

# **Brazil–United States Military Relations during the Cold War: Political Dynamic and Arms Transfers\***

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This article discusses the military relations between Brazil and United States in the Cold War. Focusing on the dynamic of these relations and on arms transfers, one argues that the Brazilian military sought in the USA a path towards organizational modernization, industrialization and regional supremacy. Thus Brazil operated a movement from a very close and dependent position to a more distant one, since Washington did not support Brazilian objectives of military modernization and strategic autonomy and the anticommunist agenda became less important to Brazil.

Keywords: Brazil-United States relations; Armed Forces; Military assistance; Cold War.

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## **Introduction**

Relations between Brazil and the United States have been well investigated by researchers from the two countries. This fact in a way mirrors the amplitude and complexity of the ties established over nearly two centuries. Although security questions and strictly military matters have nearly always been on both countries' agendas, above all since the Second World War, there are relatively few studies about the military relations between Brazil and the United States. Brazilian historiography tends to deal with the question laterally, when discussing relations between the two countries more broadly (Moura 1991; Cervo and Bueno 1992; Vizontini 1998; Almeida and Barbosa 2006; Hirst 2009), or to situate

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Brazil in US hemispheric strategy (Martins Filho 2005). This gap is in part explained by the difficulties in accessing Brazilian military sources.

Works that do approach military relations more centrally tend to focus on the decision-making process, basically using diplomatic sources (Alves 2007, or to emphasise a growing rivalry between Brazil and the United States (Bandeira 1989; Tempestini 1998), which is difficult to identify with respect to the first decades of the Cold War, in spite of there being plenty of divergences between the two countries. For its part, US historiography, which mainly uses diplomatic and military sources stored in the country's archives, tends to look upon the military relations between Brazil and the United States as a patron-client relationship (Davis 1996; Mott 2002). Sonny Davis, for instance, in a thorough study of military relations between the two countries that pays special attention to the Joint Brazil-United States Military Commission, sees a transposition of the clientelism present in Brazilian culture to the military relations between the two countries as the key to understanding the alleged ease with which Brazil realigned its military ties from Europe to the United States. Such a contribution tends to narrow one's understanding of the strategic and organizational interests that fed into Brazil's military relations with other countries. Culture, ideology and the representations of the actors are important components in understanding decision-making processes. However, one cannot project in linear fashion a characteristic of domestic politics onto complex organizations such as the Armed Forces and onto an extensive process like Brazil-US military relations during the Cold War.

This article holds the premise that despite conjunctural redefinitions and the broader evolution of relations between Brazil and the United States, military relations during the period in question were corollaries of the pattern established during the Second World War. In this setting, the agreements were signed and the channels created that made feasible the interaction between officers of the two countries. Also in this circumstance, the Brazilian military consolidated the long-term objectives on which they were to base their relations with Washington: acquisition of modern arms and equipment, development of an autonomous weapons industry (linked to the country's broader industrialization) and regional military supremacy, particularly in relation to Argentina.<sup>1</sup> Despite being deeply asymmetrical and marked by a strong material dependence, relations with the United States tended to be seen by the Brazilian military elite as a path to the modernization of their organization and, in the long term, to Brazil's strategic autonomy. The alliance — renegotiated at different moments — had a further important point of convergence: anticommunism. This had been increasingly cultivated by the Brazilian military leadership since 1935 (Castro 2002).

For the United States, this period marks the definition of the continent as its sphere of influence and as the territory hosting its strategy of “hemispheric defence” (Moura 1980; Conn and Fairchild 2000). During the war, Brazil's position in the US power system was of

great regional relevance, owing chiefly to the bases in the northeast of the country. However, by the end of the conflict and start of the Cold War, this importance declined significantly. In a context in which the Americas possessed low priority in military aid programmes, Brazil was set within the regional policy of equilibrium, together with Argentina and Chile. Thus, Washington sought simply to maintain Brazilian alignment, the bases and the supply of strategic raw materials. Without greater distinctions, Brazil should be integrated into the plans to standardize the continent's Armed Forces, thus avoiding a return of European influence, and restrict communism and the development of a brand of nationalism that might affect US economic interests (Haines 1989).

Owing to this only partial coincidence of objectives, it is argued that military relations between the two countries were selectively and pragmatically negotiated by Brazilian officers, since Brazilian national defence policy-making did not always converge with US hemispheric defence formulations. On the domestic plane, despite the fact that the Brazilian Armed Forces opened themselves to US influence, there were instances of resistance, adaptation and questioning that led to tensions in the military relations between the two countries.

