

The Brazilian Military Dictatorship: A Present Past¹

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The 1964 coup in Brazil launched a military dictatorship that for two decades subjected diverse social groups to authoritarianism and repressive violence. In 1985, the last military president was replaced by a civilian government, following an agreement between dissident factions of the dictatorship and a section of the democratic opposition. This agreed transition allowed military institutions to remain untouched and united, protected from punishment or any need to express regret, while the Constitution approved in 1988 tried to set the grounds for a lasting democracy. These events from the 1980s have continued to shape politics in Brazil, including the more recent political scenario: since 2014, the country has experienced a radical shift to the right that has strengthened those discourses nostalgic for the dictatorship and given rise to the phenomenon of Bolsonarism.

The purpose of my presentation is to synthesize some aspects of the Brazilian regime as a means to understand the present political situation. I conclude by commenting on the role of the military corporation in the current Lula government and develop some hypotheses concerning the political future

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of the armed forces in Brazil. The coup that overthrew President João Goulart in April 1964 affected not only Brazil, but also Latin America in general in the context of the global Cold War. The event is considered the beginning of a new authoritarian cycle in the region, the essential feature of which was the control exercised by military corporations that aimed to build lasting authoritarian regimes. As in subsequent coups in other countries, the Brazilian military and their civilian allies presented themselves as defenders of the nation against the communist or Marxist enemy, perceived as the local expression of a global threat.

Pre-existing liberal-democratic systems were thus suspended on the grounds that it was necessary to protect national security and the social order against red subversives. But the dictatorships also used economic projects to legitimize themselves, especially the Brazilian regime, which invested to expand economic activities (industry and agriculture) and increase employment opportunities. The most impressive period of economic growth occurred between 1968 and 1973, which official propaganda called the “economic miracle.” However, this hype concealed the negative side of the “Brazilian miracle,” which was based on reducing real wages and increasing income concentration. Furthermore, the growth phase soon passed, leaving a legacy of hyperinflation and out-of-control foreign debt.

In parallel with economic expansion, violence was used to repress the dictatorship's opponents, especially on the left and in progressive sectors, but also some liberals who dared to disagree with the authoritarian nature of the regime. Approximately 440 people were murdered by the state, mostly militants of the revolutionary left. This figure does not include the hundreds of peasants killed by farmers in local conflicts, nor the thousands of indigenous people whose lands were located in areas earmarked for economic expansion by the dictatorship, especially in Amazonia.

Despite the repressive violence and its dramatic consequences, the Brazilian dictatorship adopted a peculiar political system when we consider its congeners. It allowed parliamentary houses and political parties to function, apparently committing itself to the pillars of liberal democracy. However, political institutions and the judiciary suffered purges and interventions whenever the military leaders deemed it necessary. The militaries allowed some liberal concessions only to maintain the support of influential allies (domestic and foreign) and to conceal the dictatorial character of their political regime.

Another aspect of this authoritarian political system was the institution of indirect elections for the presidency, as rulers feared they would be defeated were popular suffrage allowed. Besides guaranteeing their power, indirect elections were also adopted to give an appearance of liberal legitimacy and to normalize the presidential succession, avoiding the figure of the permanent

dictator. Presidents were chosen by the military and then endorsed by an electoral college, essentially composed of the parliamentarians from the only two authorized parties. The same mechanism was applied for determining the governors of the Brazilian federal states. This system was far from democratic, but it offered a certain flexibility that helped placate criticism and alleviate conflicts. Paradoxically, the mechanism of indirect election for president would be used by the opposition to bring the dictatorship to an end, as we shall see.

Beginning in 1974, the third military government, led by General Ernesto Geisel, began a slow political decompression that would culminate ten years later with the return of civilians to power. His plan was not to democratize the country in the short term, but to reduce repression to benefit liberal allies, especially in the press and parliament. His intention was to promote limited liberalization, therefore, taking advantage of the fact that the dictatorship was at its peak thanks to apparent economic success and the defeat of the left-wing armed resistance.

