

Brazilian Military Reshaping for a New Era Frank D. McCann

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1. A Symbol for the Army p.1

Humberto Castello Branco. His memory is invoked publicly and externally by attaching his name to the *Escola de Comando e Estado Maior at Praia Vermelha* in Rio.

2. Struggle over Memory and History p.3

The army has accepted the idea that it should no longer celebrate or commemorate the events of 1964. The last official army commemoration was in 1996. The ‘Revolution of 1964’ has disappeared from the military’s official vocabulary. Likewise commemorations of the suppression of the communist revolt of 1935 have ended.

3. Military Education p.4

a- Military High Schools (Colégios Militares) p.5

An unusual feature of Brazilian military education is that it can start as early as age 14 at the sixth grade level. There are 12 “Colégios Militares” scattered throughout the country in large urban centers.

b- Officer Education p5

Each of the three services has its own officer training school, offering a university-level education. The army has the *Academia das Agulhas Negras* at Resende, Rio de Janeiro; the navy has its *Escola Naval* on Villegagnon Island in Guanabara Bay at Rio; and the air force its *Academia da Força Aerea* at Pirassununga, São Paulo.

There are no Officer Candidate Schools (OCS) or college-based Reserve Officer Training programs that allow entry into a regular officer career. There are the CPOR centers that prepare “reserve” officers, but graduates can remain on active duty for only five years, they are not allowed to pursue a full career.

Women were first admitted into the armed forces in the early 1980s. The Brazilian army was the first in South America to accept women.

c- Escola Preparatório de Cadetes do Exército (EsPCEEx) p.6-7

The army has lengthened the time it takes to educate new officers from four to five years. There is only one entry point into a career as a professional officer, the *Academia Militar das Agulhas Negras*. What is new is that the army has made it mandatory for all candidates to *AMAN* regardless of background to first pass through the *Escola Preparatório de Cadetes do Exército (EsPCEEx)* in Campinas, S.P.. This means that the entrance into a career as an army officer has been moved from *AMAN* to *EsPCEEx*. In effect the first year courses that had been taught at *AMAN* are now done at the preparatory.

4. Has the United States replaced Argentina as the potential enemy? P.7

a - In June 1977, Brazilian and Argentine forces on either side of the Rio Grande do Sul border went on full alert and for a short time the danger of war rumbled. P7

- Argentina no long has the military capability to pose a threat to Brazil.

b- p.10 Brazil's defense policy documents of 2005 and 2008 show that Brazilian thinking regarding the role of the military has evolved to the point where a stronger military profile is now linked to the nation's standing in the world. If Brazil wishes to have its proper place in the world it needs to be "prepared to defend itself not only against aggressions but also against threats." The Brazilian armed forces are defensive in nature and their overall defensive strategy especially for the Army is based on what they call "presence."

c- Amazônia p.11

Peace and security on the southern border allowed the Brazilians to reposition their forces. The Army considers Amazônia as its number one worry.

- Twenty-five *Pelotões Especiais da Fronteira* (PEF) under the brigade headquarters in Boa Vista, on the Rio Branco river in Roraima, which also has an infantry battalion there and another in São Gabriel da Cachoeira on the Rio Negro in Amazonas. The platoons are usually commanded by

lieutenants. Twenty-eight more units are planned by 2022 at an estimated cost of Reais \$8.5 million per platoon. The posts are under five Special Frontier Command/ Jungle Infantry Battalions, with headquarters from west to east in Tabatinga, Rio Branco, São Gabriel da Cachoeira, Boa Vista, and Macapá. Each battalion is supposed to be an operational maneuver unit. All toll these units amount to 27,000 soldiers for this huge region.

d- How does the army see its presence in Amazônia? P.12

The Brazilian Army's website says that it has been in Amazônia since the beginning of the 17th century, thereby claiming continuity from colonial days to the present. The armed forces are not trying to be historically accurate, they are adopting "the geopolitical vision of the Portuguese" employing the PEF posts as modern versions of the colonial era Portuguese forts.

Eventual settlements around the PEF posts will create the desired living frontier further contributing to the defense of Brazilian possession. P.13

- The army portrays its role in the region as pioneering and trail-blazing (desbravador), while "preserving, developing, and protecting" it. Pointing to the frontier platoons the army declares that they "are poles of development, around which, as in the past, a core of population grows, guaranteeing Brazilian presence and our sovereignty." P.13

- Critics argued that today's outposts at strategic locations were intended "as bridgeheads for future settlement projects. To fill up the area with Brazilian colonists was their idea of inhibiting foreign craving for Amazonia." The critics feared that such posts would hasten deforestation and destruction of the native peoples.

