

Soldier-Citizen: Positivism as a military doctrine in the Brazilian Army and its influence

Abstract

This article focuses on the Positivist roots of the military doctrine and philosophy of the Brazilian Army and its significance in justifying the armed forces' constant presence as a political actor. The focus of this research is on two significant periods of Brazilian history, which are argued to be connected by Brazilian positivist thinkers. We analyse the tenets adopted by philosophical military reformers during the late 19th and early 20th century and their galvanisation during the first important period, the First Republic.

Then, we observe the army doctrine of the second half of the 20th century and how noticeable elements of the positivist tract led to the events of 1964 and the establishment of the military regime that governed Brazil for the following 21 years. This article focuses on the beliefs and goals proposed by Auguste Comte and their adoption, adaptation and implementation by elements of the Brazilian Army.

Oftentimes with a direct impact on the regular course of civil life, the role the army has played, we believe, has been guided by a principle rooted in the Comtean principles of the soldier-citizen, of the scientific above the theological and the metaphysical and the Utopian project. The strong positivist beliefs held by leaders of the Brazilian army, during the First Republic, led to the concept of the military as active citizens-soldiers with the duty to directly intervene in the natural course of politics, assuming the role of tutors that bring order back from chaos. This cemented doctrine is what propelled the leaders of the 1964 revolt to act against the civil government

Keywords: positivism, military doctrine, 1964 coup d'état, soldier-citizen, Comte

Introduction

Throughout Brazilian Republican history, from its inception to 1964, the Brazilian Army has been an active actor on the political scene. An analysis of the core tenets of the Army from 1870 to 1964 point towards the existence of a common element that guides this behaviour: the soldier-citizen philosophy, or the Army as a Moderator Power, guarantor of order. This originates with the teachings of Auguste Comte and

its adoption by leading figures of the Brazilian Army, such as Benjamin Constant Botelho de Magalhães.

Comte's teachings were first introduced to the Military Academy of Realengo and of Praia Vermelha, through his work *The Course in Positive Philosophy* and furthered on by the teachings of Benjamin Constant.

The impact of his teachings can be attested throughout Brazilian Republican history as it formed the core beliefs of the Military corps as a guarantor of order in public life. A review of the teachings and the laws adopted by in the first analysed period demonstrates the leading rationale of members of the Armed Forces. The goal of this study is to propose the identification of how this one leading factor made its way into the Armed Forces tenets and as a propulsor for the constant presence of the Military as intervening actors.

Comte defended the dismemberment of the Army in favour of a National Guard composed of soldier-citizens, or members of a civic militia. The study focuses on the impacts of teachings adopted by Benjamin Constant during his time as a teacher of the Military Academy and the influence his preached philosophy exerted on the newly formed temporary government as well as the Army.

Auguste Comte's analysis of world history proposed a model of societal evolution where war, first offensive and later defensive, would pose as the goal of military societies, whereas an industrial society would focus on labour (Aron, 2017). As Aron suggests, Comte predicted the transformation of society into a Utopian *positif* one once said societies modified their behaviour into a rational pattern. This would mean abandoning the militaristic nature of pre-positivist societies.

Auguste Comte theorised society as organised into the cardinal separation of temporal and spiritual powers. For him, that meant the administrative role of the government and the role of the opinion makers. Philosophers, public environment, writers, critics, thinkers of all natures. Men of thought ranked above men of war.

Given his pacifist views on society, Comte believed that the military class would cease to exist, once war was deemed senseless to an industrial and scientific society (Bellintani, 2009). Comte proposed that, should the military class be eliminated, the rise of an Enlightened elite would foster industrial development and create a pacific society (Aron, 394).

Teachings of Benjamin Constant

Although Benjamin Constant is frequently pointed as the leading figure of the positivists in Brazil, the adoption of Comte's work predates his joining the Superior War School teaching staff in 1872, but he can be accounted for intensifying its teachings (Carvalho). While many of the officers in the school used Comte's books as teaching basis, Benjamin Constant read the whole works of the French philosopher. For this, he was held in high regard by the young cadets, who would embrace the Republican principles defended by the positivist thinkers (Exército).

