navy would have referred disparagingly to Köln frigates. See *idem*, p. 7.

73 As usual in the British diplomatic documentation, the Ambassador refers ironically to the limitations of the country where he is headquartered. For him, Vosper's firm had to be commended for the patience with which negotiated with the Brazilian officials, what ensured success “for understanding that they should fulfill the formidable task of teaching Brazilians to build warships.”

collaboration between Brazil, Argentina and South Africa, possibly being later extended to other nations such as Australia. In the diplomat's view, although registering that such a strategy did not make much sense in terms of defense, it would interest the British, which could futurely provide frigates to these countries. The British representative concluded his enthusiastic assessment with special treatment recommendations to the Anglo-Brazilian relations. For those to work, it was necessary that his country imitated in some respects the American model of offering multiple advantages in military equipment negotiations.⁷⁴

In fact, in subsequent years, the relationship between the two Navies was seen as one of the crucial aspects of relations between the UK and Brazil. Thus, writing to the Ambassador of Her Majesty in Brazil, to thank his annual report for the year 1974, the head of the Latin American Department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Hugh Carless, remembered:

The continuing connection and cooperation between the navies of Britain and Brazil form an important strand in the Anglo-Brazilian relationship. We should therefore be glad to have from you in due course a summary of your views on the role and future of the Brazilian Navy and the possibilities open to us for maintaining and possibly improving the good relations that now exist in the naval sector.⁷⁵

Thus, the diplomatic documentation left no doubt about the importance of the frigates business for the British government, largely derived from the relevance of the naval defense industry in the economy of that country. As pointed out by the Dutch Sami Faltas, in his analysis of the European armaments market in the period between 1960 and 1980, unlike the United States and France, where prevails the aerospace industry, "in Britain and the Netherlands, and to a lesser degree in Italy and the F.R.G., the naval industry can be a more useful approach to the armaments industry as a whole. Its relative importance is larger in these countries and it is commercial and outward-looking".⁷⁶ For him, until 1960, only Britain could produce their own ships, an aspect that has changed significantly in the following decades, with the development of the shipbuilding industry in several European countries. In this context, the British competitiveness comparatively decreased. At the same time, there was a clear internationalization of markets since the late

74 On the Brazilian side, the negotiation ended with the award of the Order of Naval to Merit Ronald Dickinson on 26 November. He represented the British government in negotiations with the Brazilians.

75 See FCO 7-2761.

76 Op. cit., p. 18.

1960's.⁷⁷

But the most important to note is that the sale of warships is a State decision, in which politics and economics are closely linked. As noted by Fal-tas:

Foreign policy considerations and other political factors affect every single decision to import or export warships. Buyers and sellers can use arms sales negotiations to reinforce or challenge existing spheres of influence. Negotiations on arms sales are regularly linked to other types of negotia-tions on political military or economic relations.⁷⁸

The same author emphasizes that arms negotiations are a two way street:

The major arms-supplying states use arms transfers to increase their in-fluence on other states, both inside and outside their sphere of influence. For their part, arms importers use negotiations on arms deliveries either to enlist or enlarge the support of a major power for their policies, or to become less dependent on a single supplier. Buying one's military equip-ment from various suppliers makes one less susceptible to pressure from any single source.⁷⁹

In this effort, of course, these countries were not looking for nuclear submarines or large surface ships. Sales hereby referred relate primarily to smaller ships: conventional submarines, destroyers, frigates, corvettes, fast attack equipment, minesweepers, amphibious ships and coastal patrol, etc.⁸⁰ It is worth noting, however, that purchases of escort ships were still divided half and half between the material used and new material, even in the late 1970's.⁸¹ In the buyer's side, there were fewer countries able to acquire escort ships than smaller attack boats. In the supplier's side, in the early 1970's it begins to consolidate the trend of concentration of new warships industries in

77 *Idem*, p.30-31, p.52 and following pages.

78 *Idem*, p.58.

79 *Idem*, p.59.

80 The same author thus describes the market share of these types of vessels in the period of 1960-1980: 10% for conventional submarines; 28% to escort vessels; and 61% for fast boats. *Op. Cit.*, p.66.

