

Spanish post-war intervention in Alto Peru, 1825

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Abstract

Less than two months after the factual termination of the South American Liberation War in modern Bolivia, an invasion of Brazilian forces in the eastern province Chiquitos occurred. The Spanish-controlled annexation of the province by the end of April 1825 for about seven weeks caused some diplomatic turbulences on the continent. Spain though, was not identified by the Independents as the initiator of the aggression.

Historical context

After more than one and a half decades of war, the Spaniards finally signed the general surrender for the whole continent on 11 December 1824 in southern Peruvian Ayacucho. Total independence though, was not achieved in Alto Peru, which would become Bolivia on 3 October. The United Liberation Army*, lead by Antonio José Sucre, therefore marched via Cusco to the border and intruded the last intact Spanish colony in South America. Pedro Antonio Olañeta, the military commander, intended to oppose, but he had to face massive public resistance and extended desertions among his troops. On 1 April 1825, he was injured in an encounter with another body of Spanish forces near Tumusla, not necessarily within the scope of a combat, and died the following day. Consequently, all colonial soldiers surrendered and independence was fully achieved. The occurrences described below, took place two months later, while Sucre reorganized administration, finances and military forces, and during Bolívar's journey to Alto Peru.

Introduction

The arrival of the message of the defeats in the battles of Junín and La Lava** should have

* The forces from Gran Colombia (Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador) and Peru.

** Despite the Spaniards knew the Patriots were approaching from the North — and had been victorious in Junín on 6 August 1824 — they afforded to lead a fratricidal war between the

been the wake-up call for the Spanish King Fernando VII and his government in Madrid. The authorities in Spain did have sufficient reason to be preoccupied before the opening of the final liberation campaign in southern Peru and Alto Peru with the escalation of severe political differences between the liberal Peruvian Viceroy José de la Serna e Hinojosa and the Commander-in-Chief of Alto Peru, Pedro Antonio Olañeta, who favoured an absolutistic king. Sending an expeditionary force could not have avoided the loss of Peru, but in Alto Peru, the Spanish resistance could have been prolonged significantly at the latest from March 1825.

After the loss of New Granada in 1819, Ferdinand had prepared an expedition to reconquer "his" colonies. On 1 January 1820 one of the commanders in this army corps, Rafael del Riego, insubordinated in the province of Seville and claimed republican structures for Spain. After three difficult months, he had sufficient support by the population to march into the capital and enforce the absolutistic king to accept participation in government affairs. The liberal period (*Trienio Liberal*) lasted until January 1823 and conceded the opportunity for the Patriots to rush from victory to victory in South America. Fernando had to occupy himself first with the resistance in his homeland, before he could prepare the next army to regain the lost overseas territories.

Viceroy in Peru and Olañeta in Alto Peru, which, after a couple of engagements, culminated in the battle of La Lava on 17 August.

Time is a relevant factor, especially in periods, when messages were transported by horses and sailing ships. From Peru to Spain a letter had to be either brought to the Brazilian Atlantic coast or to the Peruvian Pacific coast. In the first case the shipping to a Spanish harbour can be estimated with six weeks, after some three weeks on horseback from the Brazilian-Peruvian border. In the Pacific existed two possibilities: Sailing to the North, to Panama, would have been difficult because the Patriots controlled the Isthmus. Towards the South, Cape Horn had to be passed. In all cases, ten weeks of delay were the minimum. This implies, the reception in Madrid of the news of the above mentioned battles in August could not have taken place before the end of October.

Ferdinand had started his version of Restoration (of monarchy), but the resistance in Spain kept him from concentrating on the American colonies. He was informed that the Patriots had occupied Northern Peru and about the differences between his primary vassals in the last two remaining colonies, but he did not at least prepare another force to maintain his overseas possessions. This was also due to some pressure of other European countries, pursuing their proper interests. To allow the following Spanish actions to take place in time, they must have been initiated during the first third of February 1825 at the latest.

Preparation

TORRENTE¹ purports the knowledge of the decisive battle of Ayacucho on 9 December 1824 had arrived in Madrid^{*}; the pretended rumours of Olañeta's death are plain fiction. Rapidly the Spanish government selected an agent who, according to the author, left Madrid precipitately to support the remnants of the Spanish troops in Alto Peru. Mariano de la Torre y Vera received the order to support Olañeta with the promise of soldiers and armament to continue the Royalist resistance against the approaching Independents.