- Research is showing that the basin of the Rio Tacutu that lies between Brazil and Guiana has petroleum. P.14

- The three frontier platoon posts in the west of Roraima at Surucucu (1987), Ericó, and Auaris were built a few kilometers away from the Venezuelan boundary which slashes unseen through jungle, but they are in the midst of the Yanomami population that exists on both sides of the borderline. An old Brazilian military concern is that this transnational

indigenous population could one day coalesce into a Yanomami nation that could claim lands from both Brazil and Venezuela.

These same Yanomami lands are rich in minerals. P.15

- It is army policy to recruit local natives to garrison the posts wherever possible. According to General Luiz Sérgio Goulart Duarte, commander of the 2ª Brigada de Infantaria de Selva (São Gabriel da Cachoeira) in 2012, of the 1400 soldiers then on the frontier with Colombia and Venezuela, 70% were indigenous. Most of these rarely rise above simple soldiers and are not allowed to serve more than eight years. The relations between the platoons and the neighboring villages of Yanomami, Kuripako, Tukano, and Maku peoples is fraught with ethnic, religious, and sexual tensions that complicate the situation. P.16

- The heated international commentary about deforestation and the suggestion of some foreign leaders that perhaps planetary climate change trumped national sovereignty put Brazilian leaders on edge. In 1989, then American Senator Al Gore declared “Contrary to what Brazilians think, the Amazon is not their property; it belongs to all of us.” The Brazilian response was quick; “the Amazon is ours” became the rallying cry. Rumors that the United States wanted to establish bases in neighboring countries agitated the mood even further.

(p17)

-. In 1990 the Escola Superior de Guerra developed a document that looked ahead a decade at the “The Structure of National Power” and raised the possibility of war against international pressures to preserve “anthropological cysts” in Brazil. The commander of the Amazonian military region warned that the foreign pressures could turn the Amazon into a huge Vietnam. P.16

- The American-led response to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait startled and worried the Brazilian military. If it could happen there, why could it not happen in Amazônia?

In 1993, an incident during joint United States-Guyana military exercises in the distant coastal region stimulated Brazilian concerns. A U.S. Marine helicopter landed at Lethem in Guyana opposite Bonfim, carelessly entering Brazilian air space briefly to make the landing. P.17

-the American presence in neighboring countries, especially Colombia, was raising questions about Washington's intentions. How much staying power the Brazilian worry about foreign interest in Amazonia will have is uncertain. Brazilian academics have questioned the validity of such fears. However, reports about American projections about future food requirements contribute to such worries.

- An early proponent of this Lassitude strategy, Colonel Álvaro de Souza Pinheiro, observed in the 1990s that while American Special Forces have experience working with foreign populations, the Brazilian Special Forces would "work with internal Brazilian populations – in a resistance movement environment – when an invasion threat to Brazilian territory occurs." P.18

- As difficult as it is to imagine an American invasion of Brazil, it is understandable that some Brazilians could conceive of such a thing. P.19

e. **NGOs seen as danger or a reason for nervousness** p.19

- **The Brazilian military say that their fear is not invasion or war in the region as much as it is the negative influence of unspecified NGOs that could "foment separatism, the illegal sale of indigenous lands, the unwarranted appropriation of forest resources by foreigners, in addition impeding the region's development."**

- **In 2008 the Army estimated that there were 350 NGOs active in the region. P.19**

The level of nervousness is quite high. **The military saw the seemingly innocuous U.N. Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) as threatening the "Balkanization of the Amazon" provoking the Clube Militar to issue a rebuttal entitled "Sovereignty at Risk."** The regional commander in 2012 General Eduardo Villas-Boas commented that **the absence of the Brazilian state in Amazônia was the main reason that the region was the army's principal concern.** General Villas Bôas emphasized that Amazonia was not yet incorporated into Brazil and that budgetary allocations for the armed forces in the area were inadequate. His new position as Army Commander (March 2015) **will give**

him more ability to encourage heightened attention to the Amazon region.

f. Sistema de Vigilância da Amazônia(SIVAM) p.20

One part of the Brazilian response to international anxiety about Amazônia has been to get more detailed information about what is going on in the region. Because much of its expanse had poor to non-existent air-traffic control, the government launched **the System for the protection of Amazônia (SIPAM) that had as one of its components the Sistema de Vigilância da Amazônia(SIVAM)**. Its objectives were to gather real time data that would allow better control over the environment, regional development, vigilance of rivers, roads, jungle, air-traffic control, response coordination in emergencies, monitoring of weather conditions, and control of smuggling.

