

Liberation of Goa

The Liberation of Goa was a military action undertaken by the Government of India to liberate the territories of Diu, Daman and Goa from Portuguese rule on 17 -19 December 1961.

The "armed action" was code-named Operation Vijay by the Indian Armed Forces. It involved air, sea and land strikes for over 36 hours during which Goa was liberated from 450 years of Portuguese rule.

This article will elaborate on the Liberation of Goa within the context of the IAS Exam.

Background of the Liberation of Goa

The Portuguese enclaves in India were collectively known as Estado da India. Established in the 1400s they were the earliest colonial holding in India. It consisted of the districts of Goa, Daman and Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli. Upon India's independence from the British Empire in August 1947, Portugal still continued to hold on to its enclaves.

Resistance to Portuguese had taken concrete shape in the early 20th century pioneered by Tristão de Bragança Cunha, a French-educated Goan engineer who founded the Goa Congress Committee in Portuguese India in 1928.

The Goa Congress was also made affiliate to the Indian National Congress (Formed on December 28, 1885) and Cunha was selected as its first President.

Post the 1940s the Portuguese crackdown on the independence movement in Goa became heavy-handed with mass-arrests and police firings. There were many mass demonstration and non-violent protests during the period. Apart from the non-violent protests, armed groups such as the Azad Gomantak Dal and the United Front of Goans carried out violent attacks aimed at weakening Portuguese rule.

The government of India gave full logistic and financial support towards these movements

Diplomatic negotiations were initiated by the government of India to hand over the enclaves by peaceful means on 27 February 1950. But the Portuguese Prime Minister, António de Oliveira Salazar, asserted that Goa and the other enclaves were not colonies but part of metropolitan Portugal, hence making their transfer non-negotiable. A further argument from Salazar was that the republic of India did not exist at the time when Goa came under Portuguese rule.

Subsequent negotiations failed and India withdrew its diplomatic mission from Lisbon on June 11 1953.

The tension between Lisbon and New Delhi came to a head when on 15 August 1955, unarmed Indian activists trying to enter Goa were fired upon by Portuguese police resulting about 21-30 deaths and leading to outrage against continued Portuguese presence in the country. Following this incident, India shut its consul office in Goa on September 1955

Salazar appealed to the United Nations for a resolution of the conflict but it found considerable opposition from the Soviet Union. The US ambassador to India, John Kenneth Galbraith, requested the Indian government on several occasions to resolve the issue peacefully through mediation and consensus rather than armed conflict

It was the unprovoked Portuguese firing on a passenger Boat, Sabarmati, that finally convinced Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru (Born on November 14, 1889) in initiating military action. The firing resulted in the death of a passenger and several injuries

Eventually, on 10 December, nine days prior to the armed action, code-named Operation Vijay, Nehru stated to the press: "Continuance of Goa under Portuguese rule is an impossibility".

The Americans made it abundantly clear that should the matter be brought to the United Nations Security Council, no support from them would be forthcoming

The Liberation of Goa Begins

Hostilities would begin on Goa on early hours of 17th December 1961. In a combined Land, Sea and Air operation, the Portuguese garrison at Goa was overwhelmed by the superior numbers of the Indian Army.

By the evening of 18 December, most of Goa had been overrun by advancing Indian forces. As per the directions from Lisbon, Goa was to be held at all cost until reinforcements could be despatched from Portugal. If the situation became even more tenuous, then a scorched earth policy was to be enacted as a last-ditch resort to prevent Goa from falling into Indian forces.

Despite the orders from Prime Minister Salazar, Governor-General Manuel António Vassalo e Silva took stock of the numerical superiority of the Indian troops as well as the food and ammunition supplies available to his forces and took the decision to surrender. He knew no reinforcements would be coming as the Portuguese Navy had been blocked from crossing the Suez Canal by Egypt. The action by the Egyptians was in response to the Indian support given to Egypt during the Suez Crisis of 1956.

Silva ordered all Portuguese armed personnel under his command to surrender to the Indian forces. A ceremony was conducted on 19 December where the instrument of surrender was signed bringing to an end 451 years of Portuguese Rule in Goa. The war had lasted two days and resulted in the capture of 4,688 military personnel and cost 22 Indian and 30 Portuguese lives

The aftermath of the Liberation of Goa

When they received news of the fall of Goa, the Portuguese government formally severed all diplomatic links with India and refused to recognise the incorporation of the seized territories into the Indian Republic.

Lisbon went virtually into mourning, and Christmas celebrations were extremely muted. Cinemas and theatres shut down as tens of thousands of Portuguese marched in a silent parade from Lisbon's city hall to the cathedral, escorting the relics of St. Francis Xavier.

Following the end of Portuguese rule in 1961, Goa was placed under military administration headed by Kunhiraman Palat Candeth as Lieutenant Governor. On 8 June 1962, military rule was replaced by a civilian government when the Lieutenant Governor nominated an informal Consultative Council of 29 nominated members.

The move to liberate Goa was hailed by the Soviet Union and other members of the Non-Aligned Movement. It was inspired by anti-colonial movements in other Portuguese colonies such as Angola.

The United Nations and NATO were more negative as they considered the Indian action to be rash and unbecoming of a nation that had "preached non-violence to the world

Relations between India and Portugal thawed only in 1974, when, following an anti-colonial military coup d'état and the fall of the authoritarian rule in Lisbon, Goa was finally recognised as part of India, and steps were taken to re-establish diplomatic relations with India. On 31 December 1974, a treaty was signed between India and Portugal with the Portuguese recognising full sovereignty of India over Goa, Daman, Diu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli.

In 1992, Portuguese President Mário Soares became the first Portuguese head of state to visit Goa after its annexation by India, following Indian President Ramaswamy Venkataraman's visit to Portugal in 1990.

Goa Liberation Day is observed on December 19 every year in India in recognition of the role played by its armed forces during its liberation.

