



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

CIVILIANS GET A FOOT IN THE DOOR: REFORMING BRAZIL'S DEFENSE MINISTRY, 2007 – 2010

SYNOPSIS

In 2007, the political moment was right for President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to build Brazil's Ministry of Defense into an institution that would give civilians a significant role in defense policy—more than two decades after the end of military rule. The ministry had existed since 1999 but had failed to provide effective civilian leadership in setting defense policy and overseeing defense institutions. The president, known to Brazilians as Lula, set the stage for the reform by way of a strategy document that called for institutional changes in both the ministry and the armed forces. Then he appointed a well-known and respected minister, Nelson Jobim, to implement the new policies. Jobim worked with a military adviser to unify control of the armed forces, promote greater cooperation and closer coordination among the three service branches, and press civilians and military officers to work together in creating defense policy. By the end of Lula's presidency in 2011, key tasks remained, but the joint staff held key strategic planning functions, the three branches were cooperating on important matters, and military officers, civilians in government, and outside experts were collaborating in the formulation of defense policy.

Tristan Dreisbach drafted this case study based on interviews conducted in Brasilia and Rio de Janeiro in May and June 2016. Case published August 2016.

INTRODUCTION

In September 2006, two commercial airliners collided over Brazil's Amazon rain forest, killing 154 people. Air traffic controllers soon staged work slowdowns to protest their working conditions, and a hundred of them walked off their jobs in March 2007. Passengers protested against frequent delays and cancellations. A few months later, in July 2007, a commercial airliner slid off the runway at São Paulo's Congonhas airport; 187 passengers and 12 victims on the ground died in the fiery wreck. Brazilian media reports portrayed an air traffic control system that was poorly managed and pushed its employees to the breaking point.¹

The disasters sparked a public outcry against the air force, which managed and staffed the air traffic system—a job handled by civilians in many countries. Air traffic control was one of many areas in which Brazil's armed forces guarded their autonomy and resisted civilian control.

The military's role in aviation was a legacy of the powerful role it had played in society throughout Brazil's history. The country had experienced two decades of rule by a military junta, ending with a negotiated transition to civilian government in 1985. Although the transition specified an elected president, active-duty military officers retained important positions in government. For instance, the army, navy, and air

force each had an officer serving as a cabinet minister. A fourth officer served in the cabinet as the president's military adviser, and a fifth was a cabinet-level official with a security portfolio. Civilians had little influence over the affairs of the armed forces.

In the years following the reestablishment of democracy, civilian leaders chipped away at the military's prerogatives. In 1999, President Fernando Henrique Cardoso led the creation of the Ministry of Defense, a move that ostensibly put defense institutions under the authority of a civilian minister. But in practice, the minister had limited powers, the ministry was small and weak, and the three branches of the armed services maintained control over most aspects of their own budgets, force development, and strategic planning. The government lacked a clear defense strategy defining the role that each service should play in promoting and defending Brazil's national interests.

When President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, known as Lula, succeeded Cardoso in 2003, his government began to discuss next steps in advancing civilian control over defense policy. Lula aspired for Brazil to exert greater influence on the world stage, and he knew that to achieve it would require stronger defense institutions. The civilian-led government aimed to play a more active role in international defense cooperation, increase participation in military peacekeeping operations abroad, and ensure that Brazil's borders and resources were well defended. The agenda required not only new ideas but also new institutions.

The economy boomed during Lula's first term, and the president secured a convincing victory through his 2007 reelection campaign. He had the political momentum to take on difficult defense reforms, and the air disasters underscored the depth of the problem. The public had seen the military fail to manage an important public service effectively.

In a public statement after the second air disaster, Lula expressed his commitment: "From this moment on, we are going to do what has to be done."²

THE CHALLENGE

To establish effective civilian control over defense institutions, Lula's government had to confront deep-seated problems that had allowed the armed forces to retain a high degree of autonomy and to resist interference by private citizens in military affairs.

Brazil's military was large, reflecting the strong role the country's political leaders wished to play in South America and abroad. In 2008, Brazil's defense budget was US\$26.2 billion, equivalent to 1.62% of the country's gross domestic product. That level of financial commitment was double that of neighboring Argentina, which spent 0.81% of its GDP on defense, but it was considerably lower than Chile's 2.62%. There were about 367,000 active-duty personnel in the Brazilian military in 2008, most of whom were serving in the army. This was larger than Argentina's 76,000 personnel, Chile's 65,000, and Peru's 114,000 combined.³

The problem was not the amount spent or the number of service members under arms, but certain institutional features that cut civilian leaders out of the kind of supervisory and planning roles important in a democracy. For example, ministers had limited formal powers and no place in the military chain of command. The weaknesses stemmed from negotiations that had led to the ministry's creation in the 1990s. Cardoso had bargained with the four-star officers who served as the cabinet-level ministers of each of Brazil's three service branches, said Antonio Jorge Ramalho, who was with the defense ministry in the early 2000s and taught at the University of Brasilia. The three ministers agreed to endorse the creation of the defense ministry and surrender their cabinet-level posts, but they retained significant powers and autonomy in their newly created positions as commanders of their service branches. Ramalho said they actively participated in designing the new ministry in order to assure the influence of their services in the decision making process.

