

Diplomats and Soldiers in Cold War Brazil: Brazilian diplomats at the Superior War College (1949-1964)

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Abstract: Inspired by American military schools such as the School of the Americas, the Brazilian War College – or, in Portuguese, Escola Superior de Guerra (ESG) – was founded in 1949 with the purpose of becoming the focal point for geopolitical and strategic discussions in Brazil, designed to focus on matters of national defence, security and development. Since its early days, courses were also open to civilians, some of whom were career diplomats. According to the list of former students on ESG's official website, from 1950 to 1964, around 67 diplomats studied at the school. At the same time, according to documents found in the Itamaraty Historical Archives in Rio de Janeiro and Brasília, diplomats also taught classes and were part of the ESG's board. Since many of the diplomats that had taught and/or studied at the Brazilian War College later occupied prominent roles during the Brazilian Military Regime (1964-1985), we believe that the ESG played an important role in allowing the exchange of ideas between the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also known as Itamaraty, and the Brazilian Armed Forces. This was especially influential with regard to matters such as the fight against subversion and Communism. Consequently, this paper will provide an understanding of the importance of the Brazilian War College in the relations between Brazilian diplomats and the Brazilian Army during the early stages of the Cold War.

Keywords: Cold War; Brazilian War College; Itamaraty; Armed Forces

Introduction

This paper, which is partially derived from the second chapter of my ongoing PhD dissertation, focus on the role played by diplomats at the Brazilian War College, known as Escola Superior de Guerra (ESG) in Portuguese. The main question is to understand how diplomats contributed to ESG's strategic thought. My hypothesis is that not only diplomats were perceived as the elite of the civilian ministries by the military, but there was an endogenous thought inside the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also known as Itamaraty, regarding the fight against what was perceived as subversive activities – not only Communism, but also Peronism and other ideologies. Methodologically, this is a qualitative research, focused on archival and biographical sources, especially Itamaraty's historical archive in Brasília and Rio de Janeiro and the Brazilian National Archive.

Since the literature on Brazilian Foreign Policy tends to justify the low military intervention inside Itamaraty after the 1964 Coup D'état and its relative autonomy on the grounds of the institutional similarities between the Armed Forces and the ministry, I believe that this paper will contribute to understand how this relationship came to be.

The early stage of Cold War in Brazil

The end of World War II in 1945 marked a new era in international politics. Nazi-fascism was defeated and the world witnessed the emergence of two former members of the Allied Forces as new superpowers, the United States, and the Soviet Union. Among them, two distinct ideologies which would determine the faith of the world over the next 40 years, especially the periphery of the international system¹.

In the immediate postwar years, notwithstanding, the Third World, especially Latin America, remained under the radar of strategic and security concerns of the United States (McMahon, 2017), with the U.S including assisting Latin American countries to establish relations with the Soviet Union. According to Rabe (2012: 30), Harry Truman's (1945-1953) undersecretary of State, Joseph Grew, facilitated the contact between the Soviet ambassador and Brazilian diplomats. The fact that Latin America was not a top priority in the new postwar system enabled the continent to witness a period of democratic blossom, with the fall of authoritarian regimes and the rise of social movements and leftist parties (Bethell; Roxborough, 1988).

This would be brief, though. By 1947, President Truman would introduce the Truman Doctrine and his politics of containment of Soviet expansion. Latin America, however, did not receive the same attention as Europe, nor it was considered a centerpiece at the strategic puzzle of the Cold War at first. Both the US and the Soviet Union perceived Latin America as a hemispheric, local issue (Brevins, 2020). In 1947, the United States and Latin American countries signed the Rio Treaty (TIAR – *Tratado Interamericano de Assistência Recíproca*), which postulated the terms for hemispheric defense, tying Latin-American countries up in case of a Soviet offensive against the United States. Truman's staff knew that anti-communist policies in Latin America could endorse the rise of authoritarian figures. Notwithstanding, they started a trend that

¹ Although there is some discussion in the literature regarding the meaning of the word 'periphery', many use it as a synonym of the 'Third World' during the Cold War era (McMahon, 2017). Thus, I will use both terms interchangeably.

would be perceived along the rest of the Cold War: rather a pro-American authoritarian regime than a democratic nationalist regime (Rabe, 2012).