This cleric had distinguished himself by recruiting volunteers in Tupiza, in southern Bolivia, for the king, already in 1809. Subsequently, he fulfilled the task of the vicar-general

in Lima from 1812 to 1822. Among politicians and militaries de la Torre y Vega was supposed to be well reputed, according to the author.

Accompanied by a few selected officers, he travelled to Rio de Janeiro to meet the Emperor Pedro I of Brazil^{*}. The monarch, presently involved in a war against the provinces of Rio de la Plata^{**}, obviously saw an advantage, supporting the Spanish plea for troops to invade Alto Peru. De la Torre y Vega sent messages to Royalists, fled from Santa Cruz de la Sierra and the province of Chiquitos to Brazil, and he commissioned agitators^{***}, supplied with bribes, in order to incite the population behind the border of the Brazilian province of Matogrosso. From this background, "preoccupied" citizens had asked for military protection from the neighbours against the Independents.

Invasion

GARCÍA CAMBA² states, the Brazilian commander informed Sucre in Chuquisaca[†], the inhabitants of the province would prefer the annexation to the empire. Simón Bolívar had his secretary José Gabriel Pérez formulate in Arequipa, southern Peru, a message to Sucre on 29 May³ in which he condemned the invasion as unrightful and offending the inhabitants rights. That same day he also addressed to the vice-president of the Congress in Buenos Aires, Mariano Sarratea, in order to obtain detailed information⁴. The next day Bolívar reported the incident to his deputy in Bogotá, vice-president Francisco

¹ Mariano Torrente (1830): Historia de la Revolución Hispano-Americana. Imprenta de Moreno, Madrid. Tomo III, pp. 530-531.

^{*} Scarcely two months for the transport of an official message seems impossible, but the news could have spread earlier in other European countries and thus in Spain.

^{*} Brazil received officially its independence in 1822, but being governed by the son of the Portuguese king, the country still depended on the mother country.

^{**} The provinces of modern Argentina were organized in a federal mode.

^{***} For the approximately 1.500 km from Rio de Janeiro to the border to Alto Peru, a horseman needed about three weeks. The assistants of de la Torre y Vega must have crossed the distance speedy and achieved rapid success in order to accomplish the invasion of the Brazilian soldiers by the end of April.

² Andrés García Camba (1846): Memorias para las armas españolas en el Peru. Establecimiento Tipográfico de Benito Hortelano, Madrid. Tomo II, p. 289.

[†] The former domicile of the *Real Audiencia* would only be renamed on 11 August in Sucre, the capital of present-day Bolivia.

³ Archivo del Libertador. Document 10355.

⁴ Archivo del Libertador. Document 10354.

de Paula Santander⁵. In the adjacent footnote to this letter the *Archivo del Libertador* states, the Brazilian commander, Manuel José de Araújo y Silva, communicated on 26 April to the governor of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, José Videla, the annexation of the province Chiquitos on behalf of Pedro I after its surrender. Araújo threatened to attack Santa Cruz, in case he should be charged. Another letter from Araújo to Sucre, dated on the same day, obviously in an impertinent manner, is considered lost.

From Santa Cruz to Chuquisaca the post was transported within five days, to Santa Cruz from San José de Chiquitos, the capital of the province, at least one week can be estimated. A location of Araújo's letter is not mentioned. If he wrote immediately after crossing the border, this may explain the time elapsed, until Sucre responded on 11 May, spontaneously as he claims himself. In this communication, presented in the above mentioned footnote, Sucre denied the right of the governor Ramos rendering the province to the intruder:

«The abandon he [Ramos] has carried out with the province of Chiquitos to Y[our]. L[ordship]. [Araújo] is a treachery and a perfidiousness and Y. L. has committed an unjust aggression, occupying it; the province of Chiquitos, belonging to these territories [Alto Peru] and, set already under the Liberation Forces, it cannot receive other authorities than those assigned by their legal government.»

Sucre also questions Araújo's pretension to act instructed by the Brazilian government, but Araújo invaded like an «usurper» and without any declaration of war. This be «the most impertinent violation of human rights and the laws of the nations, and an insult which we will not take lying down». Desiring peace though, his government be not afraid of war — not after just having defeated 18.000 Spaniards. In case Araújo would not withdraw immediately, Sucre promised him to send the governor of Santa Cruz with troops. He also menaced Araújo with war and revenge*

⁵ Archivo del Libertador. Document 10379.