In order to deal with this proposition, the article is divided into two sections. The first reviews the dynamic of military relations between the two countries during the Cold War stressing the most relevant elements of the agenda, their institutional mechanisms and the movements of approximation and distancing by Brazil and the United States. One sought to employ military and diplomatic sources from the two countries so as to have a more balanced view of this dynamic. The second section deals in greater detail with arms transfers to Brazil in order to obtain a clear view of the impact of these relations on the structuring of Brazil's defence means. To this end, data made available by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and by the bibliography were used.

## The Dynamic of the Relations

Military ties between Brazil and the United States were consolidated during the Second World War. It was in this context that there took place long and sometimes tough negotiations over the granting and construction of the air and naval bases to the Americans, the granting of credits and war materiel to Brazil, the joint anti-submarine patrolling of the South Atlantic and the Brazilian Expeditionary Force itself. The war intensified diplomatic and economic links between the two countries and sealed a pragmatically negotiated military alliance (McCann 1995; Svartman 2008).

The first major agreement was signed in May 1942. It dealt with US aid and cooperation in the enhancement of Brazil's military capacity through organization, training, supply of war materiel and support for the development of infrastructure geared to the war

effort.<sup>2</sup> In order to supervise and direct the close military relations established, two joint commissions made up of officers from the two countries were created. The Joint Brazil–United States Defense Commission sited in Washington would conduct studies and make recommendations regarding mutual defence. Until the end of the war, it acted as a forum for high-level military diplomacy (Davis 1996). In Rio de Janeiro, the Joint Brazil–United States Military Commission (JBUSMC) had the role of implementing the recommendations that came from Washington, formulating suggestions and liaising with the commands and the defence staff in Brazil. The creation of the two commissions marked the birth of a formal military alliance between Brazil and the United States. Unlike the former, the latter commission had a long and intense period of activity during the Cold War, having been wound up only in 1977.

The end of the Second World War ushered in a period of indefiniteness and subsequently an inflexion in US policy-making towards Latin America, which, combined with the region's low priority level in the anti-communist strategy until the Cuban Revolution, significantly affected US interest in maintaining "special military relations" with Brazil. While this scenario was taking shape, the Joint Military Commission was the arena for talks held in 1945 that intended to establish a large-scale assistance plan. Via Lend-Lease, sales and no-cost transfers, this was to guarantee for Brazil two battleships, two light aircraft-carriers, fifteen destroyers, nine submarines, six naval bases, one arsenal, equipment for 180,000 soldiers and reserves for 26 divisions, help in the building of roads and railways for military mobility, support for the expansion of the Brazilian Air Force to 600 aircraft and compatible facilities on land (United States Department of State 1945).

Suddenly, however, the military lost influence over US policy towards the region and the position of the State Department was inflexible in vetoing Brazil's ambitious military reinforcement plan. Instead, it successfully advocated a policy to restrict military expenditure in Latin America and to promote a power balance between Argentina, Brazil and Chile. Despite this serious setback in its military interests and the frustrating negotiations about economic aid during the Dutra government, Brazil remained diplomatically aligned to the USA in 1947 at the signing in Petrópolis of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (IATRA), in 1948 over the creation of the Organization of American States (OAS) and for various votes at the UN (Moura 1991). The point of convergence and key to understanding these positions on Brazil's part was anticommunism. An illustrative example of this convergence is the provision of information to the US military attaché in Rio de Janeiro regarding the supposed presence of communists in the Brazilian public service.<sup>3</sup> The strengthening of ties with Latin American military personnel as allies in the fight against communism was one of the core points in Washington's foreign policy from 1945 to 1955 (Pach 1991; Mott 2002).

In spite of restrictions placed on high levels of military spending, there was an effort to enhance the ties and ensure US predominance in the supply of equipment and training, as well as “to make the military a factor of growing influence in the political life of the region”.<sup>4</sup> Brazil was the main focus of this effort, which ultimately sought to standardize the region’s Armed Forces to operate in tune with the United States against “Soviet expansionism” and in maintaining order domestically (Haines 1989). Thus, US officers who sat on the JBUSMC took the view that in order to attain the objectives of developing the capacity of the Brazilian Armed Forces to provide internal and external defence and to be available for deployment in other areas, greater emphasis should be put on training programmes in the United States. In the eyes of such military personnel that interacted with Brazilian counterparts, these programmes were efficient means of indoctrination, for upon their return to Brazil the participants tended to become “ardent supporters not only of US military doctrines, but also of its way of life”.<sup>5</sup>

In a context of shrinking arms transfers and continued Brazilian demands for industrialization, the anti-communist convergence and the ties established during the war were important motivating factors in the creation of the Escola Superior de Guerra (ESG, National War College). ESG relied on strong US influence and day-to-day cooperation in its early years. A mission composed of three American officers advised on its creation and a considerable part of its initial teaching materials were translations of texts originally produced in the United States. However, its doctrine was more a reflection of diffuse elements of a certain modernizing authoritarianism shared by much of the Brazilian officer corps than a direct transposition of US models (Svartman 2006).