Even if U.S. strategy could face resistance in other countries, in Brazil they were merged with the country's long-standing anticommunist tradition (Brevins, 2020: 111; Sá Motta, 2000; Setemy, 2013). Thus, while Latin America witnessed a brief period of political effervescence and democratic development, it also observed a strong anticommunist backlash, especially in Brazil.

In 1945 the country was leaving the *Estado Novo* dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas, with new elections in the horizon. The winner of the ballot was Vargas' former War Minister, General Eurico Gaspar Dutra, who took office in 1946 and stayed in power until 1951. Before the beginning of the Cold War, Communism was considered, in Brazil, a matter of social order; instead of the Armed Forces, the main source of repression was the police. With regards to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at that time Itamaraty worked closely with the political police, especially during the *Estado Novo* to monitor the political activities of immigrants (Sá Motta, 2000; Setemy, 2013; Tôrres, 2013). However, it was during Dutra's administration that Communism started being seen as a matter of national security, replacing the Fascist menace (Setemy, 2013).

Dutra's government, though, followed an anticommunist stance: in 1947, the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) was outlawed for the second time in its history (the first time being in 1927 due to the Celerada Law approved during the presidency of Washington Luís), and Brazil broke diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, going further than the US government itself.

The context of the Cold War also allowed Dutra to reorganize Brazil's security apparatus created during the *Estado Novo* (Setemy, 2013: 67). In 1946, he reorganized the National Security Council (Conselho de Segurança Nacional – CSN), responsible for 'studying matters related to national security'² through the Decree-Laws 9.775 and 9.775-A³. The CSN would be constituted by the Ministers of the State, the Chief of the General Staff and de Chiefs of Staff of the Army, Navy and Air Force. The Decree-Law 9.775 also stated that each civilian ministry must have a National Security Section

² AHI BSB. Caixa 188. 502.35 – Conselho de Segurança Nacional.

³ Decreto-Lei nº 9.775, de 6 de Setembro de 1946 <

<https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/declei/1940-1949/decreto-lei-9775-6-setembro-1946-417547-public-acaoriginal-1-pe.html> > 05.05.2021

(NSS). The decree enabled Itamaraty to restructure its own section (which was originally founded in 1939) through the decree 23.944 from October 28th, 1947⁴.

The decree 23.944, signed by Dutra's foreign minister, Raul Fernandes (1946-1951), states that the National Security Section would be subordinated to the Foreign Ministry and in close collaboration with CSN's secretary general, focusing on analyzing any matter of national security that could be of interest⁵. The NSS would be composed by five career diplomats, mandatorily the heads of the Border, Economic, and Political divisions, with the latter being head of the NSS. The security section would be under the responsibility of Itamaraty's Secretary General, the second highest position in the ministry's hierarchy, after the Foreign Minister himself.

Mainly, the National Security Section documents show that Itamaraty paid close attention to the rise of communist activities not only in Brasil, but in countries like Argentina, Chile and even in countries like Japan, not forgetting the Soviet Union itself. It also monitored the activities of anti-communists groups in the United States⁶. But, more importantly, the NSS focused on the arrival of immigrants and refugees which could be of potential risk to the national security – those coming from “undesirable places” or the activities of Brazilian nationals in communist and neutralist countries⁷.

The documents also show a close relationship between diplomats and the members of the National Security Council, especially the members of the Armed Forces. For the Brazilian Truth Commission (2014), it was the information apparatus reorganized during Dutra's administration that enabled the systematization of the repression conducted by the military dictatorship twenty years later.

Some members of Itamaraty's National Security Section from 1947 to 1964 would end up having important posts during the military dictatorship: Vasco Leitão da Cunha, which became head of the National Security Section in 1952, was appointed Castello Branco's Foreign Minister in 1964; Manoel Pio Corrêa, who became chief of the NSS in 1960, would be the responsible for the creation of the CIEX, or *Centro de Informações do Exterior*, in 1966 – the foreign arm of the dictatorship's information

⁴ AHI BSB. Caixa 188. 502.35 – Conselho de Segurança Nacional.

