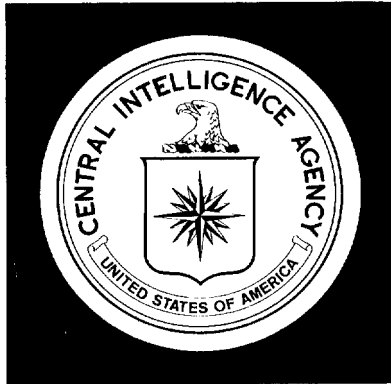


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Portugal and the Scheduled Elections

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19 March 1975

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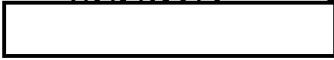
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25X1

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SUBJECT: Portugal and the Scheduled Elections

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Since March 11.....	1
The Electoral Field	5
The Popular Democratic Party	5
The Socialists	6
The Communists	6
Pressures for Delay	7
Possible Outcome	7
Summary	9

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

SUBJECT: Portugal and the Scheduled Elections

Since March 11....

1. The abortive rightist coup of March 11 has changed the shape of politics in Portugal. Radicals in the military leadership have, at least for the moment, significantly increased their influence as shown, for example, by the recent nationalization of banks and insurance companies. And rumors persist that moderate civilian members of the cabinet are about to be replaced by leftists. Meanwhile, the newly established Revolutionary Council, composed entirely of military officers, has become the supreme legislative and executive authority.

2. The closer Portugal gets to its scheduled elections, the more doubtful it becomes that they will be decisive for Portugal's future. It is clear that, regardless of their outcome, the Armed Forces Movement (AFM), now dominated by radical military officers, will continue to control the country's political institutions. And yet there remains enough

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commitment to the elections, and enough support for the moderates in Portugal that it would be premature to write the elections off as meaningless.

3. The strongest inducement for the Movement to support the elections is that it has repeatedly promised to hold them. To cancel now would only confirm what the Movement's detractors have said for months -- that a military dictatorship is being established in Portugal. The Communists have given lukewarm support to the concept of elections -- at first, because they did not dare challenge any part of the Movement's program, and now because it is not likely that the election results will alter the party's influence, which is exercised through the Movement.

4. Portugal's "democratic" parties, meanwhile, are still hanging on to the hope that a good showing on their part will encourage moderate elements in the military to press for a return to civilian rule. It will be difficult, however, for these parties to deliver their message to the electorate. Extreme left-wing political groups are expected to increase their

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harassment of campaign activity when the campaign begins on March 20. Widespread civic disorder would result in a declaration of martial law by the Movement and the postponement of the elections.

5. The abortive armed uprising on March 11 was so inept as to stimulate speculation that radicals instigated or manipulated it. We cannot entirely rule out this possibility, particularly in light of the fact that leading radicals in the AFM had lost heavily to moderates in votes among the various armed services councils before the uprising. The radical left may well have felt endangered. Nevertheless, it seems more likely that blunders and miscalculations by the right primarily explain the episode.

6. At a minimum, it seems clear that the plan for action was known or anticipated by the left which acted swiftly and effectively to put down the effort. Leftists are now making the most of their advantage to discredit and weaken the moderates and to consolidate radical dominance in the provisional government and the armed forces.

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7. The Portuguese Communist Party, in disciplined fashion, is giving effective cooperation to the radical moves -- consistent with its established strategy of making itself valuable to the AFM without getting out in front.

8. It is by no means certain, in these circumstances, that elections will be held and that, if they are, they will accurately reflect popular sentiment. Nonetheless, the AFM's commitment to holding elections, the fact that moderates still represent a large segment of the AFM, and the fundamental conservatism of much of the populace all suggest that the elections could still have some bearing on the country's future. On this assumption, the following paragraphs assess the positions of the main parties.

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The Electoral Field

9. Despite the coup attempt, the Movement has reaffirmed its intention to hold national elections for a constituent assembly on April 12. Fifteen parties had qualified but three -- one center-right party and two of the extreme left were banned this week.

10. The Social Democratic Center is the only center-right party left in the electoral field. Its program is only moderately conservative and, like all serious election contenders, it professes full support for the reformist program of the Armed Forces Movement. The Social Democrats have been the victims of severe left-wing harassment, however; they are not expected to have the money, the will, or the police protection necessary to conduct an effective campaign.

The Popular Democratic Party

11. The center-left Popular Democratic Party (PDP), considered by many to be a potentially strong vote-getter, has come under increased attack during recent weeks. Earlier this month, a PDP rally outside Lisbon set off a weekend of leftist violence which resulted in three deaths. The party's headquarters, like those of the two center-right parties, were attacked in the wake of the abortive rightist coup. The Popular Democrats are also vulnerable to charges that they depend heavily on conservative supporters, at home and abroad, for financial help.