The Brazilian Armed Forces revealed themselves rather permeable to the presence of US officers acting as instructors, liaison elements and technicians in the immediate postwar period. The Joint Military Commission had its offices on the premises of the ministry of War in Rio de Janeiro, and officers from the two countries worked there on a daily basis. Several military teaching institutions in Brazil were influenced by the USA. Their staffers took part in the meetings that redefined the organization of the ministry of War in 1946, produced reports suggesting reforms to the teaching system, gave lectures, screened films and translated manuals.<sup>6</sup> Although in a lesser scale than during the war, Brazilian officers continued attending courses, internships and “courtesy visits” at military organizations in the United States or the Panama Canal Zone.<sup>7</sup> There was a clear intention on the part of the US military to cultivate good relations with their Brazilian counterparts.

However, there was a serious hindrance to the full assimilation of US military doctrines in Brazil. According to the 1945 Report of the army chief of staff, the Training and Specialization Centre, located in the Rio de Janeiro district of Realengo, already incorporated “American doctrine” in its instruction. However, the Report also pondered

that the generalized use of US equipment and the consequent adoption of that country's military organization and doctrine were problematic, for serious limitations regarding the motorization of Brazilian forces were already being identified, with reference both to vehicles and highways. For its part, the 1948 Report informed the minister of War that in that context of transition and restructuring, which sought to assimilate the experiences of the Second World War and adapt to US organization and equipment, a serious "readjustment" had to be undertaken by virtue of the sudden "deprivation of means" which the army had undergone (Estado-Maior do Exército 1996).<sup>8</sup> This point results both from budgetary restrictions in Brazil and from the fact that since 1945 there had not existed any specific legislation or agreement that allowed the dispatch of US war materiel in keeping with Brazilian expectations. In 1949, the minister of War went to Washington to try to negotiate a new military agreement. He was not successful, given the low priority accorded to Brazil (and to Latin America) in that setting. Only after the passing of the Mutual Defense Assistance Act by the US Congress and the creation of the Military Assistance Program (MAP) were new military aid channels created (Pach 1991). Even so, the priority was not the continent. The 1952 ministry of War report speaks of the weakness of Brazilian war materiel and, in the midst of budgetary difficulties, of the need to import even tyres and batteries for vehicles. Aware of the growing discontent, US officers of the JBUSMC sought to compensate the lack of equipment by lending 5,745 training films to Brazil.<sup>9</sup>

Though close, Brazil-US military links did not always meet the interests formulated by the Brazilian military leadership, chiefly with respect to the development of a national weapons industry and to the achievement of regional military supremacy. This forced a relative distancing between the two in the late 1940s, and accentuated ideological divisions among the officer corps. The polemics relating to the model of the national oil industry and to the sending of troops to the conflict in Korea expressed the political and ideological tensions that the military relations between Brazil and the United States implied. The Brazilian Armed Forces were important protagonists of the so-called "oil question" and the Military Club was the stage where debates and sharp polemics were acted out, thus defining opposing currents among the officer corps (Peixoto 1980; Smallmann 2004). Starting in 1951, the Getúlio Vargas government sought to re-launch the formula of politico-military alignment as a tool for bargaining with the USA, so as to obtain economic support for industrialization. The possibility of participation in the Korean War further deepened the cleavages among the officer corps. Since the Brazilian Congress condemned it and Washington proved reticent in providing the expected economic and military aid, the government ended up refusing the American request (Davis 1996; Alves 2007).

More than at any other time, "the evolution of Brazilian foreign policy during this period was influenced by the comings and goings of domestic politics, which progressively

came to reflect the ideological confrontation between left and right typical of the Cold War at the global level” (Hirst 2009). The signing of the 1952 Military Accord was one of the major icons of this. It was negotiated by the army chief of staff and the foreign ministry, circumventing the nationalist minister of War Estilac Leal, and led to the latter’s resignation and to months-long polemics in the Brazilian Congress before it was ratified. Its content met US demands for strategic raw materials and established a new institutional framework for military assistance to Brazil, grounded in the 1951 Mutual Security Act and in the discourse of defence of the Western Hemisphere and the Free World (Carone 1989, 35ss.).<sup>10</sup> Its signing and ratification represented a victory for the more conservative segments of the Armed Forces (the so-called *entreguistas*) and a defeat for the *nacionalistas*. The agreement also affected Brazil’s incipient nuclear policy, for in addition to other mechanisms already in force — under the guise of scientific cooperation —, it implied controls on research conducted in the country and guaranteed the supply of radioactive raw materials to the United States (Andrade 2010). On the other hand, the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), created with the aim of developing nuclear technological capacity in Brazil, and Petrobras — both of which counted on a strong military presence — expressed the political tensions and ambiguities involved in Brazilian objectives to strive for autonomy in strategic sectors.

