

University of Oxford Centre for Brazilian Studies

Working Paper Series

Working Paper CBS-10-00 (H)

The Military and Politics in Brazil: 1964-2000

By

Celso Castro
(Fundação Getúlio Vargas)

ABSTRACT

During the Republican era in Brazil (1889 -) there were several military interventions in politics, leading to a 21-year period of direct rule by the military, between 1964 and 1985. The role of the military in power and their involvement in the repression lead to the deepening of important divergences inside the military institution. The legacy of this "military regime", particularly in respect to the participation of military personnel in political repression, is one of the most sensitive points of contemporary Brazilian historical memory. Although the military have accepted civilian rule over the last 15 years (the so called "New Republic"), the military have been socially more isolated, lost prestige and have yet to achieve a clearly defined social role. Nonetheless, they have tried to preserve for the armed forces the symbolic role of founders of the nation. The 21st century is about to begin and the historical legacy of this recurrent involvement in politics continues to affect the military institution.

RESUMO

O texto analisa a experiência das Forças Armadas durante o governo militar, entre 1964 e 1985, e debruça-se sobre a questão do papel tutelar dos militares na democracia brasileira. O autor desaconselha falar sobre 'os militares' como entidade homogênea; houve divisões internas ao longo da vida do regime já que a hierarquia não adotou ideais ou um projeto

homogêneos. Como tal, será necessário um entendimento dos diferendos internos para explicar a evolução do regime e as suas principais conjunturas. O autor divide o período de governo militar em três fases e demonstra que cada uma delas foi moldada por conflitos entre 'duros' e a facção mais liberal da instituição. Com a gradual consolidação do poder dos 'duros' findou a primeira fase do regime e deu-se início ao período de mais intensa repressão, os denominados 'anos de chumbo' entre 1968 e 1974. O início da terceira fase assinala a derrota dos duros pela ala liberal, o que eventualmente culmina no retorno à democracia.

Quanto à segunda questão, o autor considera exagerado o argumento que o Brasil é uma 'democracia tutela' limitada pelos poderes extraordinários retidas pela instituição militar. Concorda com os analistas que constatarem que, apesar destes poderes, a instituição tem vindo a perder um grau importante de influência. O autor oferece como exemplo a ausência de uma reação negativa perante o 'impeachment' de Collor de Melo, a perda de poder implícita na criação do Ministério de Defesa, e a constituição de uma comissão de inquérito sobre os desaparecidos. A seu ver, a decrescente influência política dos militares deve-se ao próprio funcionamento da democracia, ao fim da Guerra Fria, e à integração regional através do Mercosul. Por outro lado, devido à enorme importância histórica do apoio civil à intervenção militar e à percepção de uma falta de apoio político da sociedade civil ao regime militar, a memória histórica e o sentimento de 'derrota' dos protagonistas militares são também fatores importantes.

O autor modera, no entanto, a sua interpretação geralmente otimista. Um otimismo excessivo é desaconselhável quando se adota uma visão histórica de longo prazo do papel dos militares na política, e quando se considera os enormes problemas sociais que persistem no Brasil, bem como a existência de uma duradoura cultura política autoritária. Nada impede que haja uma quebra na subordinação militar no caso de crises económicas ou sociais mais profundas. Por outro lado, a retenção de poderes garantidos por leis e pela constituição, bem como a fragilidade da democracia brasileira são fatores que aconselham a prudência interpretativa. O autor conclui que o caminho a percorrer será ainda longo e que, tal como em todos os percursos longos, impera a incerteza. Não obstante, uma visão mais sofisticada do papel dos militares na política reduz o peso das marcas deixadas pela experiência de governo na instituição militar e na democracia brasileira.

THE MILITARY AND POLITICS IN BRAZIL (1964-2000)¹

Celso Castro²

Introduction

Brazil spent the 21 years between 1964 and 1985 under military rule. The military came into power when they overthrew the legally constituted government of João Goulart. By 1964, episodes of military intervention in Brazilian republican history were far from unusual. Actually, the republican regime in Brazil was inaugurated in 1889 through a coup executed by a group of military officers. This “capital sin” of the Brazilian republican regime happened again and again along the following decades, by means of several military interventions: in 1930, with the deposal of president Washington Luís; in 1945, with the deposal of Getúlio Vargas; in 1954, in the crisis that pushed Vargas to suicide; and in 1955, with general Lott’s “coup in defense of legality”. For some analysts, such interventions have been the manifestation of a “moderating power” exercised by the Armed Forces. According to this way of seeing military interventions, the Armed Forces, going above and beyond the roles of the three traditional branches of government, have exercised the power of intervening in the political scene when they judged necessary, representing the nation, in order to solve institutional crises and serious political deadlocks. However, there was an important pattern for these interventions: political power was invariably and rapidly returned to civilians.

1964 broke away from this pattern: a genuine *military regime* was established, during which the *military institution* remained in power for 21 years. In stating matters in these terms, I am not suggesting that the military ruled alone. Powerful civilian groups – political, business, religious and even popular – stimulated, supported and collaborated with

1 Paper presented at the international seminar “Political Armies”, Utrecht, 13 & 14 April 2000.

2 Ph.D. in Social Anthropology, Researcher at Fundação Getúlio Vargas/ CPDOC (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil). Email: celso@fgv.br This paper was written while a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Brazilian Studies, University of Oxford, January – March 2000.

successive military governments. However, we can consider the regime to be military because during the entire period the higher echelons of the Armed Forces were clearly the actors who kept political participation under strict control. When they were confronted by or became unsatisfied with even the limited political interplay that they allowed, the military governments acted several times in highly authoritarian manners (through the infamous “Institutional Acts”): shutting down Congress, amending the Constitution, disrespecting the Judicial branch, deposing elected congressmen, mayors and governors from their offices, forcibly retiring public servants, revoking political rights, applying censorship, and exerting the most extreme forms of political repression (such as exile, prison, torture and even the outright assassination of members of the opposition).

During all this period, the military institution was united against the civilian opposition in defense of their role in 1964 and the military regime as a whole. It is important to emphasize, however, that in no way was the military regime homogeneous and uniform, neither in the intensiveness of its repressive measures, nor in the composition and ideological orientation of the military officers in power. A good way of grasping how the military regime changed over time is to divide its 21-year life span into three phases – even though any such procedure is arbitrary and open to debate.

The first phase extends from the 1964 coup to the Institutional Act Number 5, of December, 1968, encompassing the entire term of General Castelo Branco and the beginning of General Costa e Silva’s term. In these years, officers with a more radical orientation (“hard-liners”) gradually gained power and pushed for the continuation of the military regime and for the adoption of more repressive measures, eventually outcompeting the politically more moderate officers (“soft-liners”). It does not mean that the moderate-oriented officers were politically “liberals”. They were authoritarians as well, but *in relation to* the hard-line orientation, they were less radicals and defended a shorter stay in power and a less profound intervention into Brazilian society.

The second phase covers what came to be known as the “anos de chumbo” (literally, “lead years”, meaning “heavy years”) of contemporary Brazilian history, from 1968 to 1974. This period includes the end of Costa e Silva’s term, the Military triumvirate (*Junta Militar*) that for three months ruled the country after his impeachment (due to health reasons) and the

whole of General Médici's term. Repression was at its most aggressive. "Hard-liners" exercised power in a virtually uncontested fashion.