The commanders had authority over services that controlled vast resources and made major decisions with little interference from civilians in

government. Each service decided how to spend money allocated by the defense budget, developed plans for acquiring and developing equipment and manpower, and handled its procurement of military equipment. The commanders remained the most prestigious positions in the military and answered only to the president. “They made a compromise when they created the ministry,” said Celso Amorim, a former foreign affairs minister who became defense minister in 2011. Amorim described a commander as “a kind of vice minister for a service.”

Active-duty military officers from each service branch headed three secretariats in the defense ministry and ultimately answered to their service commanders through the chain of command—an arrangement that strongly curtailed civilian control. The secretariats generally handled personnel management, legislative affairs, health care, and other administrative responsibilities. A unit in one of the secretariats handled budget proposals from all three service branches and parceled out budget funding. Secretariat staff consisted primarily of active-duty and retired military personnel, along with a small number of civilians. “The minister arrived with a small group of people who assisted him directly, but they had to operate through the secretariats in which the armed forces had control,” Ramalho explained.

During negotiations for creation of the defense ministry in the late 1990s, the service branches also retained a significant presence in key departments that the secretariats oversaw, according to Ramalho, and they divvied up important offices among themselves. The navy had personnel in departments responsible for managing international military relations, for example. The army had a leading presence in the department that wrote defense legislation.

Those departures from the conventional role of the military in a democracy had persisted in part because of weak leadership, which had hobbled the civilian defense ministry from the beginning. Cardoso and Lula had appointed people who were little known and lacked the political credentials that might have enabled change. And continuity

suffered because no minister had served as long as two years in the position.

When Lula became president, he nudged the defense ministry to modernize its structure and processes. He wanted to strengthen the economy, build national industry, and become a greater player in international affairs. Lula saw defense reform as part of the effort to achieve those goals because Brazil needed to defend its resources, increase its levels of international defense cooperation, and develop strategic alliances with other countries in South America and the South Atlantic Ocean.

In 2004 and 2005, the defense ministry hosted discussions about defense reform, inviting members of Brazil’s small academic community that studied defense affairs. The meetings addressed the need to restructure defense institutions and transform the position of defense minister into one that had both formal authority and the respect of military officers, and the air disasters in 2006 and 2007 lent impetus to that reform effort. However, designing and implementing institutional changes presented several challenges, according to civilians who joined the ministry’s reform discussions. First, civilians and military leaders rarely discussed the country’s strategic goals or the defense capability needed to achieve those goals. And political leaders had never developed clear priorities for the government and the armed forces.

Brazil’s only defense policy document was the vague and imprecise National Defense Policy, which Cardoso had ordered written in 1996 and which Lula had updated in 2005. The 1996 policy included only general principles about Brazil’s security, strategic environment, and national defense objectives. “It was a document so general that it could fit more than a hundred countries,” Ramalho recalled. “It was written by a small group of diplomats and some civil servants.” Despite its shortcomings, the defense policy document was the Brazilian government’s first attempt to publicly express expectations for the armed forces, according to Juliano Cortinhas, who served from 2015 to 2016 as chief of staff of the Pandiá

Calógeras Institute, a defense ministry research group. Ramalho said the 2005 policy was more specific, including a justification of Brazil's intent to develop a nuclear-powered submarine. The policy resulted from a discussion involving personnel from the three services, as well as a handful of civilians.

A second implementation challenge arose from a shortage of civilians who had deep knowledge of security issues. Defense policy making had always been the domain of the armed services, and active-duty and retired officers at the ministry held institutional knowledge and expertise. The civilians who worked with them were mostly retired officers or young employees who performed administrative tasks on short-term contracts. Because the ministry had no career path for civil servants, civilians rarely served more than four years before leaving.