From the Juscelino Kubistchek presidency onwards, Brazilian foreign policy took on a more assertive profile, with initiatives such as the Pan-American Operation, and a special place reserved in its discourse for developmentalism, which implied greater openness in relation to other regions. In spite of the attempt to change the terms of the dialogue with the United States, military relations maintained the same standards. It was in this context that there took place the negotiation over the expansion of some military facilities operated in Brazil by the USA since the Second World War and the establishment of a ballistic missile detection post in the Fernando de Noronha archipelago. However, the results were frustrating, for Washington did not accept Brazil’s terms, i.e., modern armaments for the premises ceded. Fresh disappointment came about with the failure to obtain an aircraft-carrier, forcing Brazil to turn to Europe and acquire the HMS *Vengeance* from the UK in 1956. The ship was modernized in the Netherlands and renamed *Minas Gerais* by the Brazilian Navy in 1960 (Davis 1996). It was only after almost a decade in existence that the MAP began to have more repercussion as far as the Brazilian Navy was concerned, with the start of deliveries of US Navy destroyers in 1959. These ships put the Brazilian Navy in contact with more sophisticated technologies such as radar and sonar, though reinforcing its role as an auxiliary force in the anti-submarine patrolling of the South Atlantic, as well as its dependence on US means and doctrine (Martins Filho 2010). In 1955, in the midst of disagreements among scientists and the military, an agreement

had been signed within the framework of the US programme “Atoms for Peace”, which provided for the supply of enriched uranium and the construction of nuclear research reactors in Brazil (Andrade, 2010).

In line with the country’s more complex international insertion, the Quadros and Goulart governments launched the Independent Foreign Policy (PEI), constituting a turning point in Brazil’s international activity and ergo in its relations with the USA. Its basic postulate stated that Brazil should enhance its autonomy on the international plane and shake off the conditioning factors of bipolarity; its aspirations should be motivated by national interests and not by pressures from the great powers, particularly the United States; it preached that Brazil should identify with the Third World; it considered itself neutralist and critical of colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism and of the arms race (Vizentini 1995).

On the military plane, the Cuban Revolution and the dissemination of doctrines on revolutionary war and counter-insurgency began to dominate the agenda, especially after John F. Kennedy took office as US president. More than his predecessors, Kennedy intended to foster closer ties between the Armed Forces of his country and those of Latin America. And although this approximation was motivated by anticommunism, it endorsed the belief held by some academics that the military could contribute towards the economic and social progress of the region on the terms of the Alliance for Progress (ALPRO). It was argued that officers would not be committed to the oligarchies and, being of middle-class origin, would act as modernizing agents and advocates of administrative efficiency and order, industrialization and technological progress (Rabe 1999). Civic action and ALPRO programmes, counter-insurgency courses taught by US officers in Brazil and the sending of some Brazilian military officers and many police officers for training at the School of the Americas in the Panama Canal Zone all meant an enhancement of Brazil-US relations. Once again, in the military sphere, the point of convergence was anticommunism, and the sectors that identified less with this rallying cry were not able to counterbalance the growing conspiracies that led to the 1964 coup.

The presence of the US embassy in the destabilization campaign and in the conspiracies against the Goulart government meant that the United States recognized coup leader Castelo Branco’s government almost instantly (Fico 2008). The first military government repudiated the PEI and adopted a policy of strict alignment to Washington, whose aim was to gain credentials as a preferential ally and regional hegemonic pole in tune with the great power’s security agenda (Gonçalves and Miyamoto 1993). Hence Brazil broke off diplomatic relations with Cuba and took part in the occupation of the Dominican Republic in close cooperation with the USA, in 1965. With an initial contingent of 1,100 soldiers in the Inter-American Peace Force, Brazil took on the command of the intervention, which in a way officialized the unilateral attitude of the United States in that



country. The close cooperation in this typical Cold War action lasted until September 1966, when over 3,000 Brazilian soldiers from the three Armed Forces took part in the troop rotation in the Dominican Republic. Brazilian diplomacy espoused the idea of creating a standing force to safeguard “hemispheric security” and even considered sending Brazilian troops to Vietnam (Hirst 2009). In 1966, under the auspices of the MAP, an anti-guerrilla training programme conducted by US military personnel was set up in Rio de Janeiro and Recife. In the assessment of the Mobile Training Team officers, the initiative would have been beneficial to the Brazilian military, for despite being familiar with counter-insurgency doctrines, they had little practical experience.<sup>11</sup> However, as Sonny Davis points out, all this fine-tuned closeness was in fact the swan song of the special relationship between Brazil and the United States. Since then, the intensity of military relations between the two countries has been on the decrease, with the emergence (even) of disputes.