Finally, the third phase was opened by the inauguration of General Ernesto Geisel, who rose to power with a project to liberalize the regime, in a "slow, gradual and safe" ("lenta, gradual e segura") manner, to quote his own words. Although Geisel employed authoritarian measures against the opposition many times, he controlled "hard-liners" inside the Armed Forces and was the only president who managed to choose his own successor – João Figueiredo, who concluded the political transition and transferred power to a civilian president, in 1985.

In this text I intend to highlight how the military lived through this experience of political power during these distinct phases. My basic sources will be the data obtained through a research project conducted between 1992 and 1995 at the Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil (CPDOC), of the Fundação Getúlio Vargas, including 200 hours of taped interviews with military officers.³ Among the interviewees were Ex-President Geisel and an important group of officers who in 1964 were in the middle echelons and supported the coup. During the 1968-1974 phase, in which the highest degree of authoritarianism occurred, several officers from this group held important posts precisely in the new intelligence and repression agencies of the Armed Forces. When military rule came to an end, in 1985, most of these officers had already retired, after having occupied highly important posts and key positions in military institutions. When we started the project, several books with the depositions and memoirs of the "generals of 1964" were already available. However, the generations of military officers who ascended to the top of their careers *during* the military regime had remained silent until then about this long experience in exercising political power.

Obviously, as our project explored military *memory*, the views given by the interviewees cannot be considered as expressions of the "historical truth", but as subjective and retrospective interpretations of their experiences. However, our research helped reveal how the military did not hold a homogeneous set of ideals, nor a shared political project,

³ This project was conducted by Maria Celina D'Araujo, Gláucio Soares and myself, resulting so far in five published books: Soares and D'Araujo (1994); D'Araujo, Soares and Castro (1994a, 1994b); Soares, D'Araujo and Castro (1995); D'Araujo and Castro (1997).

between 1964 and 1985. We found also that there is not a “military memory” about the period, but *different military memories* that compete with each other over several aspects. The results of this research project therefore proved again the problems that arise when one speaks of the Armed Forces or “the military” in general, without taking into account the differences of political opinion and thought which co-exist in military institutions. These differences must be carefully considered, especially if we want to understand the critical junctures of the military regime.

In the text that follows, I adopted the above-mentioned division of the military regime into three “phases”, and examine the role of the military during the “New Republic”.

From the 1964 Coup to the Institutional Act number 5

The military officers who executed the 1964 coup justified their acts by stating that their objective was to restore discipline and hierarchy in the Armed Forces, and to destroy the “communist threat” that they thought was hanging over Brazil. A fundamental concept among those who participated in the coup was that the major threat to the capitalist order and to the security of the nation did not come from abroad, by means of a traditional war carried out by a foreign army, but from within, impelled by the actions of Brazilian nationals who behaved as “internal enemies”. These “internal enemies” would achieve their goal – the installation of a communist regime – through a revolution, “subverting” the existing order. This line of thought was reinforced by several international examples, such as the revolutionary wars occurring in Asia, Africa and, above all, in Cuba, where Fidel Castro’s guerrilla effort had won and taken over political power. This worldview was mostly based on the so-called “National Security Doctrine” and on the theories of “anti-subversive” or “anti-guerrilla” warfare, all of which had been taught in the high-level training schools of the Brazilian Armed Forces since the mid-1950s.

The military who moved into power in 1964 believed that the democratic regime installed in Brazil since the end of World War II was incapable of neutralizing the “communist threat”. However, these officers always emphasize – and are certainly warranted

to do so – that the 1964 coup was not the result of a plan that they made up on their own, because important segments of civil society, intimidated by the possibility of leftist currents gaining power in Brazil, also participated in the coup or supported it. There is a consensus about this point among the officers interviewed by us. The participation of civil society in the 1964 coup – or “the Revolution”, as the officers like to refer to the military regime – is nowadays frequently forgotten. According to general Leônidas Pires Gonçalves, in a 1992 interview:

“The revolution came about as a result of the pressures exerted by civil society. We cannot forget this. I have the habit of repeating this and, if you have not heard it from somebody else, you will hear it from me: I believe that the Armed Forces until this day have reasons to be resentful in relation to Brazilian society. This is so because Brazilian society impelled us, it was one of the forces responsible for the 1964 Revolution, and nowadays the media constantly points the finger at us and calls us torturers, killers [...]”

This excerpt illustrates well the *resentment* of these military officers, motivated by the “historical conniving” (“safadeza histórica” -- these are also words of general Leônidas) that occurred after the military regime was over. The long period of military rule ended up credited solely to the initiative of the Armed Forces, and many people have forgotten that important civilian groups had agreed with and stimulated military intervention. There is a recurrent argument among our interviewees that there were ardent civilian appeals for military intervention, and this argument works as a tool that provides legitimacy to the coup.

However, since the very beginning there was an all-important division among the military involved in the 1964 coup. On one side were those who called for more radical measures against “subversion” and supported a longer military tenure in power. On the other, there were the officers who followed the historical tradition of the “moderating” interventions and defended a swift return to “normal” political and judicial conditions (i.e., after a “corrective intervention”). This included giving political power back to civilians after a short span of time. The first ones, more radical, came to be known as the “hard line”, and gravitated around the Minister of the Army, General Costa e Silva. The other, more moderate,

gathered around President Castelo Branco and included officers who held important positions in government, such as Ernesto Geisel, Osvaldo Cordeiro de Farias, and Golbery do Couto e Silva. This has to be seen as a division between two different institutional and political orientations inside an encompassing authoritarian common view, and not as two organized and homogenous “groups”.

In the early days of his government, Castelo Branco gave out clear indications that he was willing to honour – at least in part – his promises of returning Brazil to political “normality”. The exceptional powers given to him by the 1964 Institutional Act, such as the nullification of the terms of elected congressmen, or the revoking of political rights, or the firing of civil servants, should last only a few months. Castelo Branco accepted the time limitation placed on his exceptional powers, while “hard-line” officers defended their expansion. Furthermore, Castelo Branco allowed scheduled elections (on October 3, 1965) for the selection of the governors of eleven Brazilian states to happen, despite the opposition of the “hard line”.

In these elections, opposition candidates won in the most important states, particularly in Guanabara, with Negrão de Lima, and Minas Gerais, with Israel Pinheiro. Considering these victories of the opposition to be a threat to the military government, “hard-line” officers increased their pressure on President Castelo Branco in order to make the military regime even more restrictive. Costa e Silva, the Minister of the Army, became the spokesman of the more radical officers and even criticized the elections in public. On October 6, 1965, younger officers threatened to make the Army barracks in Rio de Janeiro (Vila Militar) rise in arms, in a protest against the election results and against the government that they deemed as not being “revolutionary enough”. Costa e Silva spoke to them and guaranteed that “we shall not turn back to the past”. He asked them not to be concerned with the fact that a few “worthless men” (“homúnculos”) would come to occupy “the posts that they have just gained in an *consented* election, a purposefully *consented* election”, he emphasized.

It is interesting to note that in this same speech Costa e Silva was strongly applauded when he stated that, after a year, the “Revolution” was having problems only

“in containing those who are excessively revolutionary. (*Applause*) We do not fear counter-revolutions... (*Applause*) What concerns us is actually the enthusiasm and

eagerness of this younger generation that yearns for more revolution. But I guarantee you, my friends, I guarantee you, my young officers, that we know where we stand. Our current commanders, as I said yesterday and repeat today, are as revolutionary as the young revolutionary officers. (*Applause*) I guarantee you that we will not return to the past. (*Ovation*)”.