Building cooperation between the service branches presented a third challenge. The effectiveness of a modern military depended on strong communication and coordination by the branches to achieve strategic goals, but Brazil's armed forces had redundant functions and little incentive to work together. A civilian-led defense policy could be effective only if the three service branches jointly lent their support to implementation. The army, navy, and air force protected their autonomy not only from civilians but also from each other. Education, doctrine, logistics, and strategic affairs took place largely within each individual branch. "We had different ideas about employment of force," Ramalho said. "The services didn't coordinate or even exchange information on a regular basis about their hypotheses of war, let alone other things." Until 1999, a military organization called the general staff had performed some of the administrative, operational, and logistical functions of all three service branches. When Cardoso created the defense ministry in 1999, he scrapped the general staff as part of his negotiations with top military officers.

A final challenge confronting Lula involved the likelihood of resistance by the military services

as responsibilities and authority shifted toward civilians. The army had the most to lose because it was the largest branch and historically enjoyed the most influence; every president during the era of military rule had been an army officer. In the 1980s, the military ceded its lead role in Brazil's government, but the services maintained control over their own affairs and still held powerful influence over Congress to block or weaken legislation that shifted power to civilians.

Military resistance was "discreet," according to Octavio Amorim Neto, a professor at the Getúlio Vargas Foundation. "They would not openly confront the commander in chief. But they would use all the formal and informal levers they had to block, to stall, and to slow all the decisions regarding the control of the defense sector by the civilians."

Military commanders had ample ability to sway government decision making. In 2000, Cardoso reinstated the commander of the army after 155 generals gathered in the capital to oppose the president's decision to fire him for criticizing defense funding.⁴

Lula witnessed similar conflict in 2004, when his defense minister, a career diplomat, clashed with the army's commander over the military pension system, salaries, and other issues. An army office e-mailed to a journalist a statement that defended the military and referred to its opponents as communists. Although the e-mail drew public criticism and the defense minister condemned the statement, Lula chose to side with the powerful army commander over the minister. Ramalho, who was with the ministry at the time, said the dispute had to do more with divergent interpretations of the role and responsibilities of the armed forces during the authoritarian period than with this e-mail alone. He said the military commanders used their political influence to help force the minister out. The defense minister resigned and issued a public statement accusing some military officers of being stuck in the mind-set of the past.⁵

Lula knew his reform efforts could fail if he failed to enlist support from key officers, particularly the powerful commanders.

FRAMING A RESPONSE

Lula addressed the leadership situation at the defense ministry first. In July 2007, one week after the second plane crash, the president replaced the defense minister he had appointed in 2006 and installed Nelson Jobim in the post. Ministerial appointments in Brazil were prerogatives of the president and did not require approval by Congress. Jobim had a far higher public profile than any of his predecessors and an extensive résumé that included experience in three branches of government. He was a lawyer who had served in Congress before becoming justice minister under Cardoso. He then served as a justice in Brazil's Supreme Federal Court from 1997 to 2006, including almost two years as chief justice.

Jobim knew the inner workings of the government well and brought a strong personality, credibility, and competence to the ministry. General Sérgio Etchegoyen, an army officer who was the chief of army staff when Jobim arrived at the ministry, said the new minister's leadership skills and communication style were well suited to defense institutions. "In the military, you never say maybe; you say yes or no," Etchegoyen asserted. "Jobim never said maybe."

Jobim said in a 2008 speech that defense had been "an exclusively military issue" following the return to democracy in the mid-1980s but that civilians had to take over the leadership role. "We discussed with President Lula the need to put defense back into the national agenda," he said at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C.⁶

Nondefense institutions took initial steps toward developing a new defense strategy and restructuring the ministry. In June 2007, Lula appointed Roberto Mangabeira Unger to be secretary of strategic affairs, a new cabinet-level position that would advise the president on national planning issues. Unger was a politician who had run for mayor of São Paulo and had considered a run for president against Lula in 2006. He was also a prolific writer and philosopher who had a faculty position at Harvard Law School.

In September 2007, Lula assigned Unger the job of drafting a National Strategy of Defense within a year. The document was to present a clear statement of Brazil's goals for its military and the role the military should play in achieving Brazil's national strategic priorities. For Lula and Unger, defense was a key part of the country's larger planning agenda. More-effective defense policies and more-effective institutions could protect Brazil's natural resources from cross-border smuggling, could build a national defense industry, and could enhance Brazil's influence in foreign affairs. Lula and Unger wanted the new strategy to be more specific and more comprehensive than the National Defense Policy the government had updated two years earlier. The old policy remained in effect, though, and its principles helped inform the National Strategy of Defense.