SIVAM required construction of radar and telecommunications sites throughout Amazonia, often in difficult- to- reach locations. As part of SIPAM, the Air Force, which is responsible for Brazilian air space and air traffic control, took the lead in creating the (SIVAM) which is the largest, fully integrated, remote monitoring system in the world. It supports Brazilian government efforts to control the environment and law enforcement over land, air and water resources. Developed by Raytheon, the system is composed of an extensive network of air traffic control and surveillance radars, environmental sensors, communications systems and airborne sensor systems. It was built between 2002 and 2005 and is fully operational.

g. Patrolling the Borders (AGATA Exercises) p.22

- The uneasiness about supposed foreign covetousness (*cobiça*) of the Amazon continues to be mixed into Brazilian policy-making regarding the region. It adds heightened emotionalism to already difficult questions. Seeing the region as being under constant but vague foreign threat may not result in the best problem analysis.

The region has become a route from the Andean countries for drug trafficking, not only to the United States, but also into Brazil itself and onward to Africa and Europe. The control of illicit cutting of valuable timber and illegal wildcat mining is extremely difficult. In June 2011, to gain better control over the borders the government started a border patrol

plan that actively involved the military in policing the frontiers with targeted temporary operations. They are coordinated by the Joint Staff of the Armed Forces involving the Navy, Army, Air Force, eight ministries, 20 regulatory agencies, and federal, state and municipal entities. Military units conduct check points on roads, patrol rivers and creeks, and inspect airfields. The objective is to reduce drug and weapons trafficking, animal and timber contraband from neighboring countries, among other crimes.

5. Naval Geopolitics p.23

In the last decade Brazil has worked toward closer relations with the West African countries. It had long participated in the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP), most of whose members are African. In 1986, over the objections of the United States and doubts of European states it formed ZOPACAS (Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic) that united in a pact of maritime cooperation the South American and African states that front on the South Atlantic.

More recently Brazil has been seeking to **create a “good will belt” around the South Atlantic** by providing naval training, vessels, increased trade, and scientific assistance in studying continental shelf and undersea resource potential. In the process it is spreading the idea of a common South Atlantic region that should be developed and defended by the region’s states. The Brazilian discourse objects to NATO involvement in the region, but at the same time Brazil cooperates in, and depends upon, defense projects with NATO countries. Sponsoring a South Atlantic identity is a logical outgrowth of establishing closer ties with the African states reaching back decades.

6. General Staff Planning for the future of the Brazilian Army p.24

The Army General Staff has developed **“Strategic Projects” that have the overall goal of transforming or modernizing the army.** In summary they aim at gaining more **control of Brazil’s frontiers (SISFRON)** via satellite observation, mapping, and integrating the army’s emergency responses more intimately with those of civilian agencies. One of the related projects is in **Cyber Defense to protect against cybernetic attacks.** A project labelled **Guarani** seeks to transform motorized infantry and cavalry units into mechanized ones by modernizing

existing units with the new Guarani vehicles. These are **wheeled armored cars, whose production will also contribute to the growth of Brazil's defense industry.** Similarly contributing to that industry is the **Air Defense Project which proposes to fabricate various ground-to-air weapons and the Astros 2020 Project to create long-range tactical cruise missiles.** A final project, **ReCop** (stands for "*Recompletamento Operacional*" or Operational Replacement), aims at maintaining a reasonable level of operational capability by addressing the need for continuous updating and adopting the latest innovations in equipment and training.

The Army's Center of Planning in the General Staff focuses on developing doctrine for future situations. Among other things they think in terms of **image creation that would discourage foreign incursion by FARC-like guerrilla forces** from Colombia. The **Agata border operations** are to some extent part of this image creation idea. They are also envisioning an enhanced role in United Nations peacekeeping missions that could have a wide-variety of objectives.

To be ready they are considering **three-types of forces: a general purpose expeditionary force; a peace-keeping or enforcement force; a humanitarian outfit** to respond to disasters. The army's peace keeping **experience in Haiti since 2004 is serving as a model for future operations.** All of these necessarily involve preparation and training of air and naval transport, inter-service cooperation, and considerable development of logistical capabilities.