To better understand the differences between “hard-line” and “soft-line” officers, it is also important to pay attention to their *generational* differences. In this case, I am using *generation* not in its biological sense, or as a simple indicator of difference in ages, but as a *cultural* fact, related to basic experiences that shape the social and professional identities of individuals. In general, the more moderate officers were older and held higher posts in the military hierarchy, when compared to the radical officers, usually young, as can be inferred from Costa e Silva’s speech cited above. The younger officers had started their careers after the traumatic communist revolt of 1935 (which involved Army personnel and is considered until today by the military as a prime example of “treachery”) and went through a long process of indoctrination during the Cold War years. They learned that the role that the Armed Forces of peripheral nations had to play was the containment of “internal enemies”. For them the “1964 revolution” should not be a short intervention to correct Brazilian polity, but a radical reform of the country, a “clean-up” of the country’s institutions and political life. Some even believed in the utopia of the elimination of all politics. In this sense, the pressure of “hard-liners” inside the Armed Forces intended to cause radical changes in the political process, because these officers were convinced that the true “enemies” were at home and were still very strong.

The reaction of “hard-liners” to the 1965 elections led to the issuing of a new Institutional Act, - number 2. This new act established indirect elections for the post of president, reopened the process of nullification of the terms of lawmakers and elected officials, and again allowed the suspension of political rights of any citizen. Furthermore, existing political parties were dissolved. Substituting the multi-party system formed in 1946, Brazilian politics now was molded into a two-party system. The Aliança Renovadora Nacional (ARENA) supported government; the Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (MDB)

was the opposition. Thus, the return to “democratic normality”, as promised by Castelo Branco, became a vanishing reality.

The process that led to the issuing of the Institutional Act Number 2 was a victory for the “hard-liners” and expanded their influence in the military regime. One of the consequences of this was the successful candidacy of Costa e Silva to the post of President of the Republic, even if he was not the choice that Castelo Branco and his supporting officers would have made. Costa e Silva was inaugurated on March 15, 1967, after being indirectly elected by Congress.

The years of 1967 and 1968 were marked by intensive political radicalization. Government, on its side, increased its repressive apparatus. Military leaders considered that the police was not sufficiently prepared to deal with “subversion”. Thus, the Armed Forces started to take over functions formerly exercised by the police. Intelligence and repression agencies were created in the Army (Centro de Informações do Exército, CIE) and in the Air Force (Centro de Informações e Segurança da Aeronáutica, CISA); the Navy reorganized its Centro de Informações da Marinha (CENIMAR) so it could function as a repressive force.

As the expression of opposing points of view inside the political system became quite limited, effective opposition to the regime started to shift over to several social movements. There was an attempt to revive the workers’ movement, with serious strikes in the industrial cities of Contagem and Osasco. These were the first strikes recorded since the beginning of the military regime. A “progressive” group of Catholic clergy also formed an increasingly visible opposition group. This part of the clergy, although a minority inside the Catholic Church, used non-violent demonstrations and exposed the lack of political liberty in Brazil. The strongest strain of opposition came, however, from student movements. Even operating illegally, students organized several street demonstrations and rallies, protesting against the military regime.

Government reacted by increasing repression. This process reached a climax with the issuing of the Institutional Act number 5, dated Friday, the 13th (!) of December 1968. This was the harshest institutional act of the entire military regime, as it gave almost absolute powers to the president of the Republic.

From the Institutional Act number 5 to Geisel's inauguration: the “anos de chumbo”

The Institutional Act number 5 was a hallmark in the process of increasing authoritarianism of the military regime, on the one side, and in the radicalization of the opposition, on the other. After it was issued, several leftist groups engaged in armed struggle against the dictatorship, mainly through urban guerrilla actions. Repression was violent and after a little over two years all urban guerrilla groups had been destroyed or disbanded. One last guerrilla attempt was made later in a rural area, in the Araguaia River region, being defeated in early 1974. The harshest phase of the military regime, initiated during the Costa e Silva government lasted throughout the entire tenure of his successor, General Emílio Garrastazu Médici.

The military think that, despite having won the war against the organizations of the revolutionary left, they lost the struggle over the historical memory about this struggle. Many officers complain precisely about the fact that a distinct, military version generated by the Armed Forces about the repression of guerrilla warfare – a version that could become socially legitimate - was never publicized. In the matter of fighting the guerrilla actions, the history of the vanquished therefore prevailed over that of the winners.

In our interviews we find implicit and explicit references to *internal* problems experienced by Brazilian military institutions during this phase of repression, and *because of* the dynamics of this repression. In these problems we can envision the reasons why no official version of this experience in repression ever emerged from the Armed Forces, not even 25 years after the defeat of the leftist organizations engaged in armed struggle. We have seen that there is a consensus among the military in the evaluation of the political situation that preceded the 1964 coup, and about the reasons that lead to military intervention. On the issue of military repression of armed political opponents, however, opinions are divided. This is seen in the ways that some interviewees linked to intelligence and repression agencies refer to their colleagues who criticized or disagreed about the methods adopted in political repression. General Leônidas calls them “theorizers”, General Coelho Neto says that they are “cowards in disguise”, and Colonel Cyro Etchegoyen calls them no less than “traitors”. These

acrimonious expressions indicate that the degree of internal conflict over the matter was strong.

In the books that we published based on these interviews, there are depositions that indicate the existence of internal tensions created by the operation of the new repressive agencies established inside the Armed Forces. The Armed Forces had a well-established and traditional command structure, based on clearly defined geographical units, but this structure was often challenged by the interference of the new “operational” network of intelligence, which recognized no geographical boundaries and was controlled directly by the offices of each military minister. Generals Otávio Costa and Moraes Rego, for example, had problems with Army intelligence officers in the military regions under their command. These officers tried to execute operations involving the military structure commanded by the two generals without informing them.

The operational network of intelligence had a strong degree of autonomy in the planning and execution of its actions. Besides this, the co-ordination between the new repressive agencies themselves was very weak. Officers directly engaged in repression gained a *de facto* power that was not in proportion with their hierarchical rankings. In some cases, such as in the Air Force, officers not engaged in political repression actually came to feel threatened by their own colleagues engaged in the intelligence sector of the corporation

Despite these differences, the need to preserve the *esprit de corps* of the Armed Forces in face of civil society prevailed. Therefore, the existence of such internal tensions was not acknowledged. They became more visible only when the main political issue became the “opening” of the military regime, in General Geisel’s term as president.

The “Opening” of the Military Regime and the Difficult Return to the Barracks

The third and last phase of the military regime starts with the inauguration of President Ernesto Geisel in March 1974. Its basic traits were a lower intensity of repression and an increased hostility in the conflicts between more radical and more moderate sectors within the Armed Forces. Geisel’s presidency brought back into power several officers that,

immediately after 1964, had been part of the so-called “Castelista group” of the Armed Forces. Geisel himself had been Castelo Branco’s chief military aide (*Chefe da Casa Militar*). However, the fact that he became president should not be taken to mean that the more moderate officers composed a majority in the military institution, or even the strongest group inside it. On the contrary, the “hard line” was at the peak of its power and was suspicious of the choice that made Geisel the successor of Médici. This was so despite the fact that Geisel had developed a good image as an administrator during his term as president of Petrobras (the state oil monopoly) during the Médici government. Ernesto Geisel had the all important support of his brother, General Orlando Geisel, Médici’s Minister of the Army, who held a good reputation among the ranks of “hard-liners” as the strong man behind the repression of subversive organizations. The two brothers had taken separate political paths years earlier, but Orlando Geisel negotiated with President Médici and vouched in favour of the selection of his brother as future president.