Because Unger had a cabinet-level post but only a small staff, he quickly enlisted Jobim's assistance. Together they made consultation a priority in developing the strategy and formed a committee that included the ministers of planning, finance, and science and technology, according to Jobim. Consultations with officers prepared the civilian committee to determine "the changes of profile, organization, practice, and equipment" in the armed forces that were necessary to perform each task, Jobim said in 2008.⁷ Unger and Jobim spoke with officers and representatives of military education institutions such as the Army Command and General Staff College. The National Strategy of Defense "was the first time in our history" that the government asked the armed forces what they needed to achieve strategic goals determined by the government, said Etchegoyen, then army chief of staff. Although policy makers and analysts said other countries exerted little influence over Brazil's defense reform agenda, the National Strategy of Defense included concepts and ideas common to militaries in NATO.

Three elements of the new strategy had special prominence. A guiding principle was so-called jointness, a term used in many countries to refer to cooperation between service branches in

all military processes such as research, planning, training, and operations. Properly implemented, jointness increased the efficiency of military operations and enabled the services to work together in an armed conflict.

In late 2008, Unger and Jobim submitted a 70-page draft National Strategy of Defense that called for the creation of a Joint Staff of the Armed Forces, which would include officers from the three service branches.

The next element of the new strategy was in the form of a more powerful role for the defense minister as the second link in the military chain of command, after the president. In a military culture that valued rank and discipline, the change marked a significant step toward strengthening the defense minister and the ministry as a whole. The strategy assigned to the minister the responsibility for all tasks that involved directing the armed forces—except those that the constitution and the law assigned explicitly to the president.

Etchegoyen said the minister’s broader authority carried with it certain added

responsibility for ensuring that the armed forces had the resources, incentives, and training needed to function smoothly and effectively. “The presence of the minister in the chain of command is important to [military officers] because the minister will answer politically for his success or failure,” he said. “If the military does not have the means, equipment, or political conditions to do our job, [the minister] is responsible, not the general.”

The third element of the strategy was the development of civilian capacity, including both an expanded civilian role at the ministry and the creation of more opportunities for civilians to study defense.

Fourth, the strategy called for greater integration of the three service branches’ industrial technology, logistics, command and control, and other areas. One aspect of that integration was the creation of a unit within the defense ministry that would oversee the procurement and production of defense equipment, a role in which the military had enjoyed almost total autonomy.

Box 1

The Purpose of the Joint Staff

Unger and Jobim intended the joint staff to take on key coordination and control tasks for the entire armed forces and to develop doctrines and strategies that applied to all service branches. The chief of joint staff, a four-star officer, reported to the defense minister and was not permitted to return to duty in a service branch after holding the position. The stipulation was intended to prevent the chief of joint staff from favoring his or her branch.

Later, Jobim and Etchegoyen, Jobim’s military adviser, further honed the plan for the joint staff. Etchegoyen said: “We had a whiteboard. Jobim said, ‘Show me how you organize the armed forces if you have a crisis.’” Jobim and Etchegoyen sketched out how the military functioned at the time and showed which processes, procedures, and organizations had to change. “We needed a structure for the armed forces in peacetime that could very quickly go into crisis mode.”

In addition to improving the military’s ability to coordinate joint operations, the joint staff promoted communication and understanding among the services. Officers working in the joint staff had “to understand how it works in the others’ services,” Ramalho said. “They learn from each other. They establish contacts with officers from the other services. They start to open their minds to the necessity of coordinating actions.”

Serving on the joint staff required military officers to adopt new ways of thinking. “For implementation of this new structure, you cannot just say, ‘Abracadabra,’ and it’s done,” Etchegoyen said. “It takes time. . . . You have to adapt the old doctrine into the new doctrine.” The services had to amend curricula in military education institutions to reflect the new ideas. The National Strategy of Defense itself became an important textbook because it clearly set out the functioning of the defense system and the new strategic goals for the armed forces.

During discussions among civilians and officers involved in creating the strategy, the services had an opportunity to also discuss goals for updating equipment, including weapons systems. Each branch made proposals for equipment and projects it would like to pursue in the coming years. And based on those conversations, the strategy included some general guidance for creating defense budgets, although it offered no specific numbers. For example, the section in the National Strategy of Defense on the navy's strategic goals stated, "Brazil will maintain and develop its ability to design and manufacture both conventional and nuclear-propelled submarines."⁸

Although Lula formally introduced the National Strategy of Defense in mid-December 2008, the document had no legal status under Brazilian law. Implementation required the cooperation of disparate groups: the military, civilians, and Congress. Jobim acknowledged the challenge in a speech earlier in the year: "Changes that take place in the world always get delayed by the most solid institutions."⁹ (In 2009, Unger left government and returned to Harvard. Lula told the media that Unger had to fulfill his obligations to the school and could not extend his leave.¹⁰)

GETTING DOWN TO WORK

To implement the National Strategy of Defense, Jobim had to create new positions in the defense ministry, prepare enabling legislation, and put in place a policy-making process that involved civilians in government, civilians outside government, and military officers.