⁵ AHI BSB. Caixa 188. 502.35 – Conselho de Segurança Nacional and AHI RJ. Presidência da República 9/3/9 – Conselho de Segurança Nacional – Ofícios – 1943-58

⁶ AHI RJ. Presidência da República. 9/3/9. Conselho de Segurança Nacional. Ofícios. 1943-58

⁷ AHI RJ. 135/3/2. Departamento Político e Cultural. Informações e relatórios. Março 1946-1954 and AHI RJ. 9/3/9. Conselho de Segurança Nacional. Ofícios. 1948-58

community; Antônio Camillo de Oliveira, the first chief of the NSS, was the responsible for the internal investigation committee that exonerated members of the Brazilian Foreign Service after the 1964 Coup D'état; and his assistant at the NSS, Antônio Cândido da Câmara Canto was not only one of the members of the second internal investigation committee of Itamaraty, which was installed in January 1969, after the promulgation of the Institutional Act no. 5 in December 1968, but was also the Brazilian Ambassador in Santiago de Chile during the coup that ousted Salvador Allende in September 11, 1973.⁸

While the CSN allowed a close relationship between the Armed Forces and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I believe that the creation of the Superior War College was what enabled the Armed Forces and Itamaraty to strengthen ties. In 1949, President Dutra, through the Law no. 785 from August 20th created the Superior War College (Escola Superior de Guerra – ESG). According to its regulation, the ESG was subordinated to the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, and its main objective was ‘designed to develop and consolidate the knowledge necessary for the exercise of management functions and for the planning of national security’. According to the article 5, ‘Officials of proven experience and aptitude belonging to the Armed Forces and civilians of notable competence and relevant performance in guiding and executing national policy will be admitted to the School’⁹.

The creation of a War College in Brazil was inspired by the military training centers in the United States, especially Fort Lavenworth, in the state of Kansas, Fort Benning, in the state of Georgia and Fort Gulick, located in Panama and known as School of the Americas, founded in 1946. With the beginning of the Cold War, the United States started an exchange program where members of the military from Third World countries allied with the United States would go to the US to study ‘operations, intelligence, and logistics’ (Brevins, 2020, p. 80). Many members of Latin-American armies, like Castello Branco, the first president of the military regime and the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, attended those courses. The influence of the American military academies was enormous not only in the Brazilian army, but also in the

⁸ These are the better-known examples – other career diplomats that were active in the NSS, like José Osvaldo de Meira Penna (secretary of the NSS in 1950) and Mário Vieira de Mello (appointed member in 1959) are, to this day, exponents of the Brazilian conservative thought, with their ideas praised by contemporary alt-right ideologues like Olavo de Carvalho and Rodrigo Constantino, for example.

⁹ Arquivo Nacional. Regulamento da Escola Superior de Guerra. BR_RJANRIO_RR_0_EAF_0021_d0001de0002

Chilean, Argentinian and even in the Indonesian army. The mindset taught in those training centers was based on a binary friend/foe lens, infusing an anti-communist, anti-Soviet, pro-US, and pro-market view in the military doctrines of those countries (Fico, 2008; Green, 2010; Oliveira, 1987; Brevins, 2020; Castilho, 2015). For some, the military cooperation, and the political and economic assistance of the United States during the 1940s and the 1950s helped build the authoritarian-bureaucratic regimes that would be seen in Latin America from the 1960s onward (Green, 2010).

The main product of the Brazilian War College was the formulation of the National Security Doctrine (Doutrina de Segurança Nacional – DSN), which played a major role in the policy formulation of the military regime. In general terms, the DSN focus on the role of the Armed Forces to guarantee stability and internal security (Skidmore, 1988).