Soon, though, two factors complicated the project of political decompression under military control, forcing changes in course. First, the new government coincided with the global crisis that ended the post-World War II economic expansion (the glorious thirty), which until the fateful year of 1973 had favoured the dictatorship's economic "miracle." In Brazil, the effects of the global crisis were spiralling inflation and the reduction of private sector investment in productive activities. The second major challenge to the dictatorship from 1974

onwards was growing parliamentary opposition and increasing demands and activism from social movements. In the first case, the opposition party authorized by the dictatorship (the Brazilian Democratic Movement) achieved an equivalent or higher vote than the official party (the Alliance for National Renewal) from 1974 on. As for the social movements, from 1976 they expanded protests against social problems and for democratic changes. The first milestone of the new phase of social activism was the student demonstrations of the first semester of 1977. However, the most important event was the workers strike in the heart of the metallurgical industry in May 1978, which made Lula da Silva famous. The cycle of strikes would expand over the following years, consolidating the sensation that the dictatorship's economic project had failed and that the population would no longer tolerate the military government.

The new scenario led the dictatorship's leaders to accelerate political liberalization from 1979, culminating in abolition of the most repressive laws and in the amnesty project. The amnesty law drafted by the dictatorship was approved in August 1979 by a divided Congress, becoming the milestone of the democratic transition and remaining a problem to this day. The controversial aspect is that the law also involved the forgetting of crimes committed by State repressive agents in their anti-leftist offensive. The strategy adopted by the regime's leaders was to accept the demands for amnesty to be given to people

targeted by state repression, but also to include 'self-amnesty' in the package, offering protection from future criminal prosecution.

The same year, 1979, saw the beginning of what would be the last dictatorial government, headed by General João Figueiredo. His mandate was marked by an increase in both economic crises and opposition activism, while he also had to deal with terrorist attacks by military personnel dissatisfied with political liberalization. Unpopular and lacking a clear strategy to elect his successor, Figueiredo ended up facilitating the opposition's rise to power after the end of his term in 1985. However, the opposition did not have enough strength to impose full democratization, which would require a presidential election by popular vote. An attempt was made to amend the dictatorial constitution to re-establish direct elections. To this end, all sectors of the opposition united in street demonstrations that rallied crowds in the *Diretas Já* (Direct Elections Now) campaign. However, the constitutional amendment was not approved by the Chamber, albeit by a few votes, which demonstrated the residual power of the military. Nonetheless, moderate opposition leaders used the crisis in the dictatorship and popular discontent to build a victorious candidacy for the indirect elections to the presidency held in January 1985. The pact involved the choice of a senior opposition leader to head the ticket, Tancredo Neves, with a politician who had served the dictatorship, José Sarney, running as his deputy.

The Neves-Sarney ticket's easy victory over the far-right candidate Paulo Maluf (480 votes to 180) was attributable to several factors, including the promise to the military that they would not suffer reprisals from the new government. The democratic forces had a limited victory, since, in addition to forgetting crimes perpetrated by the military and maintaining the amnesty law, the 'New Republic' allowed several former supporters of the dictatorship to convert into born-again democrats. The opposition thus had the strength to prevent the continuity of the dictatorship but not to impose a deeper process of democratization.

In 1985, the military relinquished control of the government and returned to the barracks. However, the memory of the dictatorship kept them united as they continued to consider the regime a period of heroism and patriotic achievements. The military unity and their prestige among some social groups granted them the power to veto several measures planned by civilian governments. During the debate over the 1988 Constitution, for example, the military lobby was able to prevent overturning of the amnesty law, the aim of some of the legislators. Another important victory was the approval of a constitutional article (n. 142) authorizing any of the powers of the Republic to mobilize the Armed Forces when threats to law and order arose.

The 1988 Constitution was the apex of the democratic transition and included important social policies, such as recognition of indigenous peoples'

right to their ancestral lands. However, as well as blocking any investigation of the dictatorship's crimes, the military reacted to what they considered an excessive empowerment of the left. In the view of those senior officers most committed to repressive policies, the return of the leftist leaders to the public scene meant nullifying their defeat in the 'battlefield.' One of the main complaints of these backers of the dictatorship was that the young democracy allowed denunciations against human rights abuses to circulate, so that their anti-subversive 'heroes' began to be denounced as torturers and murderers, while former guerrilla fighters were elected or appointed to public offices.

Reacting to this scenario, from the mid-1980s military defenders of the dictatorship took steps to propagate their ideas, especially the compilation of data and the publication of books on the violent actions committed by the left, in addition to the organization of military reserve groups, such as *Inconfidência*, *Guararapes* and *Terrorismo Nunca Mais*, dedicated to anti-leftist propaganda and the dissemination of a positive memory of the dictatorship.