7. Reputation and Shaping History p25

Memory of the years of military dominated government from 1964 to 1985 is still very keen in Brazil. The armed forces have stopped commemorating the "Revolution of 1964" and have demonstrated that they are subordinate to the elected civilian leadership. This is notable because the current president, Dilma Rousseff in her youth was part of the armed resistance, and had been arrested and tortured by army personnel. The process of re-establishing democratic rule had been slow and difficult. The military regime had not been defeated or completely destabilized rather it sought to liberalize the political situation because of infighting among military leaders over the nature of the regime and over control of it. At its heart the internal debate was whether the "Revolution" of 1964 was a time-limited surgical operation to correct a left-leaning government, or whether those events had created a long-term regime of command and control.

p.26 **By the mid-1970s key officers were thinking that the "revolution" should have ended in the Medici period.** It lost its momentum and maybe its reason for being. Such officers thought that it had been an error not to have given the necessary emphasis to social development (that is housing, education, health care, and wages). The regime simply went on for too long, and worse, "it was a disaster for the Revolution to have Figueiredo as the last president." He was unprepared for the job and did not work at being president. The most consistent argument in the military for why the regime lasted so long was to blame subversive action.

However, General Leonidas Pires Gonçalves insisted that "transition was always in our spirit." And that "those that think we wanted to stay in power don't know the ideas of the Revolution, the spirit with which the Revolution began." He did admit that late joiners, who he called mediocrities "adored power and transformed themselves into great revolutionaries simply because they benefitted." Rather than being forced out he asserted that the direct elections movement (*Diretas-Já*) occurred "because we let it." P.26

The Amnesty movement began as a civilian affair aimed at letting the political exiles return home. How exactly it became a refuge for the violators of human rights needs further study. In 1979 the Joao Batista Figueiredo government declared a general amnesty that covered the agents of repression but it allowed for the return of exiles and permitted purged politicians to stand for election. Amnesty prior to judgement and conviction wiped away the crimes of the agents of the state, but left the murdered and tortured without legal status. **The question was how could state agents be amnestied for crimes that they were not charged with committing and that the military governments would not admit had occurred?** In 1995, to make the matter more complex and confusing a law provided compensation for families that had lost loved ones. This was the first time that the Brazilian state accepted responsibility for the illicit acts post-1964. P.27

In April 2010 the Brazilian Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the amnesty law ruling that it prohibited prosecution of those from both the government forces and the armed resistance, but then in **December of that year the Inter-American Court of Human Rights**

ruled that the law was illegal. The Inter-American court asserted that the Amnesty clashed with the treaty obligations that Brazil assumed under the OAS American Convention on Human Rights. It ordered Brazil to investigate gross violations of human rights.

While this legal controversy dragged on, there was **also a slow movement to establish a truth commission to examine the repression.** President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva proposed the idea in December 2009, but dropped it when the minister of defense and the three service chiefs threatened joint resignation. In the next administration of Dilma Rousseff the mood had changed enough for the Congress to approve the creation of a truth commission in September 2011.

The **Comissão Nacional da Verdade** was to investigate human rights violations from 1946 to 1988, with emphasis on the military years (1964-85). The commission of seven members completed its work in two years. Supposedly it was to have access to all government documents and could call victims and accused individuals to testify, but it could not compel them to attend. Then in March 2012 federal prosecutors charged Colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra and civilian police chief Dirceu Garvina, with the 1971 disappearance of a union leader. The prosecutors argued that the **amnesty law did not apply because victim's body was not found so the case remained open and continued beyond 1979.** Even the failed bombing attempt on the Rio Centro in April 1981 reappeared on a court docket in 2014 because it occurred after the 1979 amnesty limit. There was enough investigation and publicity to establish that army agents were responsible, even though the case eventually ended up being archived, it was a step toward justice.

The **commission was met with hostility and lack of compliance by the armed forces.** The officer corps, especially retired officers, considered the Truth Commission a witch hunt to get revenge. "From the army of Caxias there would be no apologies. We always declared our conviction that we saved Brazil." They objected to some of the individuals appointed to the commission and its state-level branches.

The officers wanted official repression to be equated with the armed actions of their opponents. They criticized the recent statement of Minister of Defense Celso Amorim that the armed forces had violated human rights during the military period. The president of the Clube Militar, retired General Gilberto Pimentel, declared that the commission should have treated both sides impartially because “there were dead on our side too and human rights are for everyone.” The emotions were and are often raw and angry.

Now **thirty-one years after the return to democratic rule the Brazilian armed forces face the ethical and moral dilemma** of how to deal with the realities of those military years. The real problem is not the seizure of power or even the long years of political control. It is the repression that the country suffered including the use of disappearance, murder, and torture as instruments of control.