Geisel started out his term with a clearly defined project of political liberalization, although he stated that it would be “slow, gradual and safe”, and that it would have to live side by side with authoritarian instruments, such as the powers given to the president by the Institutional Act number 5. Geisel’s project was more of *liberalization* than of *democratization*. He wanted to take the military institution out of the centre of political power, but he wanted to control the rhythm and define the limits of this political transition. He also planned to restore the pre-eminence and the control of the traditional chains of military command, breaking up the autonomy of the military agencies dedicated to political repression. However, as this political *project* turned into a political *process*, Geisel found himself facing the opposition both of the MDB, that wished to hasten the pace and expand the range of political liberalization, and of the more radical military sectors, who were opposed to any political liberalization. Therefore, Geisel had to fight simultaneously on two fronts, as he explained in his interview to us published in 1997:

“There were people in the Army, in the Armed Forces as a whole, who had this obsession with conspiracy, with communism, with the left. And the situation became more complex because the opposition, particularly in Congress, instead of understanding what I was doing, my attempts to gradually solve this problem, once in a while took aggressive and hostile stands. Every time that the opposition took radical

stances and attacked the Armed Forces, by means of speeches, manifestos, public statements, obviously there was a reaction on the other side, and this created great difficulties for me. (p. 377) [...] I was pressed from both sides; by the opposition and by the military sector, unsatisfied with the criticism and with the expressions used by the opposition. [...] I spent my entire term in the middle of this game. This is what caused the delay of the final solution, the extinction of the Institutional Act number 5. While the opposition was so aggressive, it was not possible to liberalize the regime and satisfy it. I could not turn my back on the military, who, despite the co-operation of the ARENA, were the main supporters of the revolutionary government. (p. 391) [...] The acts of the opposition exacerbated the “hard-liners”, who, to a certain degree, were on the side of my government, but who were the other sector that I needed to control. In other words, I had to fight in two fronts: against the communists and against those who fought the communists. That is the truth, indeed. (p. 420)”

The process of political liberalization led to unsolvable disagreements between the military who were in favour of it and the “hard-liners” who opposed it. This was one of the critical moments of contemporary Brazilian history. Two episodes decided the conflict in favour of Geisel. The first came about after the death by torture (the official version called it suicide) of Manuel Fiel Filho, a worker, in a military unit of the city of São Paulo, in January of 1976. Less than three months before that, a ranking journalist, Vladimir Herzog, had been “suicided” in the same unit, and Geisel warned the four-star General Ednardo D’Ávila Melo, commander of the II Army, that he would not tolerate any more deaths under the same circumstances. With Fiel Filho’s death, Geisel reacted immediately, shocking many officers: he summarily relieved general Ednardo of his command.

This was intended to be a clear sign that the commanders would now be responsible for all repressive actions that occurred in areas and units under their command, even if such actions were executed without their knowledge or consent. In this manner, the traditional hierarchical chain of command was reinstated above the “operational” network of intelligence and repression. In making this decision, Geisel was not concerned mainly with human rights violations. In fact, in his interview, Geisel made it clear (and shocked many people) that he considered torture to be necessary under certain conditions, as in the more

critical confrontations with the leftists engaged in armed struggle. Geisel was really concerned with controlling the military agencies dedicated to intelligence and repression, in order to restore the institutional principles that he thought were jeopardized by the autonomy attained by these agencies.

Geisel's second crucial moment in his confrontation with the military radicals came about when the "hard-liners" started to mention the name of the Minister of the Army, General Sílvio Frota, as a candidate to succeed Geisel in the presidency. Frota had endorsed the standard critiques of "hard-liners" to Geisel's liberalization measures and had thus entered into a collision course with the president. In October of 1977 Geisel fired Frota from his post as Minister, in a surprising but carefully planned manoeuvre devised to neutralize possible reactions in favour of Frota.

It is interesting to notice that this moment is structurally similar to the crisis experienced during the term of Castelo Branco, the first in the military cycle. A Minister of the Army, the government's "strong man", again rose to the position of spokesman of the unrest among the more radical officers who felt uneasy with a politically more moderate president. Geisel, however, did what Castelo Branco could not do, or did not wish to do: he fired his Minister of the Army, Sílvio Frota. Besides the differences between the personal styles of Castelo Branco and Geisel, we must keep in mind that the upper echelons of the Armed Forces in 1977 were significantly different from those of 1965. Castelo Branco had adopted a law by which military promotions created much shorter and strictly limited terms for generals to remain on active duty. Because of this, ten years later all generals from 1964 had passed to the reserves and the Armed Forces no longer had those long-lasting generals who created literal entourages of officers along their many years in command posts. Although the two junctures pitted the presidents against their respective Ministers of the Army, the hierarchical distance between President Geisel and Minister Frota was much larger than the distance between president Castelo Branco and his minister Costa e Silva.⁴

⁴ Actually, Castelo Branco and Costa e Silva graduated from the Army academy in the same year, and Costa e Silva pulled rank on the president.

Once Frota had been fired, Geisel was free to pursue his goal of liberalizing the regime. He was also free enough to become the first and only military president to select his preferred successor, general João Figueiredo, sworn into office in March 1979. Before leaving government, Geisel had already revoked the Institutional Act Number 5. One of Figueiredo's first measures was to send an amnesty bill to Congress. It became law before 1979 was over. Proceeding with the politics of liberalization, in 1982 Figueiredo presided over elections for state governors in all Brazilian states. These elections were clean and based on direct ballots.

However, Figueiredo's attitude in relation to the so-called "Riocentro Case" created a lasting smear in the image of the Armed Forces. In 1981, an Army captain was seriously injured and an Army sergeant died when a bomb that they carried exploded accidentally inside the car that they were using. They were wearing civilian clothing and had just arrived at the scene of a large musical concert being held on account of Labour Day. This concert was happening at a convention centre called Riocentro, in the city of Rio de Janeiro. The episode made it clear that there still were groups of military officers linked to the repressive and intelligence military units who wanted to destabilize the process of political liberalization. The military investigation that followed defended the ridiculous version that the captain and the sergeant had been the *victims* of a terrorist act, denying that they themselves were the terrorists. Figueiredo thought he could protect the military institution by accepting the result of this investigation and decided not to punish any military personnel, not even the surviving captain-terrorist. Only in 1999 was this captain officially deemed to be a suspect, and the Riocentro case was reopened.

The Riocentro episode demoralized Figueiredo's government and earned a deep aversion among almost all circles of Brazilian society. It also marked the end of the deeds of military or para-military groups against political liberalization. It was also decisive in stamping a negative public image on the entire experience of military rule. All military officers that we interviewed agree that, once the military cycle was over, they lacked credibility to engage in any sort of political interplay with any actors. They also felt that their biographies were in many cases reduced to a *stigma*, the stigma of having participated in the military regime. The accusations related to the practice of torture and to the issue of persons missing since the phase of more intensive repression remain at the heart of the criticism that

they continue to receive. The recovery of the public image and of the professional identity of the Armed Forces became precisely one of the major problems that all military commanders had to face during the New Republic.