The adoption of *The Course in Positive Philosophy* was classified by José Murilo de Carvalho (2005) as strictly scientific in nature, contrary to the technical applications of subjects like mathematics, physics and chemistry to their functions in war and warfare. The Brazilian historian notes that this characteristic was allowed to flourish given a lack of supervision or control by the Imperial Government and bolstered by nature of the soldiers that served the Army.

Most of the cadets sought the military training not because of a sense of duty, nationalism or a romantic love for war, otherwise, many enlisted because the military career offered a way to subsist, and in a country which has rarely seem war in its history, that looked like a safe path for the willing (Torres, 2020). Leitão de Carvalho (Carvalho 2005), a cadet in the school from 1901 to 1904, reports that there was no military environment and professionalism in the school.

In addition to this, the national politics scenario was unfavourable to the military, considered marginalised by the Monarchy (Mello, 2011) since the end of the Paraguayan War, despite its central role in the war and a prestige to the Corps generated by the Alliance victory. This favoured the military inclinations towards a republican regime.

Benjamin Constant strongly believed in the necessity to completely overhaul the Brazilian political structure, favouring a republican regime over a monarchical one (Mendes). This change in regime would redress the military pleas, qualm the complains of all classes and guarantee the adoption of a truly modern utopia, as envisioned by Comte. According to the military thinker:

“It is proven that the monarchy in Brazil is incompatible with a regime of political freedom. For the intervention of the Army to be legitimized in the eyes of the nation and by the judgment of our own consciences, it is necessary that its action be directed towards the destruction of the monarchy and the

proclamation of the Republic, then withdrawing to its barracks and handing over the government to civil power.” (Mendes, xx, loosely translated)

Constant was a mathematics teacher that closely followed Auguste Comte’s philosophical mathematics instead of a purely technical approach.

Comte’s pacifist teachings and the urge for the military participation in public life as active citizens would later be defined by Benjamin Constant as:

“The soldier, an element of strength, must now be an armed citizen - the embodiment of national honour and an important co-operator of progress as a guarantee of public order and peace, intelligent and well-intentioned support from republican institutions, never a servile and malleable instrument through passive and unconscious obedience that lowers character, destroys stimulation and lowers morale.” (Tamer, 2020, loosely translated)

Key iconic military figures, like the Count of Caxias and the Viscount of Herval, members of an old school of teaching, were seen as bulwarks that contained the young officers’ discontent and republican ambitions (Doratioto, 2008). With the death of the latter in 1879 and the former in 1880, disgruntled leaders like Deodoro da Fonseca, Floriano Peixoto (the first and the second, respectively, leaders of the Republic), Benjamin Constant and Sólton Ribeiro, favoured by equally disgruntled lieutenants, sergeants and majors graduated within Benjamin’s teaching, were left unchecked by any strong military leaders. Moreover, by the time the republican *coup d’état* took place, the government led by the Viscount of Ouro Preto was considered politically weak and unable to manoeuvre an effective resistance to the revolted members of the army (Exército, 1972).

The graduates of the Superior War School were then a by-product of an antimilitarist, hierarchy-defiant and politicised cadre that completely rejected the *esprit de corps* intrinsic to any army institution (Torres, 2020). A contradiction between the army and positivist ideals was strongly ingrained in those that entered military life in the late 1800’s. As we expose in the next section, this generated a long running tradition of intervention on civic and political life in the Brazilian Army.

A closing remark to this section points a significant detail that should be kept in mind for the next sections: not all military members were adepts of positivism.

Florian Peixoto, Brazil's second president and, effectively, also its first dictator was notoriously averse to positivism and led a government that would actively diverge from Comte's teachings and beliefs. Also, it's noteworthy that the revolt of junior officers and dissent in the army, inaugurated in Brazil in 1889, would be a constant theme henceforth (Carvalho, 2005).