The first tensions were expressed as far back as 1965, when the USA used military channels to manifest its displeasure with Institutional Act Number 2 (AI-2). The option to support Castelo Branco against the “anti-American nationalist military”, the so-called *linha dura* (hard line), kept a lid on tensions at this stage.<sup>12</sup> The thrust of military and diplomatic relations started to change more significantly during the Costa e Silva government. The United States was deeply engaged in Vietnam and set about reducing its military and diplomatic personnel in Brazil and strongly restricting military aid to Latin America as a whole. The priority was counter-insurgency, a field in which Brazil had already been developing its own doctrine and training centres, like *Escola de Guerra na Selva* (Jungle War School). A point of tension that was to unfold dramatically during the Geisel government was Brazil’s refusal to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). In this context, the American refusal to supply supersonic F-5 fighter jets made Brazil turn to Europe once again, and acquire Mirage aircraft from France. In parallel, Brazil strengthened its long-term guidelines to develop the national weapons industry, so as to provide the Brazilian Armed Forces with autonomy. In 1969, *Empresa Brasileira de Aeronáutica* (Embraer, Brazilian Aeronautics Company) was founded. Among its first orders were Xavante training jets, made under license from Italian company Aermacchi, to train future Brazilian fighter pilots. The following year, a wide-ranging agreement was signed with the United Kingdom. The purpose was the acquisition of six modern frigates, two of which would be built in Rio de Janeiro. The impact of this agreement was felt in the training of Navy personnel and in the abandonment of the former model that depended on the (obsolete) materiel supplied by the USA (Martins Filho 2010).

New points of tension came about with the unilateral enlargement of the Brazilian Territorial Sea from 12 to 200 nautical miles and Brazilian persistence in not adhering to the NPT in the 1970s. Despite disagreements in the economic domain, during the Nixon

government there was a brief strategic re-approximation between Brazil and the United States that found expression, for instance, in the purchase of a batch of F-5 fighters by the Brazilian air force (Spektor 2009). However, the strategic nuclear issue remained open. In 1974, in the midst of the oil crisis and of the reverberations of the Indian atomic bomb, the USA suspended the supply of enriched uranium that had fed Brazil's research reactors acquired through the Atoms for Peace programme. This speeded up negotiations in this sphere with the Federal Republic of Germany. In turn, the signing of a broad nuclear agreement with this country in 1975 unleashed strong pressure from Washington. This question, together with criticism of the support offered by previous US governments to regimes that violated human rights, was integrated into Jimmy Carter's campaign speeches (Tempestini 1998). In 1977, the US Congress approved and Carter signed into law the International Security Assistance Act, which conditioned US military aid to respect for human rights on the part of recipient nations. This legislation implied severe restrictions on arms transfers to several countries, and was a turning point in the pattern of US military relations with its allies (Mott 2002).

In response to US pressures over the nuclear agreement and to the criticism of human rights violations by the Brazilian military dictatorship, the Geisel government unilaterally suspended the 1952 military accord, the Joint Military Commission, the Naval Mission and other minor measures, such as the cartographical agreement (Vizentini 1998). On the eve of their 35th anniversary, the "special military relations" came to an end, a consequence of the progressive strategic divergences between two countries whose relations had become more complex. But military relations were not cut off altogether. Contacts between the chiefs of staff remained, as did joint naval manoeuvres, officer exchanges in schools, a strong Brazilian presence at the Inter-American Defense College and the publication of a Portuguese language version of the influential *Military Review* (Davis 1996). The tensions that produced the political distancing and the interruption of the channels that for three decades had operationalized military relations did not weaken the enhanced economic and commercial relations, which involved the interests of US banks in Brazil's growing indebtedness, the competition of multinationals over this market and the export of Brazilian manufactured goods (Hirst 2009).