The reality of mistreatment of political prisoners is well documented in the military's own judicial records, but there is little institutional willingness to acknowledge what was done. This stand-off has gone on since 1985. That year the Archdiocese of Sao Paulo published *Brasil: Nunca Mais* written by priests and laymen who had acquired more than a million pages of military court records containing the names of victims and their torturers and details of their experiences. At the time the editors decided to delay publishing the names of 444 torturers so as not to appear to be interfering in upcoming elections. As the stories of death and disappearance became better known, **the consensus on mutual forgetting slowly fragmented.**

The army's version of events was best presented in a series of interviews with 247 officers and civilians published in 2003. The interviews provided a virtual ‘who's who’ of those supporting the 1964 movement and the subsequent governments, and their publication was intended as a response to the criticisms of regime opponents. Those interviewed affirmed that from the outset they supported the civil-military regime. After 1985 the struggle was to influence the memory of the nation.

Probably the case that holds the most interest is that of the conflict in the **Araguaia region's** section known as the **Bico do Pagagaio** in the eastern Amazon. Members of the Communist Party of Brazil began moving there in 1966 with the intention of establishing a base for guerrilla war and eventually a liberated zone. Some of them had been trained in China, at least one had been involved in the communist uprising of 1935, and another was an army *CPOR*-prepared reserve lieutenant. In total there were 107 guerrillas and some locally recruited campesinos.

In April 1972 the army discovered their presence and the game was on. The initial massive infusion of regular troops was not successful so the army replaced them with carefully selected secret personnel operating in civilian dress with false names and light arms. The rule of law was set aside for the laws of the jungle. They used **guerrilla-style tactics against the guerrillas**. By the **end of 1974 there were no more guerrillas** in Araguaia. Orders from Brasilia were that none should be allowed to leave the region alive. A number were executed well after their capture. Those officers overseeing and conducting the operations in Araguaia wanted to keep the executions secret even within the military services. The families of the executed still await their remains.

The closing of the ranks to protect the military institutions is understandable to a certain extent, but the documented history of what took place is not going to disappear. **As General Octavio Costa observed "most military had nothing to do with what happened ... the vast majority did not leave the barracks and stayed there fulfilling purely professional military duties. ...but what happened was that all the military ... were tossed into the common grave with DOI-CODI and the intelligence services."** He feared that the attitude of blaming all the military would persist "for many years and many generations."¹

The Brazilian Armed Forces are shielding a small minority of their predecessors at the expense of the current reputation of their institutions. The

¹ Oral history testimony of General Octavio Costa in Glaucio Ary Dillon Soares, Maria Celina D'Araujo, Celso Castro (Eds), *A Volta aos Quartéis: A Memória Militar Sobre a Abertura* (Rio de Janeiro: Dumara, 1995), p.141. On the DOI-CODI, military intelligence units, see Michael L. Conniff & Frank D. McCann, eds., *Modern Brazil: Elites and Masses in Historical Perspective* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), pp.266-269.

immense pain of relatives and friends who lost loved ones needs to be alleviated. Once that is done the armed forces can get on with building institutions committed to preserving Brazil's democratic society. Continued denial will make the future bleak indeed, especially because it will distort the education of future Brazilian officers.

The Brazilian Armed Forces have the manpower, organization and experience to handle their current missions. They are avoiding involvement in politics. **They want to be respected internally and internationally as professional forces dedicated to projecting national power so as to increase Brazil's stature in the world.** They have gone a long way toward hardening the nation's soft power, but whether the country has the political will to continue to build up and expand its armed forces is an open question.

Critics would ask why have a strong military if threats to national security seem nebulous? What had appeared possible a year ago is now in doubt because Brazil fell into a recession in August 2015 which is predicted to continue through 2016. The *Real* has fallen markedly against the Dollar. Added to the shocking *Petrobras* scandal and widespread disenchantment with President Dilma there are now the tensions produced by the cuts in federal spending for health, education, and city services that are especially felt by the poor and middle classes. Some analysts predict that recovery may extend as far as 2023.

How the current economic-political crisis will affect the Armed Forces is simply unknown. Even so the Armed Forces are accustomed to tight budgets and are good at finding ways to adapt to the lack of money. The purchases of jets and the construction of the atomic submarine will go forward thanks to the laying aside of funds for those projects. More likely the construction of new frontier platoon posts will be delayed. It is perhaps well to recall the comment by a British ambassador more than a century ago that **“in Brazil ... the unexpected always happens....”**²

² Ambassador William Haggard to Foreign Minister Edward Grey, Petropolis, July 1, 1912, in Brazil, “Annual Report 1911,” p. 8; Foreign Office: Confidential Print 1912, The National Archives (United Kingdom).Kew.