As pointed by José Torres (2020), a conundrum was born in the army with the adoption of positivism: one cannot be a good soldier and a good positivist. Either a positivist rejects the uniform and believes in pacifism or, as a good soldier, embraces the military nature and rejects positivism, there is no room for both. Yet, this sort of schizophrenia settled within a significant portion of graduates of the Superior War School, which weakened hierarchy in the Armed Forces.

Establishment of the First Republic

The military revolt that took place on the 15th of November 1889 was led by the disgruntled understudies of Benjamin Constant and had the symbolic leadership of Floriano Peixoto and Deodoro da Fonseca, who, despite being a republican himself, was a close friend of Emperor Peter II and favoured seeing the fulfilment of the Republic only after the death of the Monarch (Mello, 2011).

Worthy of notice is the fact that most of the rebels embraced Comte's principle of a sociocratic dictatorship (Torres, 2020). It was suggested at the time that soon the provisory government would disband the army and establish a National Guard in its stead.

In modern vernacular language the term *dictatorship* is commonly associated with totalitarian, authoritarian and brutal regimes. But, for Comte, this meant a "dictatorship of consensus", where private liberties were guaranteed, and a great concentration of power would be held by the executive branch (Mello, 2011). With the success of the coup, many positivists believed that soon this project would be implemented in Brazil.

However, as mentioned, not all members of the rebels were positivists nor espoused positivist sympathies. This dispute shall be explored further on, for the moment we shall turn our attention to the matter of the crowning of the soldier-citizen philosophy.

The position the Army found itself in 1889 and 1890 strengthened the philosophy of the soldier-citizen: as citizens, the soldiers should take their place in

society, thus assuming full citizenship by participating in the revolutionary movement, and as soldiers, use the rebellion as an affirmation of their military status (Carvalho, 2005).

At the same time that this intervention ascertained a victory for the positivists, it also marked the beginning of the Army as a fourth power, a Moderator Power, despite positivism. This wasn't a new concept in Brazilian politics as the Empire legally had the four powers, Executive, Legislative, Judiciary and Moderator, the last one personally held by the Emperor (Torres, 2020).

As part of the provisory government, Benjamin Constant managed to influence the government and furthered the galvanisation of the active participation of soldiers in civic life. A decree signed by Deodoro da Fonseca, then generalissimo of Brazil, and co-signed by Benjamin Constant, in 1890, reads:

“Considering that the soldier, an element of strength, must today be the armed citizen, the embodiment of national honour and an important co-operator of progress as a guarantee of public order and peace, an intelligent and well-intentioned support of the republican institutions, already a servile and malleable by passive and unconscious obedience that lowers character, annihilates stimulation and lowers morale;

Considering that, for a perfect comprehension of this high destiny in the bosom of society, as the most solid support for the good, morality and happiness of the Fatherland, the military needs a succulent and well directed scientific education, which, preparing it for profit to take all the advantage and usefulness of the special studies of his profession, enable him, by the formation of the heart, by the legitimate development of affective feelings, by the rational expansion of his intelligence, to know his duties, not only military, but mainly social;” (Decreto 330 de 12 de abril de 1890, loosely translated)

As presented, the decree cemented the nature of the military forces as scientific. It would remain in effect for almost 101 years, being revoked only in 1991 by president Fernando Collor de Mello. This strongly suggest the adopted doctrine of the Armed Forces leaned heavily towards the active participation in society.

In addition to this, Benjamin Constant also managed to have an educational reform, strongly based in positivism, established by Decree number 980, also in 1890. This reform altered the syllabus not only of the military academies, but also of the colleges and the high schools (Torres, 2020). This second decree would be amended before finally being revoked 103 years later in 1993 by president Itamar Franco, and reissued, albeit with a different, non-positivist, basis, in 2002, by president Fernando Henrique Cardoso.

As exposed, the positivist teachings had a long and profound influence in the Army. It is important to note that the core teachings of positivism would be abandoned or repurposed on the early years of the Republic. The main tenet legated to the Armed Forces was that of the soldier-citizen.