However, the concepts of the DSN are quite malleable. That allowed a wide range of interpretation of those concepts and their use to justify authoritarian measures (Dreifuss, 1987; Pinheiro, 2013). The idea of national security creates, thus, the perception of a total ideology, according to Oliveira (1987, p. 47), a ‘global politics of the State’, where every aspects of life ‘must be safeguarded and protected’. During the Cold War, Brazil was facing a “Total War” against a powerful enemy, Communism, which blurred the boundaries between the external and the internal.

The DSN also played a major role in the formulation of the dictatorship’s foreign policy, especially during the Castello Branco government (1964 -1966). Castello Branco’s foreign policy was labeled “Concentric Circles policy” – in a world marked by the division between capitalism and communism, it was Brazil’s responsibility to help the United States to defend the western civilization. Thus, Brazil should act within its spheres of influence – first and foremost, the Americas, Western Africa, and Antarctica, ‘the decisive frontiers of south-American security’ (Couto e Silva, 1981, p.82). Next, Europe, Japan, and the Middle East. The greatest menaces of the free world were at the outermost circle, what Golbery do Couto e Silva (1981) called the “Moscow-Beijing axis”.

Until recently, the literature on Brazilian Foreign Policy considered that the “ideological side” of the Military Regime’s foreign policy was of sole responsibility of the National Security Council and the ideas of the National Security Doctrine (Pinheiro,

2013; Mello e Silva, 1996; Miyamoto and Gonçalves, 1993 and 2000; Ricupero, 2017; Vizontini, 1999). However, diplomats were an important part of the civilian arm of the Brazilian War College, not only attending courses but also as a part of the administration.

Diplomats at the Brazilian War College

Since its establishment in 1950, career diplomats have attended ESG training courses. Between 1950 and 1979, 111 career diplomats attended the courses – ambassadors, ministers, and advisers: of them, 67 attended ESG from 1950 to 1964. In his memoirs, Pio Corrêa (1995: 338) explains that Itamaraty went further than just sending diplomats to the college's courses. According to him, alongside the Army, the Navy and the Airforce, Itamaraty was part of ESG's administration board, occupying the posts of Vice-Director and the internship body. According to him, 'the Superior War College being a common site of the three Forces, became the center of intense confabulation, which I attended as a silent observer' (Pio Corrêa, 1995, p. 351).

Diplomats had preference regarding attendance: according to the 1949 statute, those who could apply to attend the courses at ESG were

- Officials with proven experience and aptitude, belonging to the Armed Forces of the Country, and
- Civilians of remarkable competence and outstanding performance in the formulation or execution of national policy, **especially the foreign policy**¹⁰.

Those diplomats who attended the war college were sent on the recommendation of the Foreign Ministry, and the article 26 of the regulation admitted civilian specialists as collaborators.¹¹ In a memo from February 1956 to the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, General Anor Teixeira dos Santos, foreign minister José Carlos de Macedo Soares nominated the diplomats Fernando Ramos de Alencar, Luiz de Souza Bandeira, Paulo Henrique de Paranaguá, and Luiz Octavio de Morin Parente de Mello to attend ESG on the grounds of article 26¹². Their names appear on ESG's graduate list from 1956, along with two other diplomats, ambassador Moacyr Ribeiro Briggs and Helio de Burgos Cabral. In the memo sent by Macedo Soares to General Santos, Ambassador

¹⁰ Arquivo Nacional. Regulamento da Escola Superior de Guerra. BR_RJANRIO_RR_0_EAF_0021_d0001de0002

¹¹ Arquivo Nacional. Regulamento da Escola Superior de Guerra. BR_RJANRIO_RR_0_EAF_0021_d0001de0002

¹² AHI RJ. 103/4/6. Ministério da Guerra. Estado Maior das Forças Armadas. Escola Superior de Guerra. Ofícios. 1956-1958

Briggs is nominated in the rules of article 52 of the ESG statute. However, in the original statute it has not been found an article 52. Notwithstanding, Macedo Soares may be referring to Article 42 of the statute, which states that

Art. 42 - The current officers of posts corresponding to General of Army and Division and those who are promoted to these posts until December 31, 1952, as well as civilians of recognized value will be able to follow the work of ESG without prejudice to their functions, by invitation of the Head of EMFA¹³.