From the 1990s onwards, these military groups had more reasons for annoyance. In 1990, and although a former supporter of the dictatorship, President Collor de Melo abolished those information agencies still active, including the National Information Service, created in 1964 following the coup. In 1995, President Fernando Henrique Cardoso took an initiative more disturbing to the military by establishing the Special Commission on Dead and Missing

People, although it was limited to offering financial reparations to some families of victims of the dictatorship and did not investigate the crimes committed against them. The extreme right was also upset when, in 1999, Cardoso established a Ministry of Defence run by civilians, while the military were accustomed to managing their corporations without being accountable to civilians.

A new era in civilian-military relations began with Lula da Silva's victory and the left-wing rise to power in 2002. True, some military personnel temporarily put aside anti-leftist prejudices and welcomed the new president, who took initiatives to please them such as modernizing the armed forces' equipment and increasing their salaries, as well as sending troops to international UN missions, such as the peacekeeping mission in Haiti. Lula also sought to placate conflicts between the military and their civilian chiefs. This explains why he accepted Defence Minister José Viegas's resignation in November 2004 after friction when the Army command made speeches favourable to the dictatorship. By adopting such attitudes, Lula managed to avoid military crises in his government, but did not reduce the traditional indisposition of the Armed Forces against the left, which after all formed part of the government. Some of the Lula government initiatives displeased the military, including its support for the Landless Workers' Movement, the expansion of reparation policies for victims of

the dictatorship, and the demarcation of indigenous lands – an issue that perturbs the military as they believe it implies the internationalization of the Amazon.

Military unrest increased under Lula's successor, former guerrilla and political prisoner Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016). Right-wing indignation was sparked by Dilma's political past but was probably also due to a sexist indisposition against Brazil's first female president. Some initiatives of the new president, less conciliatory than Lula, further provoked the radical and conservative right, already on the rise since the turn of the twenty-first century. One of the most sensitive issues was the program of affirmative action policies in the cultural, racial and gender areas. The Rousseff government deepened actions initiated by the Lula administration in favour of black people, women, LGBT groups, indigenous people and low-income populations. This entire agenda offended the conservative right, but probably the most high-profile theme was the accusation that the left intended to encourage children to adopt homosexual behaviours.

From the military and police viewpoints, the two most uncomfortable issues involved the policy agenda to safeguard the human rights of ordinary criminals and, above all, the deepening investigations into the dictatorship's crimes. The most controversial measure was the creation of the National Truth Commission (2012-2014), which the military considered a 'stab in the back' as it would broaden public interest in the subject and lift the veil of amnesia. They

also protested because the NTC had no representatives from the Armed Forces and no willingness to investigate the actions of the armed left. In the view of the NTC members, however, their role was to focus on the crimes committed by state agents, not least because the actions of the armed left had been investigated and punished (including by torture and murder) during the dictatorship.

Protests against the NTC's activities increased the circulation of nostalgic discourses concerning the dictatorship and its military leadership, promoting the rapprochement between diverse groups dissatisfied with the PT governments, especially the authoritarian, religious and conservative right-wing factions. It should be noted that the reactions against the NTC ended up publicizing Deputy Jair Bolsonaro, a former Army captain and over the years a defender of conservative and authoritarian agendas. He had left the Army in 1987 after being accused of planning a terrorist attack in protest against low wages, an episode that led to him being distrusted by his peers. However, Bolsonaro's speeches against the NTC led to his rapprochement with the barracks.

Thus, in the context of the NTC's activities during the first Rouseff government, the Brazilian political setting witnessed a gradual shift to the right. Analyzing the transnational connections of this process properly would take time. But it is clear that a part of the radical right was inspired by models originating in the United States and diverse European countries, though adapted to the local context and mixed with national traditions.

A key moment in this right-wing turn was June 2013, when a surprising cycle of street protests initiated a change in the political landscape. The demonstrations were started by young leftists, but gradually their leadership passed to right-wing groups opposed to Rousseff's government. The right-wing upsurge and radicalization made the 2014 elections fiercer. Dilma Rousseff ended up winning re-election by a narrow margin of votes, but there was an expansion in anti-PT discourses, which represented a kind of anti-communism updated for the twenty-first century.

It is essential to note that from the end of 2014 the Lava-Jato (Car Wash) operation increased the anti-PT street demonstrations. The Lava-Jato investigations against state corruption would end up focusing on PT, a political manoeuvre that became more evident over the following years. The rhetoric blaming the left for corruption coincided with the impact of the economic crisis at the beginning of Rousseff's second term, which eliminated a factor (economic growth) that had reduced right-wing indisposition towards PT governments. This context led to Dilma Rousseff's impeachment in 2016 – effectively a parliamentary coup justified through the rhetoric of fighting corruption.