12. The Popular Democrats so far have had the advantage of participating in the governing coalition. Rumors are circulating in Lisbon, however, that they will be replaced by the Communist-dominated Portuguese Democratic Movement in the cabinet reshuffle now under consideration.

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The Socialists

13. The Socialists are to the left of the Popular Democrats, but they have often worked together against the Communists within the governing coalition. The Socialists are still badly disorganized. Until recently they consistently rebuffed conciliatory advances by Communist leader Alvaro Cunhal, but shortly before the attempted coup in March the Socialists announced a willingness to cooperate with the Communists.

14. A partial alignment with the Communists may spare them some extremist harassment during the campaign. The guidelines for their cooperation are still under discussion, but it is already clear that the Socialists cannot afford to move too close to the Communists.

The Communists

15. Secretary General Cunhal and the Communists are undoubtedly encouraged by recent events which have reaffirmed radical supremacy in the Movement and improved leverage for the Communists in bargaining with the Socialists. The new pressures now being exerted on the moderate parties are also certain to raise the confidence of the Communists, who have never been optimistic about their prospects in a free popular vote.*

16. The Communists, meanwhile, are concerned that violence perpetrated by the extreme left may hurt them at the polls. This would account for the reported dispute over what emblem will be placed on the ballot next to each party. The Communists protest

* At last report, the Communists expected to garner 25 percent of the vote. This estimate combines the expected support for the Communist Party and its front group, the Portuguese Democratic Movement, with that of two other parties that are sympathetic to the Communist cause.

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the use of hammer and sickle variations by extremist radical Marxist-Leninist groups, which the Communists are afraid will confuse their supporters. The extremist groups are not serious contenders and probably will concentrate on disrupting the election process rather than trying to win votes.

Pressures for Delay

17. There is still a chance, despite repeated assurances that the elections will be held on April 12, that they will be put off either because of violence or technical problems -- real or contrived. Although the Communists would prefer a delay, they have never taken a position that would pit them openly against the Movement's program. The furthest the Communists have gone on this issue is to argue that the Portuguese people are not yet ready -- i.e., sophisticated enough -- for national elections.

18. The smaller militant parties to the left of the Communists have not worried about alienating the Movement. Some have already begun to campaign against the elections and more politically-inspired violence can be expected. If this should spread and develop into large-scale public disorder, the elections might be postponed.

Possible Outcome

19. Before the March 11 coup attempt, we expected that the moderate parties would win the bulk of the vote, given the generally conservative tradition of the Portuguese people. Polls, although of doubtful reliability, have consistently shown the moderate forces well in the lead over the Communists. Over half of those polled, however, either had no political preference or were unwilling to express it. In the largely conservative, densely populated north, there have been various reports that the people not only dislike the Communists, but have acted

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[REDACTED]

with force to keep them from campaigning in some villages. The party has been better received in urban areas and in the south -- where peasants working for large landholders are attracted by the promise of agrarian reform.

20. The basic anti-Communist outlook of the population will probably not be changed much by the March coup attempt, which appears to have had little impact in rural areas. If the election can be held without widespread intimidation, the moderates will probably do well, although the events since March 11 will cost them some support in urban areas.

21. The Communists have been searching for ways to gum up the electoral process and can be expected to use their influence with Movement leaders to enhance their electoral position, if not to rig the count altogether. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the Communists in the north have been advising conservatives to vote for the party of their choice, and then to cross out the Communist Party to show their disapproval. A ballot so marked would be considered spoiled and would not be counted.)

22. Responsibility for ensuring the integrity of the election returns lies with the National Electoral Commission, which is under the control of the Movement. The membership of the Commission has not been announced but the major parties have representatives on it. Nonetheless, radicals within the Movement may now be better able, in view of their recent gains, to manipulate the results of the elections.

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Summary

23. In sum, if the elections are held, they will at best be a semi-controlled process manipulated to ensure a result acceptable to the AFM. In practice, this will mean a heavy bias toward the left. It is still possible that the Socialists and other moderates can chalk up sufficient gains to encourage moderates in the Movement and give them leverage in future dealings with the radicals. And if the Communists do badly enough, similar effects might be felt. But there can be no guarantee in the present uncertain situation that the AFM radicals would allow events to unfold in this manner.

24. No matter how the elections turn out, political power will continue to be held by the AFM. The Movement almost certainly incorporates a variety of political leanings and ideological sympathies, but collectively it has shown itself clearly unwilling to entrust the future of the revolution to a free and uncontrolled vote.

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