The documents show that members of the diplomatic corps were made available to the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces to serve as assistant to the command of the Superior War College. In a memo from August 24, 1956, minister Macedo Soares wrote to General Teixeira dos Santos to replace the diplomat Luís Leiva Bastian Pinto, who was located at ESG and was summoned back to Itamaraty to serve at the ministry's general secretariat by Fernando Ramos de Alencar, which was studying at ESG at the time¹⁴.

Based on the documents available, we can infer that most diplomats sent to the War College were beginner or mid-career diplomats, although high rank diplomats (ambassadors) also attended their courses. Some diplomats who were present at ESG came to have prominent posts in the military regime: Vasco Leitão da Cunha, who attended the Superior War College while head of the National Security Section in 1953, became Castello Branco's foreign minister. Pio Corrêa, the architect of CIEX, was part of ESG's first class, in 1950. Mário Gibson Barboza, foreign minister of the Medici government (1969-1973), the period known as *anos de chumbo*, was member of the class of 1951.

Besides that, diplomats, especially the foreign ministers, also attended the school as panellists and lecturers. According to Moreira Lima (2018: 21), the Foreign Minister's discourses at ESG were of equal importance for the ministry as the discourses made for the class of new diplomats of the Rio Branco Institute, the minister's inauguration speech, showing the degree of importance of the exchange between diplomats and members of the Armed Forces.

¹³ Arquivo Nacional. Regulamento da Escola Superior de Guerra. BR_RJANRIO_RR_0_EAF_0021_d0001de0002

¹⁴ AHI RJ. 103/4/6. Ministério da Guerra. Estado Maior das Forças Armadas. Escola Superior de Guerra. Ofícios. 1956-1958

In those discourses, some ministers were armed with a Cold War rhetoric. João Neves da Fontoura, Getúlio Vargas' foreign minister from 1951-1953, in his speech at ESG in 1952, stated that:

The Brazilian position in the face of international current events and the prospect of a bloody outcome is not yet to be defined. It is fixed and fixed irremediably against the victory of communism. If we could consult the Brazilian people, through a plebiscite, about the direction they want to take in the face of the universal situation, I am sure that the vast majority of our country - due to its formation, the geographical position of Brazil, our moral and political background - would align overwhelmingly alongside the Western powers. That is because - another reason above all - communism destroys the dearest and most grateful prerogative to the heart of our people: all freedom, civil, spiritual and political. (Fontoura, 2018[1952], p. 104)

Afonso Arinos de Mello Franco, who would become João Goulart foreign minister in 1961, gave a speech at the Superior War College in 1958 about 'contemporary political doctrines and its relationship with national security' (p. 123), where he equalized communism and fascism as totalitarian doctrines and warned for the fact that, due to the lack of 'democratic education', the nationalist movements of the Third World would be captured by communism (Mello Franco, 2018[1958]: 135-136).

Concluding remarks

This is a preview of the section 2.2 of the second chapter of my PhD dissertation. In this section, I intend to show how the relationship between the diplomatic corps and the Armed Forces was strengthened through the participation of diplomats at the Brazilian War College. While there are still documents and speeches that I must further analyze, I believe that the preview of the documents quoted in this draft show that diplomats had a bigger role in the formulation of the national security doctrine than what is led to believe.

I believe that the participation of career diplomats at ESG strengthened a relationship that had begun a few years prior, with the creation of the National Security Council and the National Security Section of the civilian ministries. Most of time, the names of the diplomats that attended the courses of the Superior War College and had a role at the National Security Section between 1947 and 1964 overlap. As mentioned in

the paper, many diplomats who attended those courses had important roles during the military dictatorship.

The research so far shows that a group of diplomats, which I cannot say constitute the majority of the diplomatic corps, had a similar view to those propagated by the national security doctrine, and acted accordingly. However, they were not influenced by the military – rather, they also helped shape the doctrine that would influence the military regime.

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