Military interventions after 1889 until 1961

From its inception to the coup d'état that ended the First Republic in 1930, Brazil face eight separate, sometimes simultaneous, rebellions, of which only were not of a military nature and further on, only one didn't end up in armed conflict. The very first conflict happened in 1891, just two years after the founding of the Republic, known as the Naval Revolt, after rebellious members of the Navy, led by junior officers, revolted against the employment of physical punishment. 24 of the next 41 years were riddled with political unrest and rebellions, until a Getúlio Vargas-led coup d'état brought the end of the First Republic in 1930.

Despite strong initial influence by the positivist leaders on the establishment of the Republic and the adoption of its first constitution, the utopian society never came to fruition, with the first blow to this ideal being dealt by Benjamin Constant, by refusing to embrace a republican dictatorship (Leal, 2014). An internal division between orthodox and heterodox positivists weakened their chances at creating a unified political entity as with which to push positivist ideals (Torres, 2020).

Furthermore, as mentioned, Floriano Peixoto was strongly opposed to the ideals presented by the followers of Benjamin Constant. A devout man of arms, he rejected the pacifist views of the positivists and his profound pride in his participation in the Paraguayan War, which was condemned by the positivists (Saes, 2005).

Although the Military Academy of Realengo, the main Army academy in Rio de Janeiro, was closed down in 1904, and positivist influence begun to wane by the late 1920's and early 1930's (Bellintani, 2009), the ideals and teachings continued to

live on through the establishment of the Positivist Church and the works of civilian individuals like Teixeira Mendes, Miguel Lemos, Luís Pereira Barreto, Silva Jardim and, later on, Ivan Lins (Torres, 2020).

One of the most notorious revolts of the period was the 1922 *Tenentismo* revolt (i.e., revolt of the lieutenants), where it is attested that not all members of the army participated in the revolt, but a specific group of lieutenants that broke ranks and openly defied their superior officers. It took place in three different phases (Sodré, 1967). The first one was in 1922, in Rio de Janeiro, the second one in 1924 in São Paulo and the third one also in 1924, although this third phase was associated with a retired army General, Isidoro Dias Lopes, and later became a guerrilla-style communist insurgency led by Luís Carlos Prestes, an army officer, whose name most famously became associated with this third phase of the revolt, the Prestes Column (Silva & Carneiro, 1978).

Many in this group of young cadets had been trained in Europe, and followed post-First World War educational models. Given the influence of this novelty method, these men believed they were “[intellectually] superior to their senior officers” (McCann, 2004, p. 261). Identifying the leading individuals of the Army as an extension of the government and political establishment, which in the 1920’s was chaotic, the young lieutenants mutinied, arms in hand, against this perceived chaos.

Their demands, during the first phase of the rebellion, included impeding president-elect Artur Bernardes from taking office, agrarian reforms, and other social modernisations.

One very important side note to this movement is pointed by Hélio Silva and Cecília Carneiro (1978). They consider the genesis of these rebellions as being the same one as that of 1964. The historians point out that when Marshal Hermes da Fonseca, another military who also served Brazil as president, tries to intervene in the affairs of the commander of the Federal Garrison in Pernambuco, he is arrested for insubordination. His arrest leads to the insurrection of the lieutenants in 1922 and is recognised by the revolted military in 1964 as being their legacy.

In 1930, legally elected Júlio Prestes was impeded from taking office by members of the *Tenentism* movement, a coup d’état that instated Getúlio Vargas as president and brought about the end of the First Republic. Vargas would remain in power for the following 15 years, being ousted by another coup d’état led by the military (Sodré, 1967). As a result of the newly established government, a great purge

was held in the military, removing from commanding positions those who were against Getúlio Vargas (Carvalho, 2005).

The March 1964 Revolution

The second important period is the one that led to the establishment of a military government in 1964. After the Second World War, dictator Getúlio Vargas was deposed and, in 1946, a new constitution was adopted, inaugurating the Fourth Brazilian Republic, which lasted from 1946 to 1964. During this period, only two presidents saw their term to completion, Eurico Gaspar Dutra (1946 to 1951), an army general, and Juscelino Kubitschek (1956 to 1961), a political heir to Getúlio Vargas (Gaspari, 2002).