81 "In the field of destroyers, frigates, and corvettes, we find little evidence of change in modes of procurement throughout our period (1960-1980)". And continued: "It is interesting to note that imports of used warships in the late seventies still accounted for more than half the overall demand for escort warships in the outside market, whereas domestic construction and new imports maintained a comparatively small share of the market". *Op. cit.*, p.67.

Western Europe, where the technology contained in these equipment would be originated. At the same time, exports are the mainstay of European military shipbuilding industry. According to the quoted author, “without warship exports, most naval industries could not continue at their present capacity, and several could not survive at all”.⁸² Another important trend in the supplier side in the period examined is the technology “transfer”, more precisely the manufacture of some ships of the same class in shipyards located in the purchasing countries:

the period under review saw an increase in the number of transfers of warship-building technology from one country to other, an increase in the number of countries exporting such know-how, and an increase in the number of importing countries. An international market for warship-building technology seems to be emerging”,- said Faltas referring to the 1970’s.⁸³

In the first three post-war decades, the number of countries that built the aforementioned types of ships has significantly increased (from 9 to 37). As a result, the share of European suppliers in this market of warships technology “transfer” would rise from 10 to 70 percent during this decade, especially West Germany, whose share rose from nothing to 40 percent, with production mainly submarines and fast attack vessels.⁸⁴ Some specifics mark the German naval industry: a long tradition in the construction of submarines and other vessels; independence from the state and, to a lesser extent, restrictions on the export of military equipment. Nevertheless, a key factor in the German success was the willingness of its shipbuilding industry to satisfy the desire of buying countries such as Argentina and Turkey, of manufacturing their submarines locally.⁸⁵ At the end of the decade, the importance of this type of business had grown to a point in which European marines changed their own equipment with an eye on its attractiveness to foreign buyer merchants.⁸⁶ Another topic to be discussed is the growing importance of the equipment in shipbuilding. Europe was also able to maintain hegemony

82 *Idem*, p.69.

83 *Idem*, p.73.

84 On the demander side, while in the 1950s countries such as Brazil did not receive virtually no technology “transfer”, in the late 1970’s, at least half of these businesses went to countries without advanced shipbuilding industry. Among them, there were Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, India, Ireland, Malaysia, Peru, Portugal, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea and Turkey. *Idem*, p.75-77 and note 14, p.95.

85 *Idem*, p.79.

86 It was the British case of Type 2400 submarine and Type 23 frigates. *Idem*, p.83 and footnote 29, p. 96

in this area, but in this case the difference between the weapons and other equipment installed on their ships and installed on boats sold to foreign navies produced scale problems in European shipbuilding production, which shall not be minutely detailed hereby.⁸⁷

The British were particularly willing to meet the demand for Navies such as the Brazilian for advanced technology frigates, for its own Navy had demanded such ships in previous years. Indeed, as NATO sought opposing to the Soviet Navy, it was especially relevant for the British shipbuilding industry to build escort ships.⁸⁸ Some authors attribute this characteristic to the post-war economic situation - which led this country to focus on more affordable alternatives - besides the naval strategy reasons: the prevailing belief, then, in the supremacy of air power, leading to emphasis on aircraft carriers, which needed escort vessels.⁸⁹ Anyways, most of the ships produced in British shipyards during this period were frigates. This was the context in which the British developed the aforementioned Leander frigates, made between 1961 and 1971, and considered a landmark to this type of ship.⁹⁰ Hence, the early interest from the British government in strengthening its naval industrial park by selling frigates to countries such as Brazil. The fact of belonging to NATO, of course, did not mean that Britain did not actively compete with its allies in the search for markets for their ships.⁹¹ Finally, Brazilian purchases may have contributed to the brief peak of British naval military exports in the early 1970's.

87 Faltas, op. cit., p.160.

88 As recalled by Eric Osborne, referring to the period of 1955-1967: "The naval power with the greatest output was Great Britain. In this period, destroyers and frigates smaller came to represent the majority of the British surface fleet". See *Destroyers: an illustrated history of their impact*, Santa Barbara / Denver / Oxford, ABC Clío, 2005, p.139.