Military relations between Brazil and the United States in the final decade of the Cold War followed along in the progressive distancing process of the previous period. What differed was that the optimism in the quest for Brazilian military autonomy of the initial years was severely shaken by the limitations of the country's development model and the debt crisis. Brazil's growing military exports brought about a dispute surrounding the re-export of US technology embedded in these products. Washington intended to exert a veto power over sales to certain countries, which hurt Brazilian trade interests vis-à-vis Libya,

Iran and Iraq. The 1982 Malvinas War clearly exposed the limits of IATRA, thus making the idea that the United States was “not a very reliable ally” mature among the Brazilian military (Bandeira 1989). In a context in which the national weapons industry was capable of supplying 80% of the army’s equipment and disputes built up in sensitive fields such as information technology, missiles and nuclear energy, the Brazilian chiefs of staff began to formulate hypotheses of war, perhaps for the first time ever, between Brazil and “a country of the Western Bloc, situated in the northern hemisphere” (Bandeira 1989). Another important inflexion of this period was the progressive approximation between Argentina and Brazil, which evolved towards a hollowing out of their diplomatic-military rivalries and an enhancement of politico-economic ties that were to become institutionalized in the Mercosur (Common Market of the South).

Differences over US interventions in Central America and the Caribbean, over the creation of a NATO-style military alliance involving Argentina, South Africa and Brazil, over Brazilian access to technologies such as microelectronics, aerospace materials and long-range ballistic missiles, and to the US aircraft and armoured vehicle market were only formally mitigated by an understanding on military cooperation reached in 1984 (Vizentini 1998). In spite of thriving bilateral trade relations, disputes involving issues linked directly or indirectly to the Armed Forces were notable in the second half of the 1980s. Pharmaceutical patents created a new focus of disagreement, whipped up by US companies. This led to the creation of the ministry of Science and Technology and to the exacerbation of nationalist positions in Brazilian military circles on the question of “technological sovereignty”, which would bring together IT, the nuclear project and pharmaceutical patents with a view to an autonomous technology policy (Hirst 2009).

The international setting of the late 1980s greatly limited the Brazilian strategy. The Third World debt crisis and the “hardening” of North-South negotiations severely restricted the markets opened by Brazil in Africa and the Middle East. The fragility of the debt-fuelled growth of some “emerging” economies was becoming clear. Such countries were now more vulnerable to external pressures for “structural adjustment” of their economies, in a context of demobilization of third-worldist collective action (Lima and Hirst 1994). Brazilian dependence on the US market increased again, as did its reliance on financial institutions controlled by the North, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The 1991 Gulf War marked another disagreement between Brazil and the United States, since the war put an end to important Brazilian economic and military cooperation interests in Iraq. If the Second World War was a milestone of a new standard in Brazil-US military relations, the conflict in the Middle East marked the end of an era. In constant pursuit of autonomy, Brazil went from being an exporter to being a modest importer of war materiel in the post-Cold War period.

## Arms Transfers

An important indicator of the intensity and profile of military relations between two countries with such asymmetrical military might as Brazil and the United States is the supply of armaments, whether through military aid programmes or trade. This indicator was particularly relevant during the Cold War, for since the late 1940s military aid had become a political instrument of major importance for the United States (Pach 1991). The data presented here seek to quantify and qualify the importance for the Brazilian Armed Forces of their relations with Washington. It is not a full inventory of what was received (light weapons, munitions, radars, missiles and various items of equipment were left out, as were innumerable spare parts). Rather, it tracks significant means such as ships, aircraft, armoured vehicles and canons. This allows one to size up US influence in the structuring of Brazilian forces during the Cold War, as well as the change that took place in the second half of the 1970s, in comparison with other suppliers.

**Table 1.** Ships acquired by Brazil from 1950 to 1990, by category and country of origin

	USA	UK	Netherlands	FRG	Japan
Aircraft-carrier		1			
Cruiser	2				
Frigate	4	6			
Destroyer	14				
Submarine	11	3			
Minesweeper	4			6	
Landing	4				
Repair	1				
Rescue	1				
Transport					4
Tugboat			10		
TOTAL	41	10	10	6	4

Source: SIPRI.

The importance of the USA in the composition of the Brazilian fleet during the period is very clear, not just in numerical terms, but also qualitatively speaking. Only the United States supplied ships of the various categories, with (light) cruisers, submarines and destroyers standing out. The United Kingdom supplied the same number of vessels as the Netherlands, but more important ones, such as the aircraft-carrier delivered in 1960 and the Vosper frigates (capable of operating surface-to-surface missiles) that arrived between 1976 and 1980. Even then, British deliveries did not amount to ¼ of American ones.

**Table 2.** Aircraft acquired by Brazil from 1950 to 1991, by category and country of origin

	USA	France	UK	Netherlands	Canada
Piston fighter	25				
Jet fighter	116	24	71		
Bomber	38				
Training	229	49		70	
Helicopter	176	58	29		
Transport	131		12		24
Anti-submarine	33				2
Observation and liaison	40				
Detection	2				
Total	790	131	112	70	26

Source: SIPRI.