After Vargas' suicide in 1954, Carlos Luz was ousted by Nereu Ramos, Minister of the Army. Luz, president of the Chamber of Deputies ascended to the presidency after vice-president, and then acting president, Café Filho was forced to retire from public life due to illness.

Finally, in 1961 Jânio Quadros was elected president and João Goulart, popularly known as Jango, was elected vice-president – at the time, Brazilian electoral system had the offices voted separately. Only seven months after taking office, Quadros resigns citing “terrible forces” within and without the nation forcing his hand:

“I wished Brazil for Brazilians, facing, in this dream, the corruption, lies and cowardice that subordinate general interests to the appetites and ambitions of groups or individuals, including those from abroad. Terrible forces rise up against me, and intrigue or defame me, even with the excuse of collaboration. If I remained, I would not maintain the confidence and tranquility, now broken, and indispensable to the exercise of my authority. I really believe that it would not maintain its own public peace. So, I close, with my thoughts turned to our people, to students and workers, to the big family in the country, this page of my life and national life. I do not lack the courage to renounce” (Ustra, 2013).

This generated a crisis of extreme proportions even when one considers the period's instability.

Fearing a return of Vargasism and the deceased president's populism, the commanders of the armed forces, led by Marshal Odílio Denys, vetoed the constitutional succession of vice-president Goulart. The military high command mobilised Congress and troops, from the three branches, in a possible coup d'état, closing the National Congress and instating Denys as a dictator (Silva & Carneiro, 1978).

Meanwhile, the commander of the largest land forces in Brazil, General Machado Lopes of the 3rd Army, headquartered at Porto Alegre, on the south of Brazil, announced that his troops would pledge to follow only the orders of the Supreme Commander of the Army, the President of the Republic (Silva & Carneiro, 1978). State governor Leonel Brizola barricaded himself inside his gubernatorial palace, with elements of the 3rd Army alongside him. He vowed that the only way for this situation to be over would be if Goulart, his brother-in-law, took office, as per the constitution (Medeiros Filho, 2014). Making use of local radios, Brizola made a pronouncement stating that:

“Rio Grande will not allow attacks. Mr. Jânio Quadros' resignation is final. It now remains to swear in the Brazilian constitutional president. It remains to hand over the Presidency to Mr. João Goulart. [...] We, who govern Rio Grande do Sul, will not accept any blows. We will not passively watch any attacks on public freedoms and constitutional order. We will react as we can. If only to be crushed. But we will defend our honor and our traditions. The country's constitution must be respected.”

(Silva & Carneiro, 1978).

Furthermore, on the prospect of a civil war, which started to be seen as an increasing probability, Brizola guaranteed that:

“[...] if the eventuality of the ultimatum occurs, there will also be very serious consequences. Because we will not submit to any coup. No arbitrary resolution. We do not intend to submit. May they crush us! May they destroy us! Let us be slaughtered, in this Palace! Brazil will be slaughtered with the imposition of a dictatorship against the will of its people. This radio will be silenced [...]. What is certain, however, is that it will not be silenced without bullets”

(Silva & Carneiro, 1978).

This crisis would be temporarily solved by the amendment to the constitution and the adoption of parliamentarism. This would mean that Jango would take office as president, but with much reduced powers. This solution allowed the military leaders to save face and Goulart to take office. Despite this (temporary) solution, a series of events would lead to the downfall of Jango's government.

João Goulart enjoyed support from labour unions, the Brazilian Communist Party, and, most importantly, NCOs of the Brazilian Army. The left's support of Goulart, especially considering his ties to Getúlio Vargas and leftist candidate Brizola made senior officers uneasy. Political instability within the army was further aggravated when the Army busted a clandestine guerrilla training camp in Goiás in 1962 (Medeiros Filho, 2014).

The following year, Goulart's government faced a new crisis when lance-corporals and junior officers revolted in September. In 1962 many sergeants who had ran for office had their eligibility rejected. 600 Airforce and Navy junior officers commandeered Brasilia's Air Base. This mobilisation was endorsed by members of the UNE (National Union of Students), CGT (General Command of Workers) and members of the Nationalist Parliamentary Front. Despite this, the rebellious officers didn't manage to mobilise their Army counterparts, and the movement was dispersed in just 12 hours (Ustra, 2013).