The anti-PT mobilizations and the increased circulation of right-wing speeches were used to transform Bolsonaro into a national leader, backing his candidacy for the following presidential elections. A striking moment in this journey was his declaration during the vote to impeach Dilma Rousseff. In the

Chamber of Deputies session of 17 April 2016, he stated that his support for impeachment represented a vote against communism, for the family, for God and for the Armed Forces and a tribute to Colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra. For Bolsonaro, Ustra was a hero in the fight against communist guerrillas, while for the left and human rights organizations he was one of the main figures responsible for torture, murders and disappearances. One shocking aspect of Bolsonaro's speech was that Ustra commanded the military unit where Rousseff was tortured.

Fuelled by the context of radicalization, Bolsonaro's candidacy grew to the point of him winning the 2018 elections, an unprecedented event since the far right had never achieved more than 10% of the vote. The Bolsonaro phenomenon was made possible by the unification of diverse right-wing segments, mainly the conservative and authoritarian, but also by the support of liberal sectors won over by his pro-market discourses. In addition, he benefited from public dissatisfaction with the economic crisis and from the widespread feeling among voters that all parties and leaders were implicated in corruption.

The military's return to the public scene occurred in parallel with the emergence of Bolsonarism. The phenomenon was already visible in 2015 when military leaders like General Hamilton Mourão, at the time commander of the South region and later elected Bolsonaro's vice president, started to issue aggressive statements in defence of authoritarian measures. But militarization

began to be officially encouraged during the government of Michel Temer, who assumed the presidency after Rousseff's impeachment in 2016, when the military were invited to occupy important public positions and expand their actions in the repression of common crime.

However, it was in Bolsonaro's government that the militarization process reached its peak – and it is no coincidence that his candidacy was planned by a group of influential retired generals. Under his government, approximately 6,000 military personnel were appointed to diverse types of public offices and there were 11 military ministers, a record. A significant aspect of the militarization of public space was that there was an explosion in military candidacies for parliamentary functions with dozens becoming elected.

Following Bolsonaro's inauguration in January 2019, the federal government pursued a series of radical and conservative right-wing agendas. These included the reduction of gun control in the name of the right of 'good' citizens to defend themselves from criminals (and farmers to 'defend themselves' from peasants claiming land rights); encouragement of police violent action against criminal suspects without risk of punishment for human rights offenses; suppression of social policies aimed at underprivileged groups, especially indigenous and LGBT peoples; reduction of enforcement against environmental crimes, acting as an incentive to deforestation and exploitation of indigenous lands; reduction of funds for education and scientific research; and reduction of

state expenditures and public sector wages (except the military, of course). Among the Bolsonaro government controversies, we can highlight its actions in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, especially the sabotage of vaccine and social isolation programs to prioritize the “herd immunity” strategy. The consequences were a health disaster of criminal proportions, which was not worse thanks to the vaccination programs adopted by other public authorities.

As for the authoritarian and militaristic character of the Bolsonaro government, it is worth mentioning its glorification of the memory of the dictatorship, a strategy intended to prepare the way for a new anti-democratic offensive. Among other initiatives we can pick out the speeches commemorating the anniversaries of the coup (March 31) that initiated the dictatorship, which, in the words of Bolsonaro and his military ministers, was to be celebrated as a victory of democracy against communism. These speeches denied that a coup with dictatorial consequences had occurred in 1964, reframing it as a revolution followed by an ‘exceptional’ democratic regime. These negationist versions echoed the kind of statements made by dictatorship leaders in the 1960s and 1970s, who classified the regime as ‘conditional democracy,’ ‘Brazilian democracy’ or ‘organic democracy.’ It is important to highlight that Bolsonaro’s denialism concerning the events of 1964 incited attempts to intimidate academic researchers dedicated to the subject, as well as the censorship of entrance exams

to public higher education, vetoing questions referring to the dictatorship in History tests.

The Bolsonaro government sought to foment other links with the years of dictatorship, such as honouring officers who had acted on the frontline against the left – and not only the infamous Brilhante Ustra, but also Major ‘Curió,’ a self-confessed murderer of the guerrilla fighters arrested by the Army in the Araguaia River area. Another prominent action in this line was the creation of ‘civic-military’ schools, a partnership between the Ministries of Education and Defence that involved hiring retired military personnel to work in schools to influence the formation of young people’s values.