Therefore, the legacy of the military regime for the military corporation and for the new generations of officers has been very heavy. This refers both to the external image of the military institution and to the internal strife caused by the 21-year experience of direct participation in political power. In 1992, general Moraes Rego summarized this heavy legacy in his interview:

“Nobody can help us recover the losses – and no one even acknowledges them – that we experienced - friendships that were torn apart, camaraderie that was lost. This revolution cost us much, very much indeed”.

The military under civilian rule – the “New Republic” (1985-)

The transition to civilian rule in 1985 occurred, however, still under norms that pertained to that authoritarian period. The first civilian president, Tancredo Neves, was elected indirectly by an Electoral College, despite the huge civic and popular mobilization in favour of the popular and direct vote (the campaign for the *Diretas Já*). Tancredo, however, fell ill before his inauguration and was substituted by the elected vice-president, José Sarney, a conservative politician who had always supported the military regime. A few weeks later, Tancredo died.

What happened with the military after they retired from the strongholds of political power? Did they return to the barracks and just watch as their influence shrunk? Or did they, conversely, remain politically powerful and behave as a sort of “tutor” of Brazilian democracy? There is a clear lack of consensus among the analysts of this matter. Therefore, it is a question still open to debate.

Let us examine the arguments presented by two opposing and mutually exclusive points of view. Jorge Zaverucha (1994; 1998) argues that there is not a democratic civilian

control over the military in Brazil, because there still are military “prerogatives”. These “prerogatives” are defined by him as areas in which the military institution presumes to have “gained the right or privilege, formal or informal, to govern over these areas, to exercise roles in extra-military affairs within the state apparatus, and even to shape the structure of the relationships between the State and civil or political society” (Zaverucha, 1994:93). He calls this situation a “tutelary democracy” (*democracia tutelada*), characterized by the institutional and political autonomy of the military, who would thus be acting as the “guardians” of democracy. In this situation, half way between dictatorship and democracy, the military institution, by threatening with coups, explicitly or not, has set limits to the range of behaviours of civilian politicians. Zaverucha lists the survival of 17 distinct military prerogatives throughout the governments of Sarney, Collor and Franco, and Cardoso’s first term (until 1998).⁵

Zaverucha considers that the civilian governments of the New Republic varied only in the *degree* of their stance *vis-à-vis* the military, and not in the *nature* of their behaviour. Thus, we would be facing a *tutelary democracy*, with military prerogatives remaining strong and with a low degree of military resistance to civilian orders. In this case, this would mean not that the military returned to the barracks, but it would be “evidence of their significant participation in the political decision-making process” (1998:2). This non-democratic and “unstable” balance in civilian-military relations can, according to Zaverucha, will be broken as soon as a civilian government tries to put an end to military prerogatives, a fact which would detonate “a praetorian reaction that will threaten the ruling government” (1998:33). In

⁵ These prerogatives are: 1) the Armed Forces are still charged with the role of guaranteeing constitutional powers, law and order; 2) the military retain control over the major intelligence agencies, in charge of surveillance over lawmakers; 3) active duty and reserve military officers have been present in the higher echelons of the Executive branch; 4) the lack of a Defense Ministry; 5) the lack of routine legislation and detailed examination by Congress of matters pertaining to national defense; 6) absence of congressional influence over the promotions of generals; 7) state Military Police corps continue under the control of the Armed Forces; 8) fire fighter corps also remain under partial control of the Armed Forces; 9) small probability of military officers going to trial in civilian courts; 10) strong probability of civilians going to trial in military courts, even for political or common violations; 11) military officers retain the right to arrest civilians or military personnel without court orders or without them being caught on the scene; 12) the military may exercise extra-judicial and legislative authority; 13) the military can become an independent executive force in the case of internal turmoil; 14) the Armed Forces have major responsibility for the security of the president and the vice-president; 15) military presence in areas of civilian economic activity (space, naval transportation, aviation, etc.); 16) the Armed Forces are allowed to sell military property without being fully accountable to the National Treasury; 17) wage policies for military personnel are similar to those that adopted during the military regime (Zaverucha, 1998:2-3).

this sense, the Brazilian transition would therefore be an *incomplete* one and, as Zaverucha argues,

“there are no promising indicators that we will be able to pass from a democratic government to a democratic regime, in both short and medium terms. In the long term, as Keynes reminds us, we will all be dead” (1998: 34).

On the other hand, Wendy Hunter (1997), in a much more optimistic view, disagrees with the authors who saw Brazilian democracy as designed to suffer the influence of the military because of the negotiated nature of the transition — “a transition from above”, as it is commonly called. In this type of transition – very distinct from the one that happened in Argentina, for example, which was a “transition by collapse” – the Brazilian military would hold on to a tutorial role, thus creating barriers to the consolidation of democracy. Hunter believes, much to the contrary, that civilian-military relations in Brazil have displayed a much stronger dynamism and that, “rather than creating a static framework, democracy unleashes a competitive dynamic conducive to change.” Her research “suggests that countries that return to civilian rule through elite-led negotiations need not be constrained indefinitely by the balance of forces that prevailed in the transition and immediate post-transition period.” Thus, the operation of democratic rules and the political competition associated with them allow for changes in the conservative pact that rules over the transition. As to the matter of military prerogatives, so strongly emphasized by Zaverucha, she believes that, although they may continue to exist, “leading officers appeared increasingly unable to use them to wield actual political influence.” Therefore, there would not be a deep contradiction between the persistence of some prerogatives and a limited degree of political influence of the military.

Hunter believes that the military lost its political influence in the New Republic because of “the unfolding of the rules and norms of democracy”. She argues that the military lose their muscle in democratic scenarios. Electoral competition entices civilian politicians to reduce the political influence of the military, and electoral victories reinforce the ability of these politicians to do so. Therefore, what results is a trend for the erosion of military influence. Hunter wrote – in a phrase that is becoming famous (because it has been cited in

all academic texts that followed) - that, “at the risk of exaggeration, conditions of the 1980s and 1990s have rendered the Brazilian military somewhat of a paper tiger.” (1997:23)

Other analysts have sided with one or the other of these two positions. Tollefson (1995), for example, strongly defends Hunter’s theses, criticizing Zaverucha and what he calls “the myth of tutelary democracy”. Martins Filho e Zirker (1998), on the other hand, reach conclusions that are opposite to those reached by Hunter, stating that the political drive of the military was not reduced, and even pointing to “the rise of a new kind of military influence”, in a perspective that they consider to complement the outlook presented by Zaverucha (1998:2).⁶

In order to understand two perspectives that are so distinct from each other, one very optimist, the other so pessimist, we must first realize that the topic is very difficult to deal with. The major events are still too recent, there is the inertia of the interpretative schemes strongly influenced by the historical role of the military in recent Brazilian affairs, and the meager amount of available sources, despite the information stemming from the press and military statements. What follows, therefore, is based on on-going research about the military in Brazil’s New Republic.⁷ As such, this research should be considered provisional and subject to changes.

My perspective is closer to Hunter’s than to Zaverucha’s. I believe that the military has in fact lost a significant degree of power and influence in the Brazilian democracy.⁸ I must, however, make two preliminary points.

⁶ A distinct perspective is contained in the text of Oliveira and Soares (forthcoming), emphasizing the inability of Brazilian society to deal with the topic, but not falling in either camp. In other words, these authors are pessimistic in relation to the civilians, and not the military. My own view on the matter is closer to the one voiced by these authors.

⁷ This research is funded by FINEP and by the PRONEX program, and has been executed at the CPDOC of the Fundação Getulio Vargas by Maria Celina D’Araujo and myself. We conducted open interviews with all the military ministers of the period, besides some Armed Forces Chiefs-of-Staff commanders and top presidential military aides.

