

# War of attrition vs. Brazil's Armed Forces

by Silvia Palacios and Lorenzo Carrasco

The sudden firing of Brig. Gen. Walter Werner Brauer, commander of the Brazilian Air Force, at the end of last year, served as a signal inside Brazil for a new phase of the campaign to dismantle the nation's Armed Forces. The strategy of the Fernando Henrique Cardoso government is to trigger successive military crises of a magnitude that it hopes will bring about the controlled disintegration of the Armed Forces, which would presumably allow them to be tamed through what the Inter-American Dialogue calls "submission of the Armed Forces to civilian power."

The desire to provoke such military attrition in Brazil stems from the urgency of the Anglo-American interests to guarantee that there will not be left standing a single institution capable of organizing resistance to the current policy of globalization, on the eve of an inevitable world financial collapse.

This perspective is shared by U.S. Defense Secretary William Cohen, who visited Brazil in late November 1999 to propose that the country and its Armed Forces serve as "subordinates" to the Anglo-American power, in a project to establish supranational dominance over the Western Hemisphere, using the Organization of American States (OAS) as the "democratic" instrument for the takeover.

This oligarchic strategy took on special urgency with the December 1999 and January 2000 events in Ecuador, where the imposition of dollarization accelerated the country's disintegration, and provoked a series of military coups d'état of varied political orientations.

## Defense Ministry clownishness

This new phase, which has been in the planning stages since early last year, with the decree to create a Defense Ministry, had been delayed due to the financial turbulence that sank the Brazilian currency, the real, and with it, President Cardoso's popularity. Ever since assuming the Presidency, Cardoso has made every effort to implement all the demilitarization initiatives of the Inter-American Dialogue, of which he is a founding member. For example, following a meeting of the continent's defense ministers convoked by the United States in Williamsburg, Virginia in 1996, the Brazilian government defined its new security doctrine around the creation of a single Defense Ministry, to replace four existing military

ministries (one for each branch of the Armed Forces). This is a long-standing demand of the demilitarizers, as a first step toward establishing a civilian Defense Minister, in order to further reduce the military presence in the government.

To dilute the historic role of the Armed Forces, President Cardoso named the mediocre former Senator Elcio Alvares to head the new ministry. Alvares had just lost his reelection bid for the Senate and hadn't the slightest experience in national security matters. Thus, his nomination was doubled-edged: first, to humiliate the Armed Forces by putting them under the leadership of an unknown figure, and second, to give a timid individual, wholly dependent on the Presidency, the unenviable task of establishing the controversial ministry.

Alvarez attempted to begin the restructuring of the Armed Forces, starting with the Air Force, through measures such as permitting foreign capital—especially French—to assume control of decision-making for Brazil's largest exporter and the pride of national technology, the airplane manufacturer Embraer. In privatizing Embraer, the Cardoso government abandoned a clause which had given it veto power over strategic decisions, despite being a minority partner. The privatization of the airports and the agency that administers them, Infraero, is slated to follow.

This triggered a public confrontation between Defense Minister Alvares and Air Force Commander General Brauer, which ended with Brauer being fired last December. And so began the first major military crisis of the Cardoso administration. Shortly before, Minister Alvares had been hit by a scandal over his alleged links to the drug trade, according to accusations received by the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry.

The confrontation with Brauer led to a national clamor on the part of the media for government measures that would put an end to the growing expressions of discontent by respected military figures. Cardoso responded in a typically Kissingerian "balance of power" maneuver, replacing Alvarez at the helm of the Defense Ministry with an even more obscure individual, Geraldo Magela Quintao, who had until that moment served as the country's Prosecutor General.

In response to these maneuvers, the Ibero-American Solidarity Movement in Brazil, which is associated with the LaRouche movement internationally, issued a statement which charged: "This is typical British-style 19th-century cabinet warfare, to provoke, await a reaction, and then decapitate potential opponents of the oligarchic project. It is the same method used by the Raul Alfonsín regime in Argentina, against the nationalist nucleus of the Armed Forces of that country following the 1982 Malvinas War, which led to the current prostration and impotence of the Argentine military in the face of national destruction promoted by succeeding governments."

