

**A NEW NORMAL? ARMED FORCES AND POLITICS IN BRAZIL**

**UM NOVO NORMAL? FORÇAS ARMADAS E POLÍTICA NO BRASIL**

**¿UN NUEVO NORMAL? FUERZAS ARMADAS Y POLÍTICA EN BRASIL**



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## Introduction

When this dossier was proposed, there was an abundance of academic and journalistic analyses on the existing militarization in the government of the president at the time, Jair Bolsonaro, and his dialectical counterpart, the politicization of the barracks. Questions like “Will the armed forces support coup attempts by Bolsonaro?” or “How to return the military to the barracks?” loomed like swords over the delicate Brazilian democracy. The reelection of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva for a third presidential term reversed the issues at hand but kept the military at the center of the political agenda. How do you demilitarize politics, and how do you depoliticize the barracks?

The question that names this dossier – “*A New Normal?*” – is misleading. Although the issues derived from the existing situation over the past seven years are relevant, the military tutelage over Brazilian politics is a permanent historical aspect. In other words, the military presence in politics is not new or an exception that occurred only during the presidency of Jair Bolsonaro or the Military Dictatorship (1964-1985). As the extensive literature on the subject indicates, the military played a fundamental role in Brazilian political dynamics in the decades following the Paraguayan War (1864-1870), becoming central actors in the process that led to the Proclamation of the Republic (1889), even leading the first two presidencies in our history. Thus, to use the happy expressions of renowned analysts from these periods, they began to loom over civilian power like the sword of Damocles and became a true destabilizing power, being involved in basically all movements and political crises of the First Republic (1889-1930)<sup>3</sup>.

From the Vargas Era (1930-1945), the armed forces effectively became partners in power, constructing an image, consolidated in our first democratic experience initiated in 1945 – itself inaugurated from a military presidency – that they constituted a “moderating power” with legitimacy and authority to intervene in the political realm to solve problems and mediate conflicts that civilians were incapable of handling<sup>4</sup>. In this envisioned role, they continued to involve themselves continuously in major national issues, such as debates on oil monopoly, national development models, and foreign policy, until in 1964, they staged a coup that initiated a period of just over twenty years under authoritarian military rule.

<sup>3</sup> See Costa (1996) and Carvalho (1977).

<sup>4</sup> The main proponent of the military's view as a moderating power is Stepan (1975). However, this view is highly contested today, as it represents more of a military self-image, frequently claimed at the time and, curiously, also currently by far-right militants (through a mistaken interpretation of Article 142 of the Federal Constitution of 1988), rather than a proper institutional assumption or political dynamic explaining their actions. See the criticisms by Quartim de Moraes (1985) and Martins Filho (2019).

The long transition process, initiated in 1974 and carried out in a “slow, gradual, and secure” manner, ensured that military personnel involved in human rights violations were not punished due to a broad amnesty, and the preservation of institutional privileges and bureaucratic autonomy incompatible with full democracy<sup>5</sup>. Thus, even after stepping away from the presidency starting in 1985, the generals maintained a tutelage over spheres of politics, seemingly withdrawing to the barracks as the new regime solidified. The creation of the Ministry of Defense during Fernando Henrique Cardoso's government, as well as the construction of various documents, notably the National Defense Strategy, the National Defense Policy, and the White Book of Defense, promulgated during the PT<sup>6</sup> governments, seemed to indicate that relations between the military and politics were advancing towards democracy and institutional stability<sup>7</sup>, despite the lack of deeper reforms in the military structure.

However, the political, social, and economic crisis that began in 2013 caused seismic disturbances in the Brazilian political system, resulting in the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff and the emergence of the far-right, consolidated with the election of Jair Bolsonaro. In this sense, considering the terms proposed by Samuel Finer (2006), we can argue that the Brazilian crisis created a window of opportunity for the military's return to politics, given that the complete absence of reforms in the military structure implied that little would change regarding their historical inclination to participate in politics, resulting in their comeback as central actors in the contemporary scenario. Furthermore, without delving into futurology, it is possible to suggest that the military presence in Brazilian politics will persist, as evidenced by the events preceding and following January 8, 2023, a date that will be marked in Brazilian history by the infamous and violent attack on the core of the country's political power: the Planalto Palace, the Congress, and the Supreme Federal Court.

On one hand, military tutelage is a variable in the social, cultural, political, and economic formation of Brazil and its people. Still, it is essential to question whether the political intervention evident during the Bolsonaro government carries other characteristics that enable the identification of new forms of political interventionism. In this regard, the dossier presents three texts that contemplate the relationship between the armed forces and politics from a more extended historical perspective and two very contemporary texts dedicated to understanding

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<sup>5</sup> See Stepan (1985), Pereira (2010) and Teles e Safatle (2019).

<sup>6</sup>“PT” is the acronym for “*Partido dos Trabalhadores*”, which translates to the “Workers' Party”, a Brazilian center-left political party

<sup>7</sup> See Oliveira (2005) and Fuccille (2006)

militarization in the Bolsonaro government combined with two new components: the accumulation of political capital from engagement in humanitarian missions and simulations of punishments for disciplinary transgressions with the involuntary approval of the press.