With respect to military aviation, the suppliers are a little more diversified. Even so, only the United States supplied aircraft of all categories, and always in greater number than other nations. In the case of fighters, it is important to note that Washington was a less willing supplier. The first batch was purchased from the UK in 1953, and it was not until 1956 that Brazil had access to the more modern American F-80s, and even then in smaller number than the British fighters. The obtainment of supersonic fighters was a difficult negotiation, as already commented, leading Brazil to acquire the first batch of sixteen Mirages from France in the early 1970s. It was only in 1973, in a context of commercial and political approximation, that the US government authorized the sale of 42 F-5A and F-5E fighters to Brazil, delivered in 1975 and 1976. A further batch with 26 aircraft was delivered during the dimming of Cold War lights (1988), so that the French presence was counterbalanced in this sector.

**Table 3.** Canons and armoured vehicles acquired by Brazil from 1950 to 1991

	USA	UK
Artillery	492	4
Armour	991	

Source: SIPRI.

If in the interwar period Brazil acquired artillery pieces from France and Germany, Table 3 allows one to conclude that during the Cold War the USA completely displaced European suppliers from the Brazilian market. The Krupp canons acquired in 1938 continued being used by the army, but in residual fashion. Beginning with the 1942 military

agreement, Brazilian artillery was restructured using American methods and equipment.<sup>13</sup> The four artillery pieces purchased from the United Kingdom were meant for the Inhaúma class corvettes, built in the Navy’s own arsenal from the second half of the 1980s. As for the armoured vehicles that equipped both the army and the Navy, Brazil’s deep dependence on the USA was partly reduced only when the national industry started supplying products manufactured domestically.

**Table 4.** Diversification in the supply of armaments to Brazil (%)

	USA	UK	France	Others
1951-55	83	17		
1956-60	68	25	5	2
1961-65	92	5	1	2
1966-70	58	12	1	29
1971-75	76	9	6	10
1976-80	27	62	7	4
1981-85	14	?	36	50
1986-90	12	?	46	42

*Source:* Mott (adapted). The percentages indicate the monetary value of transfers in each period.

Tables 1 to 3 show the totality of the materiel delivered by the USA and other meaningful suppliers during the Cold War without taking into account how this evolved over time. For its part, Table 4 presents the relative importance of each major supplier at different periods. Obtaining the specific percentage of UK deliveries between 1981 and 1990 was not possible, so these are aggregated in the “others” column. Table 4 clearly demonstrates that Brazilian dependence on US arms was very significant until the mid-1970s, when the dynamic began to alter. Washington held a comfortable lead, even reaching a virtual monopoly from 1961 to 1965, as had been the case during the Second World War. The United Kingdom had played a secondary though important role until then, meeting demands that the USA did not, like the first jet fighters for the Brazilian Air Force and the aircraft-carrier that equipped the Navy until 2001. Until the 1980s, France had hovered around the 5% mark, but by the end of the decade was the largest single supplier.

The second half of the 1970s was marked by an inflexion in the profile of Brazilian military acquisitions. The rupture of the military accord in 1977 constituted a watershed not only in diplomatic terms but also with reference to the diversification in the supply of war materiel. The US share was sharply reduced and carried on declining until the end of the period. The United States ceased to be a hegemonic or even majority supplier, becoming instead a secondary one, within a framework of diversification where no individual supplier managed to concentrate 50% of Brazilian purchases.

An assessment of the above data should also take account of the change in the American pattern of arms deliveries to allies, as Mott points out. Military aid programmes such as MAP underwent significant reduction or were interrupted precisely from the mid-1970s. In parallel, direct sales grew, whether financed or not by government credits. The supply of US armaments and equipment took place more and more by means of market mechanisms rather than through military aid.

**Table 5.** US arms transfers to Brazil, by type

	Military aid		Direct sales		Total	
	MAP		Financed sales	Training and education		
1946-55	50.6		21.4	3.1	75.1	-
1956-65	101.3		42.7	6.1	150.1	-
1966-75	55.2		122.6	6.5	184.3	12.7
1976-85	-		113.9	0.7	114.6	138.3
1986-90	-		121.1	0.3	121.4	210.8
Total	207.1		422.6	16.6	645.5	361.8

*Source:* Mott (adapted). Amounts in 1985 US dollars (million).

Table 5 shows the value of military aid (in million dollars) provided by the USA to Brazil over the course of the Cold War. The column furthest to the right indicates the value of direct arms sales that do not constitute military aid because they are not financed by government programmes. The data are set out so that one can visualize their evolution over time. In the case of military aid, the amounts are broken down under three different mechanisms: the Military Assistance Program, which supplied arms and military equipment with no onus for the recipient countries; sales of arms produced and financed by the USA, which constituted a mechanism of indirect aid; and the less costly but very important training and education programmes offered by the US Armed Forces to the Brazilian military.