* William Miller mentions a plan not just to expel the Brazilians, but also to invade Brazil to support the local republicans. Bolívar though, did not approve the idea. The author errs with respect to the time: The event did not take place shortly after Ayacucho, but shortly after Tumusla. His indication, a company of Patriots contributed at least by its presence to the withdrawal of Araújo

as well as protesting in front of «Supreme Government» of Brazil.

Consequences

Via his secretary José Gabriel Pérez, Bolívar commissioned on 4 June⁶ the Government Council in Lima to deliberate over the case and investigate the British attitude. He also demanded to examine the role of the Holy Alliance* in Brazilian politics. In a second letter from the same day, the secretary ordered the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Lima to claim an explanation from the Brazilian government because of the aggression and the future relationship by means of a legate.⁷

Sucre informed Bolívar's secretary on 27 June from Chuquisaca⁸ about the «most desirable» end of the affair. He holds the governor of Matogrosso responsible for the intrusion, who apparently had withdrawn his troops. Expressing his hope for no future incidents of this kind, Sucre demonstrates his ignorance about de la Torre y Vega. That same night he communicated Bolívar that the message of the retreat of the Brazilians just arrived⁹. This implies that the return of the foreign soldiers had taken place by the mid of June.

Bolívar was unsuspecting too, as he expressed in the above mentioned letter to Santander:

«I figure that this official [Araújo] could have operated without consultation with his government and, if the Emperor has given an alike order, it may have been one of his plenty lunacies he commits during the day.»

cannot be discarded. This squad could have been gathered rapidly and would have been marching for at least eight days. [John MILLER (1829): *Memoirs of general Miller in the service of the republic of Peru*, II. Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown and Greene; London, pp. 300-301.]

⁶ Archivo del Libertador. Document 10407.

* Formed in 1815 by Austria, Russia and Prussia, the main target of the Holy Alliance consisted in countering republican ideas in favour of traditional aristocratic power structures. France joined in 1818 and was ordered in 1822 to end the Trieno Liberal in Spain (which happened in 1823).

⁷ Archivo del Libertador. Document 10409.

⁸ Antonio José Sucre (1981): *De mi propia mano*. Fundacion Biblioteca Ayacucho, Caracas. N. 150. (Without attachments.)

⁹ Simon Bolivar O'Leary (1879): *Memorias del general O'Leary*, t. I, Caracas, pp.273-274. Reprinted 1981.

If there was at all an influence from Europe, he states, it could have been only the Holy Alliance.

Sucre had ordered the governor of Santa Cruz, Videla, to ask the government of Matogrosso to withdraw its troops «temperately and decently». Therefore, GARCÍA CAMBA (op. cit.) does not believe in a noteworthy detriment for the population in the occupied region, which makes MILLER's (op. cit.) indication of about 200 Brazilians likely. According to this author, the intruders stole cattle and other mobile possessions from the inhabitants. It is most likely that they provided themselves on cost of the population and possibly counted with an extended sojourn. So they kept their "prey" when returning home. MILLER (op. cit.) reports that Pedro I disposed a recompensation for the civilians, which never arrived.

TORRENTE (op. cit.) adopts the pretexts of de

la Torre y Vega, but yonder probably simply learned on the way to Alto Peru about the end of the war in Tumusla. It is not unlikely that the soldiers in front of him, who heard about it during their invasion, informed him and the Emperor at the latest on their way back. The special envoy preferred, for obvious reasons, not to encounter Pedro I again. Probably via Paraguay, he travelled to Uruguay, where he caught a naval passage in Montevideo directly to Spain. TORRENTE (op. cit.) claims de la Torre y Vega was appointed auxiliary bishop of Charcas (i.e., Chuquisaca) on 9 August. At this moment de la Torre y Vega was at least close to Spain, if not already there. By the time the Brazilians withdrew, the death of Olañeta and the collapse of Spanish resistance in South America for good, were well-known in Madrid.

Bibliographical note

The [Archivo del Libertador](http://www.archivodellibertador.gob.ve) (www.archivodellibertador.gob.ve) in Caracas offers a search field bottom right to find a document by its number. Due to the situation in Venezuela the pages may be temporarily not accessible (power failure). Despite all errata within the texts, also within the references, its worth studying not just the digitized letters which were not published before.