In a commentary in the Jan. 26 edition of *Jornal do Brasil*, Dora Kramer, one of the hired pens of the Foreign Ministry, wrote, "In naming the new minister, the President chose a man in his absolute confidence, who would be capable of

keeping the military out of the news, and as Defense Minister, effectively named President Cardoso.”

In so doing, Cardoso intends to press forward with his drive to clip the wings of the military. Columnist Carlos Chagas wrote in *Tribuna da Imprensa* on Jan. 18 that former Defense Minister Alvares “played the role of pulling the chestnuts out of the fire for the government. In the center of everything is the creation of the Defense Ministry, a globalizing strategy adopted by President Fernando Henrique Cardoso to demoralize, erode, and distance the Armed Forces from the centers of decision-making. . . . The former Prosecutor General of the country is simply the next victim. If that’s what they want, then the new guy will have his hands in the fire as well.”

### Calming the waters

In this context, the political convulsions in Ecuador are having major repercussions inside Brazil, given the parallels that can be seen in the growing social discontent against President Cardoso, who can count on absolutely no support from the Army and Air Force, or from the population in general.

Veteran columnist Clovis Rossi, for example, in an article on Ecuador in late January entitled “And If This Were Brazil?” emphasized that “in Brazil, as in the other countries of the region, you can sense an environment that people have had it with politicians in general . . . who haven’t the remotest idea of what their constituencies feel. . . . It is enough to imagine a repeat, in Brasilia or in Buenos Aires, of what happened in Ecuador. . . . Before I am accused of coup-mongering, I am not suggesting anything of the sort. I am simply confirming developments.”

Another indication, from a leftist political viewpoint, was expressed by economist Paulo Nogueira Batista, Jr. “Thanks to the governments we have had,” he wrote, “Brazil has become, from a certain viewpoint, a sort of gigantic Ecuador. . . . The truth is that the fall of Ecuadoran President Jamil Mahuad, is an alarm for the numerous Mahuads of Latin America.” For such rulers, “in the economic, military, and international areas, the fundamental interests of the country end up subordinated to the priorities of the dominant powers and of the international financial groups.” Nogueira ended by stating that such leaders have kept themselves in power through “the rituals of democracy,” and that “the results of that style of government are known. In the economic area: stagnation, instability, and dependence on foreign capital.”

The high temperature of military discontent in Brazil has been expressed by the various manifestations of solidarity that General Brauer received after he was ousted from the military. For example, the Air Force high command released an official note of support for Brauer, which says: “You leave the command of the Air Force, enjoying the greatest respect, admiration, and trust among your peers of the high command, based on a past of more than 46 years of shared experiences and of excellent service to the Brazilian Air Force.”

On Dec. 28, the Armed Forces clubs that represent both active and retired officers organized a protest luncheon which pulled together several hundred people. At the ceremony, Brig. Gen. Ercio Braga, president of the Air Force Club, stated: “When we see headlines attacking our patriotism and there is no reaction from our government or our congressmen, we feel uncertain about the future. . . . One cannot talk about the legality of a government which, because of its strategy, has become illegitimate. . . . Like all of these here present, we would say one word to summarize our feelings: Enough!”

Military Club president Gen. Helio Ibiapina stated, “What truly hurts our sensibilities, and those of the 40,000 citizens linked to us . . . is the identification, in that abominable act, of three common characteristics in acts of this nature practiced by the government: humiliation, civic cowardice, and treason. . . . Our guest of honor bravely fought the handover of Embraer.”

As *EIR* was told, “The Armed Forces have turned on the yellow light, but the government didn’t want to understand it, and continued with its dirty cabinet warfare. Now, all that remains is the red light, with the certainty that Brazil could kick over the chessboard of globalization, and the whole continent would follow.” This sums up the growing sentiment among military officials in Brazil.

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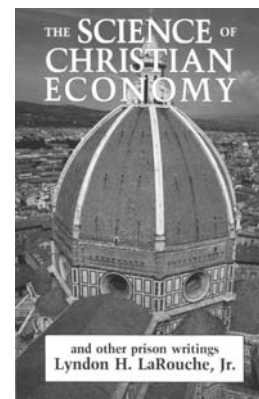
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