⁸ I am convinced, of course, that there is a political democracy in Brazil, as the eight conditions proposed by Robert Dahl (1971) are fulfilled: 1) the freedom to form and join organizations; (2) freedom of expression; (3) right to vote; (4) eligibility for public office; (5) right of political leaders to compete for support/votes; (6) alternative sources of information; (7) free and fair elections; and (8) institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference.

First, we must distinguish the first years of the transition from the ones that followed. In the beginning of the New Republic, during the Sarney government (1985-1990), the military still exercised a significant degree of political power. As mentioned, Sarney was the vice-president of Tancredo Neves, elected by an indirect ballot and deceased before his inauguration. He sought support from the Armed Forces because of the weakness of his position, shattered by the failure of the *Plano Cruzado*, his economic stabilization plan, in late 1986. The Army minister, Leônidas Pires Gonçalves, was particularly visible, because of his constant political statements about non-military matters. Also, through efficient lobbying, the military got the 1988 National Constitutional Assembly to approve the agenda that they thought to be central: the military conserved their constitutional role of intervening in the case of serious political crises, if requested to do so by any of the three branches of government; banned military officers and non-commissioned officers were not to be accepted back by the Armed Forces; a separate wage and benefit policy was maintained for the military; mandatory conscription for military service was preserved, and a planned Defense Ministry was not created. For this phase of the Sarney government, it makes sense to defend the notion that the military exercised some sort of tutorial role. The situation changed very much, however, under the governments of Collor and, above all, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, both of whom displayed a strong degree of *political direction* of the Armed Forces.⁹

Second, I agree with Hunter about the general point that military influence in Brazil has been decreasing since 1985 and will probably continue to decrease as the democratic process becomes stronger and stronger. However, a wider historical perspective about the role of the military in Brazilian republican history, associated with the perception of the enormous social problems and inequalities that persist in Brazilian society, should make us stop short of characterizing the Brazilian military as “paper tigers”. It should be kept in mind that the Brazilian political culture also carries an ancient authoritarian tradition, one that existed long before the military regime itself. Even if we agree with Max Weber in accepting that the sociological imagination necessarily involves exaggeration, Hunter could have been more careful and could have avoided using the expression. Nothing stands in the way of a

⁹ For the concept of *political direction*, see Oliveira and Soares, forthcoming. Itamar Franco’s government managed to stay between Sarney and Collor/Cardoso in the matter of political direction of the Armed Forces. Franco was afflicted, to some degree, by the same political weakness of Sarney, because he rose to the presidency as a consequence of the impeachment of Collor. Franco was much shyer than Collor in increasing civilian control over the military.

reversal of military subordination in the case of, for example, deeper social or economic crises.

Having made these points, I will now focus on four issues or moments of the New Republic which are important for the understanding of the changes experienced by the relationships between the Armed Forces, the State and society, during the 1990s.

1) Actions during Collor's impeachment. It would have been hard for any political analyst to predict that the Brazilian Armed Forces would voluntarily keep a safe distance from political matters in the case of the serious political unrest that caused the impeachment of a president accused of grave deeds of corruption, and in the middle of a strenuous economic crisis, especially given a long-term perspective of Brazilian republican history. However, this is exactly what happened. Running against its historical “messianic calling”, the military held on to a strictly institutional stance, avoiding statements or threats of coups or intervention aimed at “saving” the president, or the nation, for that matter. This was the military’s “baptism of fire” in the New Republic. Despite being prompted by the press, by politicians and even by Collor himself, the Armed Forces insisted in saying that its role was to respect the Constitution and the legal political process. It is important to recall, by the way, that during the entire New Republic there has not been a single day of alert in military barracks.¹⁰

2) The creation of the Ministry of Defense. Brazil never had a Ministry of Defense in its history. The commander of each service has traditionally been also the respective minister. During the entire military regime, these posts were filled by military officers, and not by civilians. As the Joint Chief-of-Staff of the Armed Forces and the top presidential military aide (*Chefe da Casa Militar*) held ministerial status, Brazil always had at least five military ministries. With a Ministry of Defense, this situation changes very much. The commanders of the three services lost their status as ministers and fell under the rule of a minister of Defense (and, ultimately, of the president, who constitutionally is the supreme commander of the

¹⁰ There were some isolated interventions, but they happened always at the request of one of the three branches of government, as predicted by the Constitution, and never by military initiative.

Armed Forces). The Joint Chief-of-Staff was extinct. The president's top military aide also lost the status of minister, as his duties were incorporated into an Institutional Security Office (*Gabinete de Segurança Institucional*), a civilian agency.¹¹

The creation of a Ministry of Defense was an objective that could be found already in the electoral platform of Cardoso's first term. However, it took four years for such a Ministry to be created, through an executive provisional decree, at the end of 1998, a few days before Cardoso started his second term. This delay in the creation of the new Ministry should not be interpreted as the result of tensions in the relations between civilians and military, because it is explained by deep divergences to be found *among the military itself*. Each service had its own view about the institutional design of the new Ministry. Tensions were particularly visible between the Navy on the one side, and the Army and the Air Force on the other. During the military regime such disagreements were minimized and the Army held a clear hegemonic position. Besides that, the existence of a military president worked as a decisive component in the control or resolution of these disagreements. This changed during the New Republic. The end of military rule also brought about more competition between the three armed forces, and this weakened the ability of the military services to act together. The Ministry of Defense surely has a long way to go before it effectively becomes the agency responsible for military matters, but one cannot ignore the changes introduced by its sheer creation in the relations between civilians and military in Brazil.

The first minister of Defense was Élcio Álvares, a politician lacking any national importance. He was a senator from the small state of Espírito Santo, and was not reelected. His name was chosen after a number of important politicians were invited. They all declined. On January 18, 2000, however, a little over a year after the creation of the Defense Ministry, President Cardoso fired Álvares. This followed a crisis that started in December 1999, when a Congressional sub-committee investigating narco-traffic decided to probe the possible involvement of Álvares' top aide for more than 20 years of activity in money-laundering in favour of organized crime in the state of Espírito Santo. A few days after this decision, the Air Force commander, Brigadier-General Walter Bräuer, when queried about the episode,

¹¹ Which is currently under the command of a general, but this can be seen as a choice of the strict confidence of the President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, not as a military prerogative. General Alberto Cardoso also had to retire from active duty following the creation of the GSI. It is important to note also that the new intelligence agency created after the extinction of the Serviço Nacional de Informações (SNI) by Collor is a demilitarized one.

answered that all persons in public office should have a clean record. On December 17th, the minister fired the commander, considering his words as a breach of discipline. He also fired his aide singled out by the Congressional Sub-Committee. In an attempt to defuse a tense situation, Cardoso invited the retired Brigadier-General Carlos Almeida Batista to be Air Force commander. He was the president of the Supreme Military Court and a highly respected officer in the service.

In fact, the disagreement between the minister and the Air Force commander involved other delicate matters, such as the privatization of Brazil's airports and the creation of a National Civilian Aviation Agency, unlinked to the Air Force, that until now controlled the sector and employed quite a number of reserve officers in it.¹² A luncheon to honour the fired Brigadier-General Bräuer, on December 28, 1999, brought together more than 700 people and prompted radical speeches, but the vast majority of those who attended were retired officers.