In the first block, the first text is an unpublished article by Professor João Roberto Martins Filho, titled “*Military Dictatorship and Corruption: The Case of the Acquisition of the Vosper Frigates by Brazil*”. In this work, the author goes back to 1970 to provide details of the negotiations between authorities from Brazil and the United Kingdom for the purchase of six British frigates, four of which were to be built by the Vosper shipyard in Europe and two in Rio de Janeiro, all financed by British banks. In 1977, the company was nationalized, and from then on, authorities in the United Kingdom identified the possibility of fraud in these negotiations. Suppliers would have increased their prices to Vosper, and the difference between the actual price and the price stated in the invoices remained with the company in secret accounts while the Brazilian military government paid the full amount of the invoices. These allegations became public in the Brazilian press in 1978. In the article, Martins Filho chronologically follows the events, analyzing the official correspondence between different departments of the two countries, highlighting that the Brazilian Navy never contested the agreement, even after the allegations of fraud, contributing to dismantling the myth that there was no corruption during the military dictatorship.

The second article in the dossier proposes an even longer historical retrospective, focusing on the Imperial Brazil period. João Rafael Gualberto de Souza Morais, in the text “*What remains of the National Security Doctrine? DSN's legacy in Public Safety post-1988*”, surveys the history of Brazil, revealing the constant presence of the military in politics. In the text, the author identifies connections between the internal interests of the military institution (notably the Army) and the need for national modernization. The linkage between security and development reaches its peak in the National Security Doctrine, analyzed by the author as the normalization of the authoritarian ideology of the Army, perfectly adapted to the Cold War era, when the focus was on internal enemies. Much of this framework would have persisted after 1988, with repercussions in current security policies, which are more concerned “with defending the interests of the State than of citizenship, producing a democratic deficit in police institutions”.

The third text, titled “*The armed forces and politics: Reflections from influential theorists of Brazilian and western strategic thought in the 20th century*” and authored by Iago Gonçalves Ferreira, also takes a historical perspective by analyzing the Brazilian military

thought according to the views of three of its greatest exponents: Generals Pedro Aurélio de Góes, Golbery do Couto e Silva, and Carlos de Meira Mattos. The author shows how these military thinkers developed their conceptions of strategy and national security, with a perspective implying greater military involvement in Brazilian political life, including the claim of a moderating role. Additionally, a reflection seeks to relate these views to the contributions of the strategic thinking of two critical European theorists, Basil Henry Liddell Hart and Charles de Gaulle, emphasizing how they articulated their conceptions of strategy and politics.

The two texts that complete the dossier will also identify problems left by the “slow, gradual, and safe” transition under military control that occurred at the end of the dictatorship. However, both texts are primarily dedicated to understanding the political-military preamble that led to the expansion of militarization seen in the Bolsonaro government, in a path contrary to the advances that were being achieved in normative terms with the publication of national defense documents and in institutional terms with the creation of the Ministry of Defense.

Gilmara Gomes da Silva Sarmento, in the article “*From humanitarian missions to government: The armed forces and their political connections in Brazil*”, tackles the issue of humanitarian activities carried out by the military as a generator for military intervention. The first identified experience is the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), initiated in 2004 and commanded for 13 years by Brazilian military personnel. The mission allowed the military to “test abroad the expertise in policing Law and Order operations, accumulate learning and experience in techniques and control strategies, and expand their economic resources and international prestige, in short, power”. The second highlighted experience is the *Logístico-Humanitária - Operação Acolhida* Operation, the Temer government's response to Venezuelan migration in the state of Roraima in 2018. Relevant political actors participated in both missions in the Temer and Bolsonaro governments. As the present repeats the past, human rights violations committed in both actions faced a culture of tax impunity from the dictatorship and were barely addressed by the National Truth Commission. In summary, the article points out how armed forces members can instrumentalize humanitarian missions to expand their individual and collective political capital.

The article that concludes the dossier, “*Generals between Powers: A routine of "indiscipline," "crises", and "insubordination" (2007-2018)*”, written by Guilherme Alessandro Lemos da Silva Moreira, emphasizes internal politicization within the barracks rather than the militarization of politics. The text chooses to analyze four political-military actors, Generals Hamilton Mourão, Augusto Heleno, Girão Monteiro Filho, and Maynard Santa

Rosa, situating their statements in episodes of disagreements with the Workers' Party governments, notably controversies about the demarcation of the indigenous reserve Raposa Serra do Sol, the National Defense Strategy, and the National Human Rights Plan. As an analytical instrument, the text uses different reports broadcast during the highlighted period and discusses the adoption of notions, such as indiscipline or insubordination, external to military culture by these reports. Thus, not mastering internal rules within the military institution, military personnel simulated punishments through the press to disguise their political actions. In summary, the article suggests that disciplinary transgressions were beneficial for the transgressing individuals and the military institution in their process of political intervention.

We believe that the five texts assist in understanding the past and offer clues illuminating the future's construction in a moment of severe democratic crisis. Enjoy the reading.

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