All these speeches and initiatives glorifying the past dictatorship were connected to very present authoritarian projects. In fact, the military regime was never overthrown entirely and thus never ceased to be present. But the continuing presence of the authoritarian past acquired a severity never seen prior to the Bolsonaro government, which made various demonstrations of indisposition towards democratic institutions, suggesting that they could be ignored or abolished.

The far-right leader’s first demonstrations of authoritarianism came early in his government, in May 2019, when he encouraged protests organized by his followers against the legislature and the judiciary. This was the first evidence of an intention to subjugate the two other branches of the Brazilian Republic to the

president's will. Significantly, the Bolsonarist street demonstrations adopted slogans inspired by memory of the dictatorship, such as calls for military intervention or for a new Institutional Act 5, an authoritarian decree issued by the military regime in 1968. Over time, Bolsonaro's conflicts with the judiciary worsened, especially following criminal investigations involving him and his children, while he sought to win over the parliamentary majority by allowing them to control the federal budget, a strategy designed to please them and avoid the risk of impeachment. It is important to add that Brazil's main civic date, the commemoration of Independence (September 7), was used to agitate the Bolsonarist grassroots and stir authoritarian patriotism, while the president mobilized the Armed Forces on these occasions in gestures intended to threaten the democratic institutions.

The military were used specially to put pressure on Brazil's electoral system, which is based on electronic voting devices considered secure by independent analysts. Even so, and although he was elected by means of the same system, Bolsonaro created controversy by arguing that electronic voting devices were susceptible to fraud and needed to be monitored by the military. Various times he demanded reinstatement of the traditional paper ballot, threatening in his campaign for re-election that otherwise he would refuse to recognize a victory of his opponent, Lula da Silva. Lula had returned to the political scene after release from prison in November 2019 and was able to run as

a candidate from April 2021 after the Supreme Court annulled his original conviction. The turnaround came after the release of evidence showing that Sergio Moro, the same judge who accepted Bolsonaro's invitation to become Minister of Justice, had manipulated Lula's trial. As the polls began to show the likelihood of Lula's victory in the October 2022 elections, Bolsonaro amplified criticism of the electoral system and pressure for the Armed Forces to support his pretensions, proclaiming that PT's return to power would be disastrous.

Finally, Lula's electoral victory generated the expected reaction from the Bolsonarists. Within hours of the election, several groups erected roadblocks in different regions of the country, causing lengthy traffic jams. Simultaneously, other groups set up camps in front of Army barracks, and both movements demanded military intervention to reverse the outcome of the elections and thus prevent Lula's inauguration. During the remaining two months of Bolsonaro's government, the camps in front of the Army barracks continued with the tacit consent of various military leaders, but the road blockades were dismantled due to the sizeable economic losses they provoked.

The culmination of the Bolsonarist reaction occurred a few days after Lula's inauguration, on January 8, when the new government was still thinking of strategies to deal with the extreme right-wing inclinations of most military personnel. It was a mixture of attempted coup and an act of vandalism, as thousands of people stormed the buildings of the three branches of the Republic

and destroyed everything they found, from works of art to furniture. Leaders of the Brasília district government and part of the security forces supported the invaders and tried to prevent the repression of the attack. Faced with this critical situation, Lula's government decreed an intervention in Brasilia and ordered the retaking of the buildings and the dismantling of the camp set up in front of the Army command, leading to the arrest of approximately 2,100 people. The investigations, not yet completed, have revealed that several military leaders are implicated in the episode, either by their failure to act or by encouraging and protecting the coup plotters.

Police investigations into the 8 January attack also found evidence of Bolsonaro's government involvement in conspiratorial plots. A compromising text was seized at the home of the Minister of Justice of the Bolsonaro government, indicating that he had attempted to launch a coup to remain in power. Bolsonaro allegedly tried to convince the military high command to prevent Lula's inauguration, but failed to garner enough support for an action that was unlikely to generate a stable government. More recently, two weeks ago, Bolsonaro's former military assistant, Colonel Mauro Cid, was arrested on charges of defrauding his boss's vaccination record. By investigating his cellphone, police found more evidence that Bolsonaro's inner circle was, in fact, preparing a coup d'état after his electoral defeat. We are eagerly awaiting the next

chapter of the investigation process to figure out what will happen to Bolsonaro and Bolsonarism.

Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, amnesty for the crimes committed by state agents in political repression activities was one of the preconditions for the negotiated transition that brought the military dictatorship to an end, which also involved a policy of ‘forgetting’ the past. At the time, some observers believed this was a safer path towards stability, while in Argentina, where the dictatorship collapsed and conciliation had no significant role, the spectacular military trials would foster new authoritarian coups. But it seems clear today that Brazil’s negotiated transition limited the attempts to defeat authoritarianism and had implications for the recent growth of the radical right. There are two main questions involved here. First, the military were allowed to believe they were beyond punishment and that their actions were patriotic and heroic. Secondly, the official policy of ‘forgetting’ prevented the population from being educated about the evil of dictatorships. However, the PT governments’ move away from official amnesia by establishing the NTC helped provoke the ultra-rightist turn that changed the Brazilian scenario.

In any event, since the failed Bolsonarist coup Brazil has been facing a historical opportunity. The ultra-right was discredited by its vandalistic

behaviour on 8 January, Bolsonaro is on the verge of being prosecuted and the military corporation is confronting a decline in its traditional popularity. Hence, the institutions and leaders committed to democracy now have the chance to force the military to retreat to their barracks. When they started to reoccupy the public sphere after Rousseff's impeachment, many military personnel declared they were skilled technicians able to solve Brazil's problems and only leftist prejudice had been hindering them from doing so. After their disastrous conduct while supporting Bolsonaro and his administration, it is time to make clear that the country does not necessitate military involvement in civilian issues. We do not need protection against supposed internal enemies; at the most, we need defence from possible foreign threats.

The solution to this 'military question' demands that the justice system punish those involved in the attacks against the democratic institutions. After 8 January, this process seemed to be under way as hundreds of those involved were held in jail while investigations were carried out by police to legally substantiate their prosecution. The question is whether justice will be done or whether these crimes too will be forgotten – a national tradition when social elites are at stake. Let us hope that judges will be courageous and adhere to their duties, even when the suspects belong to the upper echelons. Punishment is essential to show that authoritarian interventions will no longer be tolerated or forgotten as in the past.

The other fundamental actor in this process is the executive branch. Yet Lula would have to change the conciliatory style predominant during his first government. The moment demands a president capable of showing the military that they must bow to their commander-in-chief, who occupies such a position thanks to the popular vote. Auspicious signs appeared when Lula fired the Army commander who prevented the police from removing the Bolsonarist camp in front of the Brasília barracks, replacing him with a general who declared that the Army should accept the will of the people. Additionally, the government announced its intention to tighten the rules regarding military participation in politics. But against the advice of part of PT, Lula retained a Minister of Defence considered overly sympathetic to the military. This minister and other government aides pressured Lula to act softly on this issue, claiming that pushing too hard would provoke a dangerous military crisis.

Undoubtedly, a military crisis would be risky as they could try to undermine the newly installed government. But inaction could be riskier still as the military has shown a willingness to support an authoritarian government only (or primarily) due to its anti-leftist stance. In addition to what has been mentioned previously, the executive could explore other options. Some interesting initiatives were suggested in previous years by diverse observers and were initially embraced by PT, only to be abandoned during the presidential campaign. For example, the Brazilian constitution could be amended to rescind

the article stipulating that any branch of the republic can mobilize the armed forces to guarantee 'law and order'; the Military Justice, as a permanent institution, could also be abolished to reduce the power and autonomy of the corporation; the executive (or the legislature) could intervene in the promotion of officers to prevent the empowerment of military personnel inclined to authoritarianism; and schools and military leaders should stop teaching that the armed forces saved Brazil in 1964 and that torturers can be heroes. Above all, to avoid new episodes of military authoritarianism, they need to abandon their anti-leftist obsessions and prejudices. They do not have to love the left, but they should not use their strength to interfere in democratic political competition. But we should not be naive here since changes in cultural values take time.

Finally, a new defence strategy needs to be developed to shift the military away from domestic politics and involve them in activities more relevant and compatible with democracy. One of the questions is whether it is time to change a hundred-year-old military structure that relies on recruiting 18-year-olds scattered in barracks across the country. This model was designed to strengthen the patriotism of Brazil's youth and make the Army present throughout the country, including for political purposes. Beginning in the 1930s, the political use of the armed forces was reinforced by the anti-leftist obsession, which further increased during the Cold War.

It is time for us to move away from these negative traditions. Perhaps a more professional and smaller force than the approximately 300,000 poorly trained young men in uniform would serve the country better, provided they were well trained and equipped, and capable of rapid displacement. Maybe after the armed forces have been restructured, the military will use their time and energy away from politics. But such a course requires more civilian participation in defence issues, including the development of the skills needed to get the military to submit to democratic institutions. Unfortunately, the democratic governments of the previous years failed to develop such a policy. Let us hope things will change for better in the near future.