Álvares position became untenable after he gave an interview to the weekly *Época*, defending himself and his aide, and criticizing two fellow ministers (José Serra, Health, and José Carlos Dias, Justice). He was fired only a few days later. Geraldo Quintão, the advocate-general of the Federal Government, who took over the office on January 24, 2000, replaced him. Speaking at his inauguration, Quintão supported two of the major military demands: more money for reequipment of the Armed Forces and higher wages. According to the Air Force commander, in doing so he started at the right pace...

This episode does not reflect a “military crisis”, as diagnosed by some eager journalists and analysts. This was a *political* crisis, caused mainly by the lack of political refinement on the part of the ex-minister Álvares in dealing with the accusations against his aide. Also remarkable – and a good sign – is that during this period the commanders of the Army and the Navy stood aside, and said nothing about the accusations against the aide, nor about the dismissal of the Air Force commander.

¹² Notice that the previous Ministry was called Air Transportation (*Aeronáutica*)– and not Air Force – precisely because of its control over civilian aviation).

3) The “Committee on Missing Persons” (*Comissão dos Desaparecidos*) and the reopening of the “Riocentro Case”. This committee started to work after a law was issued to solve the legal situation of the families of people who disappeared during the military regime, none of which were officially declared dead. The enforcement of this law means that the Brazilian State recognizes its responsibility for the death and disappearance of these people. It was predicted that more than 300 financial reparations would be paid, and most of them effectively have been paid.

On January 22, 1996, the first practical result of the Committee’s work was to issue a death certificate to the ex-representative Rubens Paiva – received by the widow -, arrested at home in 1971 and officially “missing” since then. During the ceremony, held at the presidential palace, there was a moment when the President’s chief military aide, General Alberto Cardoso, hugged the widow of Paiva. The photos of this moment were posted on the first pages of the nation’s newspapers and the officer’s attitude was interpreted as a new stance of the military in relation to the political past. The gesture was criticized, however, by a number of reserve officers, especially those in charge of the *Clube Militar*, and those belonging to about ten small right-wing groups, always willing to criticize any attitude perceived by them as part of a “campaign to demoralize” the Armed Forces.

It is true that most active military officers, including military commanders, were deeply annoyed with some of the financial reparations decided by the committee, even more because they amounted to admitting that the State – in this instance represented by the Armed Forces – had failed in its duty to protect the lives of prisoners under its guard. The two most sensitive cases were those of the ex-congressman and guerrilla leader Carlos Marighella, killed in an ambush in 1969, and, above all, of Carlos Lamarca, an ex-captain of the Army who deserted in 1969 and became one of the major leaders of the armed struggle against the military regime, until he was killed, in 1971.

Despite the bad feelings among the military, clearly stated in an internal message written by the minister of the Army stating that Lamarca would continue to be considered a traitor according to the military code, the work of the Committee as a whole was not contested by the military. Among the officers, the vision that the matter was about the relationship between the Brazilian State and these families prevailed over the notion that it might imply a moral judgment of the institution.

In much the same way, there have been no major incidents following the reopening of the investigation about one of the most compromising episodes in terms of the image of the Brazilian military institution, the so-called “Riocentro Case”, in 1981 (after the Amnesty Law). For the first time the Army captain of 1981, now an active colonel, was heard as a suspect. For almost 20 years everybody thought that this would not be accepted by the military under any circumstances, but what is happening is exactly the opposite.

4) Changes in important military celebrations. Another striking aspect that has escaped the attention of researchers is that an entire set of symbolic elements that characterized the Brazilian Armed Forces – in some cases, going back to the 1920s and 1930s – has also undergone important changes after the military left the nucleus of political power, in 1985. These changes follow, as I understand, the same course taken by the changes in the political behaviour of the military.

With the end of the military regime, two once important celebrations have experienced a decline so strong that it is reasonable to suppose that they tend to officially disappear. One is the commemoration of victory over the 1935 communist revolt, staged each November 27th at the Praia Vermelha (in Rio de Janeiro). The other is the commemoration of victory of the March 31, 1964 coup (or "Revolution", as called by the military), held in all military barracks and units. In 1990, for the first time since the 1930s the President of the Republic failed to attend the November 27th ceremony. A few years later the Armed Forces decided to put an end to the traditional public ritual held at the Praia Vermelha. Similarly, the usual joint statement of the military commanders of the three services, issued every March 31st, has not been heard in recent years.

When the Communist revolt was defeated in 1935, the aftermath was an intense process of institutionally driven building of an anti-Communist ideology among all services of the Brazilian Armed Forces. Although most sectors of the military services were opposed to communism even before the rebellion, it was only after the event that the Communists were clearly identified as “the great enemy”. An important part of this process of instituting anti-communism was the yearly celebration of the victory over the November 27th revolt.

From 1936 until 1996, the Brazilian Armed Forces doggedly paid their respects to the victims of the revolt. This occurred in Rio, first at the São João Batista cemetery, in which a mausoleum was built in 1940, and later, starting in 1968, at the Praia Vermelha, near the site of the rebellion, where a monument that still exists was built for this purpose. The idea of transferring the yearly ceremony from the cemetery to the newly built monument, according to the proclamation of the Army minister, Aurélio de Lyra Tavares, was to “allow a more effective participation of the general population in the ceremonies (Cf. Carvalho, 1981:428). The celebration, in which the presidents of the Republic had always participated, included the reading of proclamations written by the three military ministers. This was a hallmark of the strongly anti-Communist institutional culture in which the military generations that took over power in 1964 were bred.

This celebration gained strength with the new military regime of 1964. The most important rationale used in the more recent run of November 27th speeches was that, in 1964, the communists had attacked again, and this attack, as in 1935, was again thwarted by the Armed Forces. In other words, 30 years later the enemy was the same, and it still required armed repression. Comparing 1935 and 1964 became a mandatory piece of rhetoric. Besides, a new commemoration was created, with the reading of the proclamations of service commanders in all military barracks and units on each anniversary of the coup of March 31, 1964. The two celebrations mutually reinforced themselves, ritualizing the anti-Communist spirit of the Armed Forces.

After 1985, with the end of the military regime and the reestablishment of political democracy, both celebrations started to lose importance. At first, the proclamations read in the November 27th celebrations fell from three to one, amounting to a joint statement by the commanders of the three services. The content itself of the statement became more and more watered down. The old, vehement anti-Communist symbology lost its drive. In 1990, the absence of the president of the Republic, Fernando Collor de Mello, marked the first time that the ceremony was conducted without a president in attendance. According to Collor's minister of the Army, General Carlos Tinoco, the President informed his military ministries ahead of time that he would not go to the ceremony.¹³ Collor just announced his decision. As he did not ask the opinion of his military ministries, there was nothing to discuss. He did not

¹³ Tinoco was interviewed by Maria Celina D'Araujo and myself in July and August of 1998, at the CPDOC.

oppose the celebration, however. Nonetheless, his stance made the ceremony lose its importance, and it never again managed to secure the attendance of the President of the Republic, dwindling down to an exclusively military affair.