Table 5 allows one to see that in terms of resources, MAP was the most important mode of US military aid to Brazil until the mid-1960s, accounting for approximately 2/3 of all the military aid in the period. MAP's preponderance coincides with the period in which Washington was Brazil's chief arms supplier. In turn, financed sales gradually took on a leading role. The rising values must be qualified, inasmuch as after the suspension of MAP by Carter and the denouncement of the Brazil-US military accord by Geisel, this mode in practice became the main mechanism of military aid to Brazil. However, the table also shows that the level of non-financed direct sales — inexistent in the first two decades of the Cold War and modest in the 1966-1975 period — rose sharply until the end of the period, even surpassing that of military aid. Examining Tables 4 and 5 side by side, one notices that

the decline of US influence in terms of the supply of armaments coincides with the end of donations and with the growing role played by purchases made at market rates.

## Final Remarks

The dynamic of Brazil’s military relations with the United States operated a movement of approximation motivated by convergent interests that were bargained over, followed by moments of strict alignment and then a progressive distancing inasmuch as Washington failed to attend to the strategic objectives formulated by Brazil. During four decades, the Brazilian military sustained the continuity of an agenda involving the acquisition of armaments and equipment and the development of a weapons industry linked to the broader industrialization of the country. Anticommunism and regional military supremacy were important themes in the initial decades and grounded the convergence between the two countries. But these declined in importance in the second half of the 1970s and exited the Brazilian agenda. Over the course of the Cold War, the intimate military relations that had even been designated a “special alliance”, evolved, in the midst of advances and retreats, towards a distancing that translated a divergence in objectives and the emergence of disputes.

As for defence means, if on the one hand Brazil sought autonomy in terms of supplies for its Armed Forces (something that remained distant in the first decades of the Cold War), on the other the United States converted military aid more and more into business. This meant that there was room for Brazil to seek other suppliers on the growing international market and to develop its own industry, which towards the end of the period was also internationally competitive in certain niches. In spite of having played a fundamental role in the supply of combat means for Brazil’s forces — with the consequent organizational, doctrinal and ideological implications —, military relations with the United States became progressively more distant as a result of the declining commonality between the two countries’ objectives.

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## Notes

- 1 The 1941 ministry of War report is particularly clear in this sense when it lists the conditions perceived as necessary for supplying Brazil’s “future weapons industry”, and manifests the intention of the military elite to make the country into a “great world power, truly independent” (BRASIL 1942, 10).



- 2 In 1941, a US\$ 100 million credit had been agreed for Brazil to acquire war materiel from the USA, under the terms of the Lend-Lease Act. However, its implementation was far short of the demands formulated by the Brazilian military.
- 3 Military Attaché Intelligence Report. Rio de Janeiro, 5 December, 1946. RG 319 Records of the Army General Staff. Estimate Military Intelligence Division. National Archives (NARA).
- 4 Operational Letter Report. 28 October, 1950. US Military Commission (JBUSMC) Army Command Reports. RG 407, box 16, NARA.
- 5 Operational Letter Report. 28 October, 1950. US Military Commission (JBUSMC) Army Command Reports. RG 407, box 16, NARA.
- 6 The Joint Brazil-United States Military Commission and the Brazilian Army. RG 333 Record of the International Military Agencies. JBUSMC, 1946-1952, box 6, NARA. [
- 7 Monthly report of activities of the JBUSMC. 2 January, 1947. RG 333 Record of the international military agencies. JBUSMC, 1946-1952, box 7, NARA.
- 8 Relatório dos trabalhos do EME, 1945 e 1948. p. 287 and 296.
- 9 BRASIL. Relatório do Ministério da Guerra referente ao ano de 1952. CDocEx.
- 10 The full text of the agreement is published in Carone (1980, 35ss.).
- 11 Report of Mobile Training Team in Brazil. Fort Gullick, Canal Zone, April 22, 1966. RG 319 Records of the Army Staff, Foreign National Training files, 1955-1966, box 9, NARA.
- 12 Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Brazil. Washington, November 7, 1965, 2:09 p.m. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968. Volume XXXI, South and Central America; Mexico, p. 493. Memorandum from secretary of State Rusk to president Johnson in Texas. Washington, December 3, 1965. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968. Volume XXXI, South and Central America; Mexico, p. 499ss.
- 13 US influence in this sector dates back to 1934, when a coastal artillery training mission was contracted by the Brazilian government.

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