João Goulart exerted an erratic presidency, his ties to the left, the strong influence over the president by Brizola and General Teixeira Lott would provide the basis with which some army commanders held the view that soon a coup by the president would take place. The end of the parliamentary experience by an overwhelming majority of votes in 1963 brought the stability of the system close to a collapse. We see from a Estado de São Paulo newspaper report from 1962 that:

"The signs of consanguineous conspiracy could be seen everywhere, according to Júlio Mesquita Filho. The government itself guided the strikes that followed and encouraged the breaking of the military hierarchy, supporting the sergeants and sailors in rebellion against their superiors. succession of crisis, Luís Carlos Prestes went so publicly as saying that the communists are already in the government although not yet in power." (Ustra, 2013).

Cabinet members close to the president are reported to have recommended that he close the National Congress, declare a state of siege, which by Brazilian law means the suspension of civil liberties and near-dictatorial powers conferred to the president. Frightened by this perspective, high ranking officers of the Army begun conspiring to have the president removed from office and the arrest of close members of his cabinet (Silva & Carneiro, 1978).

In 1964, at the Rio Metalworkers Union, the Association of Sailors and Marines of Brazil gathered in assembly, contradicting the prohibition of the Minister of the Navy and in clear breach of hierarchy (Medeiros Filho, 2014). Present at the assembly were Brizola, union leaders, deputies, the press, a representative of the President. One notorious guest of this mobilisation was 83-years old João Cândido Felisberto, the leader of the 1891 Navy Revolt.

The final straw for the military conspirators was Jango's speech at the Automóvel Clube seemed to define the side Goulart was taking in the increasing complications of his government. It sent a clear message that he intended to see his reform programme through (Ustra, 2013). The army mobilised on the 30 of March, and facing little resistance, managed to seize control of key government buildings. The lack of any resistance baffled even the Czech secret service, the StB, active in Brazil since the late 1950's, which could not understand how Jango, with support among military leaders, including the leaders of the two largest armies in Brazil, Rio de Janeiro and Rio Grande do Sul, failed to resist the rebellious movement (Kraenski & Petrilák, 2017)

Conclusion

The core function of an army is the defence of its nation and the nation's sovereign territory (Aron, 2017). Auguste Comte's Positivism proposed a pacifist approach to the structure of societies, where armies would be outdated institutions of an unenlightened past. The adoption of Comte's philosophy posits a contradictory set of beliefs for the Brazilian Army officers who decided to embrace it, either they should follow the positivist tenets or altogether deny them. The consequences of allowing the teachings of Comte to be spread in the Military Academy proved to be a problem for the hierarchy of the Brazilian Army for almost 75 years.

Heavily influenced by positivist ideas, the young cadets of the Military Academy would strengthen the Republican ideology and bring about the downfall of

the Monarchy, which the army was sworn to protect. This ideology would be the dominant doctrine taught in the military schools of Brazil for 50 years, from the 1870's to the 1920's. The report of a cadet in the early 20th century demonstrates how the military institution lacked a proper *esprit de corps*, which, in turn made the troops more susceptible to indoctrination and disregard for hierarchy.

Although the teachings of Comte were no longer used in the training of officers, the process of integration of the armed forces into civil society as active members and the establishment of its image as a Moderator power was already completed by then. This proved to be a leading cause for rebellion and insurrection throughout Brazilian Republican history. During the analysed period, 12 out of 26 elected presidents were military officers.

By the time of the coup d'état of 1964, the instability of the republican system had proved time and again to be unable to sustain itself. Constant interference by the armed forces originated in the cemented imagery of moderating power conferred upon it by the success of the 1889 coup d'état that established the Republic.

It can be concluded that the mythos of the soldier-citizen was strongly ingrained in the Army and led many would-be leaders and effective leaders to take an active role in trying to shape politics.

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