89 To the author, "rightly or wrongly, the main objective of NATO doctrine appears to be to prevent a re-enactment of the Battle of the Atlantic, with Soviet submarines playing the part of German U-boats". See Sami Faltas, op. cit., p.28.

90 Leander constituted an evolution - in the design and the radar and air traffic control installations - from the commonly used British frigates, known as Type 12, developed in the 1950's. The design of the Type 12 frigates, "in its various incarnations provided the backbone of the Royal Navy from about 1965 to 1985". See Eric Grove, "Major surface combatants," in Robert Gardiner (. Org), *Navies in the nuclear age: warships since 1945*, London, Conway Maritime Press, 1993, p. 50-51. Osborne said some experts considered the frigates of this class among the best of its kind built in the era of missiles, op. cit., p. 252. Twenty-six ships were thrown overboard, fourteen more for export (six were made in the Netherlands and six in India). Measuring 372 feet, they carried two guns of 4.5 inches, four missiles SAM Seacat, a MK 20 Limbo, and a Wasp helicopter. Moving 2350 tons. Some units were still in use in smaller navies in the early twenty-first century.

91 See Faltas, op. cit., p.27.

In 1965, the so-called Geddes report, produced for the British government, recommended that the domestic shipbuilding industry should focus on a small number of specialized shipyards, three for surface ships. In subsequent years, the British Navy consolidated a trend to manufacture “leader” ships (*lead*, first in the class) in these shipyards and “follow-on” ships in a slightly larger number of firms. In the analysis of Faltas,

for the specialist warship builders – *Vickers, Vosper Thornycroft, Yarrow* and *Brooke Marine* – specialisation meant a virtually total dependence on the government for the provision of Royal Navy orders and for help in securing export contracts for warships.⁹²

He argued that, in the 1970’s, the militarization of some of the largest and most modern shipyards was clear, guaranteed by national and international orders.⁹³ Among the British companies in the early 1970’s, Vosper was the only one exclusively specialized in medium-sized vessels, and, on the list of experts, was the newest one.⁹⁴ Therefore, it was crucial for this firm the design of Amazon class frigates, developed in cooperation with the Ministry of Defense. This project would result in the MK-10 and MK-11 models, from which originated our Niterói class. The importance attached by both Vosper and by the British government to the sale of frigates to Brazil has to be seen in this broader context.

In May 1976, President Geisel made his state visit to the UK. At that time, the domestic opposition in UK came to an apex, including from the Labour Party itself, which was in power. It opposed to the approach of the British government with the Brazilian dictatorship. Without understanding the history of Anglo-Brazilian naval relations, it is difficult to understand a fundamental aspect of the relations between the two countries in the 1970’s. At the end of that decade, Brazilian military purchases in Britain were varied and substantial. In this context, the history of relations between Brazil and Europe during the military dictatorship had new meanings if considered an aspect so far largely ignored in the context of the relationship between democracy and dictatorship: military relations, especially in the case of Anglo-Brazilian

92 See chart 27 in op. cit, p.204: “Specialisation in British warship building”.

93 Between the mid-1950s and mid-1970s, the percentage of shipbuilding within the production from British shipyards went from 16% to 42%. See Faltas, cit., p. 205.

94 “And of course that, being the youngest, the Vosper had a big dispute with the other shipyards. The battleships were Vickers, Saldanha, which was our training ship, Vickers. The Argentine Navy also bought in Scotland. Then the Vosper did a really great effort - and perhaps some advantages have arisen therefrom to Brazil - to get contracts. “ Cited testimony of Fernando Costa to the author.

relations towards the naval arms rapprochement between the two countries in the 1970's.

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the case of the acquisition of Vosper frigates by the Brazilian Navy, which took place in early 1970. Besides being an illustrative case of foreign policy disputes, it demonstrates how economic interests can define the foreign policy of nations. The business of frigates is considered strategic for the relationship between Brazil and the United Kingdom.

KEYWORDS

Naval Relations; Brazil; United Kingdom; Vosper Frigates.

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