Finally, in 1996 the military ministries attended the ceremony at the Praia Vermelha for the last time. Their joint proclamation stated that communism had come to an end. The heroes who had been an example and had inspired the perpetual anti-Communist feeling among the military for 60 years had also concluded their struggle. At its closing, the proclamation warned that, in case there was not a celebration in the following years, the prevailing regime of liberty and democracy would be the best way to pay reverence to those heroes, a living proof that their deaths in defense of democratic institutions had not been in vain.¹⁴

The official newsletter of the Army, *Noticiário do Exército*, published a text by the commander of the Army, General Gleuber Vieira, about the communist revolt of 1935 (published on November 27, 1999, issue number 9,626). He stated that it was important to understand “that everything flows, nothing persists, nothing remains the same”, and that this was the perspective of the Army in relation to the episode. In the same conciliatory and Heraclitan spirit, he continues:

We are not tied to the past, we look into the future – after all, each time we wade into the historical river of time, we touch new waters. And therefore, despite the fact that we are the winners, we do not scoff the losers. [...] When we erect monuments, we do so only to think deeply about History, never to demean opponents or to stir up disagreement. We know that to build the foundations of tomorrow means bringing seed to fertile soils, never waking up ghosts. This is what keeps us above ideologies, above discord, above resentment.

It is worth highlighting that the Military Club – whose directors are usually Army reserve officers, all of whom made their active careers during the military regime – has been speaking out against the withering of these ceremonies. Actually, over the last few years the

¹⁴ I thank the support provided by my assistant Dulcimar Dantas de Albuquerque. She helped research the history of the November 27th celebrations and attended the 1996 ceremony.

Club has been trying to play the role of promoter of these two rituals, in a posture that is explicitly critical of active military commanders. At the closing of the 1998 ceremony, the cultural director of the Military Club, Colonel Sodré, a reserve officer, told two of my research assistants, present at the occasion, that the Club took the initiative of organizing the celebration after the Army “watered down” the event, since the Collor government, and that the situation had become serious after “the communists reached power” (e.g., with the Fernando Henrique Cardoso government!). Still according to the same colonel, the lack of interest in the ceremony (reflected in the low number of attendants) was explained by an alleged campaign against the Armed Forces, conducted above all by the media.¹⁵

The 1999 events with which the same Military Club commemorated March 31st also combined radicalism and slim attendance. Attendants to a “debate” conducted on March 29, 1999 were mostly from the club’s board of directors, joined by a few reserve military officers. The attendance was less than 30.¹⁶ It is clearly wrong, therefore, to state that the Military Club is a “mouth-piece” of active military officers for matters pertaining to politics.

Conclusion

Other points could be cited as examples of the much-lessened presence of the military in the political scene and of the acceptance, by the military, of a new pattern of civilian-military relations during the last decade. However, in order to conclude, I will now deal with the matter of how and why these changes were possible.

First, as emphasized by Hunter, one of the major factors in the decrease of the political influence of the military was the operation of democracy itself – and the manner by which the military themselves perceived the situation. Other factors should be mentioned,

15 In the ceremony of November 27, 1999, there was the presence of three senior officers representing the Armed Forces and the military units of Rio de Janeiro, but they abstained from speeches or statements. The attendance was minimal and the ceremony was highly formal. The proclamation issued by general Gleuber, mentioned above, was read. Since 1995, no military ministries have attended the event.

16 I thank my research assistants Aline Marinho, Carlos Sávio, Carolina von der Wied and Priscila Brandão Antunes, for the information that helped me describe these events.

such as the external influences coming from the international scene, and a certain “trauma” of the heritage of the military regime.

The end of the Cold War and the new international scene in which bipolar ideological opposition vanished, together with heightened regional integration through Mercosul, put an end to strategic scenarios and ideological cleavages that had prevailed for four decades. The remembering of the internal divisions and tensions inside the Armed Forces brought by the military regime also has its role. Besides, I believe that the effects of the “defeat” suffered by the military in the matter of the historical memory of the military regime were an important factor, leading to lack of *political* support and credibility. One thing is quite clear when we examine Brazil’s recent history: the military never made any political actions without the support of important social groups. In the absence of societal support and in the absence of civilian allies for the execution of coups or barracks uprisings, the risk of such actions are even higher for the military. Consensus about democracy is today higher than in the past.

Finally, as time goes on there is a natural substitution of the military generation that lived through the military regime by another generation that is emotionally unattached to this period. Measures targeted to make the military more professional – issued paradoxically by a military government (Castelo Branco) – and a promotion law that restricts the time that officers can spend as active generals – are working to transform into history the experiences of the generation that lived under the military regime.

Of course one can always think the change in the attitudes of the military during the New Republic is actually no more than a “disguise” for a new “serpent’s egg”. It is true that several “prerogatives” still are in the Constitution and laws, and Zaverucha’s list can be seen as a good agenda for what has yet to be changed (some of them have already been dropped without any significant resistance on the part of the military). It is also true that ten years is a short period of time, and that Brazilian democracy is a fragile one, still under construction. Finally, the Congress, the political parties, the universities and other civilian institutions have so far failed in acquiring expertise in defense matters, thus leaving more autonomy for the military. But it is a mistake not to consider the significant changes that occurred. The attitudes of Brazilian military commanders over the last decade have not gone the opposite way of democracy. It seems that for them it is a matter of reestablishing a socially valued and positive image, washing away the stigma left by the military regime. There is still a long way

to go – and, like in all long paths, there is uncertainty – but the process that I described may help lessen the burden of the negative heritage that the recent political involvement of the military left for the military institution.

References

- Carvalho, Ferdinando de. *Lembraí-vos de 35!* Rio de Janeiro: Biblioteca do Exército, 1981.
- D'Araujo, Maria Celina; Castro, Celso (orgs.). *Ernesto Geisel*. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. FGV, 1997.
- D'Araujo, Maria Celina; Soares, Gláucio Ary Dillon; Castro, Celso (orgs.). *Visões do Golpe. A Memória Militar sobre 1964*. Rio de Janeiro: Relume-Dumará, 1994a.
- . *Os Anos de Chumbo. A Memória Militar sobre a Repressão*. Rio de Janeiro: Relume-Dumará, 1994b.
- Dahl, Robert. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1971.
- Hunter, Wendy. *Eroding Military Influence in Brazil ¾ Politicians against Soldiers*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1997.
- Martins Filho, João Roberto & Zirker, Daniel. “The Brazilian Armed Forces After the Cold War: Overcoming the Identity Crisis.” Paper presented at LASA Congress, Chicago, 1998.
- Mello, Evaldo Cabral de. *Rubro Veio. O Imaginário da Restauração Pernambucana*. 2ª ed. Rio de Janeiro, Topbooks, 1997.
- Oliveira, Eliézer Rizzo de & Soares, Samuel Alves. “Forças Armadas, direção política e formato institucional”, in: Maria Celina D'Araujo e Celso Castro, *Democracia e Forças Armadas no Cone Sul*. Rio de Janeiro, Ed. FGV, forthcoming.
- Soares, Gláucio Ary Dillon e D'Araujo, Maria Celina (orgs.), *21 anos de regime militar: balanços e perspectivas*, Rio de Janeiro, Ed. FGV, 1994
- Soares, D'Araujo e Castro (orgs.). *A Volta aos Quartéis. A Memória Militar sobre a Abertura*. Rio de Janeiro: Relume-Dumará, 1995.

Tollefson, Scott D. "Civil-Military Relations in Brazil: The Myth of Tutelary Democracy." Paper presented at LASA Congress, Washington, 1995.

Zaverucha, Jorge. "Sarney, Collor, Itamar, FHC e as prerrogativas militares". Paper presented at LASA Congress, Chicago, 1998.

Zaverucha, Jorge. *Rumor de Sabres: Tutela Militar ou Controle Civil?* São Paulo: Ática, 1994.