Creating an implementation team

In 2009, Jobim asked the army commander to select an officer who could serve as his military adviser and oversee implementation of the strategy document's policy recommendations. The commander approached Etchegoyen, who in 2009 was a three-star general serving as commander of the Army Command and General Staff College, an institution that educated military officers and was a center of the military's strategic thinking. Under

Etchegoyen, the college had contributed to the National Strategy of Defense.

Etchegoyen's job was to formally advise the minister, but, he said, his task was to create the conditions for Jobim to achieve his goals. He helped the minister evaluate defense institutions and identify changes that needed to be made so as to conform to the National Strategy of Defense. Although his position had no authority over the four-star generals who commanded the service branches, he derived power from the minister.

Etchegoyen, whose father had been a general in the era of the military junta, had a reputation as one who respected the military's social traditions and internal culture. That heritage increased his credibility in his new role, which involved changing the fundamental relationships between military leaders and between military leaders and their civilian counterparts. Etchegoyen's familiarity with traditions and organizational cultures added to his ability to navigate deep-set resistance to institutional changes.

Etchegoyen's team consisted of a small support staff and a colonel from each of the three service branches. The colonels served as Etchegoyen's primary means of communication with each service branch and updated him on what their branches were doing or not doing. Etchegoyen also had two civilians seconded from other ministries: one from the foreign affairs ministry and the other from the planning ministry.

Because one of the major goals was to establish the joint staff—a task that required the cooperation of all three armed forces and the creation of new offices and positions in the military hierarchy—Etchegoyen expected to have to draw on those attributes. "Every time you change [institutions], you know there will be some reaction," Etchegoyen said. "You will be afraid to lose power. . . . The joint staff was another powerful new actor on the stage."

Etchegoyen decided to make as many of the decisions as possible through negotiation rather than relying on orders from the minister. The three colonels who served in his five-person staff were his primary means of communication with the

service branches, said Carlos Azevedo, a civilian seconded to Etchegoyen's staff by the planning ministry.

Negotiation was especially important for Etchegoyen because he dealt mainly with officers who outranked him. A three-star general, Etchegoyen had to move carefully when interacting with his four-star superiors. "I did not have a hierarchical position from which to give orders," Etchegoyen said. "When I wanted to give an order, I wrote a letter that said 'By order of the minister of defense.'" He added that he tried to limit his use of ministerial orders and always made it clear that he was acting on behalf of the minister and not for his own service branch. "I was always very aware not to create the impression that I was working for the army," he said. "I was working for jointness: for the navy, the air force, and the army."

The relationship between the minister and his military adviser was also strong from the start: Jobim and Etchegoyen were from the same region and had known each other for years.

Preparing enabling legislation

The National Strategy of Defense contained a number of broad ideas that Jobim and Etchegoyen had to turn into detailed legislation. The government could use executive orders to implement some of the institutional changes the strategy recommended, but for other aspects the government sent enabling legislation to parliament. "The law was about training, organization, and deployment of the armed forces," Etchegoyen recalled.

The two men ironed out some of the details the strategy had left open and turned many of the provisions of the strategy into legal language. For instance, the proposed legislation refined the strategy's envisioned powers for the defense minister by placing the minister into the chain of command and empowering the minister to nominate high-ranking officers for promotions or special assignments; previously, the president had been the only civilian in the chain of command. The proposed legislation also specified the

mandate and organization of the joint staff under the authority of the ministry. In addition, the language stipulated that the service branches had to work with the civilian-led ministry in developing their budgets—a big change from past practice.

The head of the defense and foreign affairs committee in the Chamber of Deputies, one of the two chambers of Brazil's Congress, negotiated with Jobim to include a provision in the law that would require the government to update the National Strategy of Defense every four-year presidential term and submit it to Congress for approval, according to Ramalho. "Every four years, they have to present a new document," he said. "This created a process, an obligation for the minister to say, 'This is what we've planned, this is what we have done, this is what we need, and this is what we want to do for the next four years.'"

The final version of the law required the government to submit a revised National Defense Policy and National Defense White Book on the same schedule. The white book increased transparency in defense by providing information about the current state of the armed forces and by including an inventory of weapons and equipment held by each service and the size of each service's budget. It was intended to be a tool to inform and involve Brazilian society in defense issues, Ramalho said.

Lula's ruling coalition helped move the legislation through Congress. The Chamber of Deputies approved the new provisions, with 328 out of 336 members voting in favor.¹¹

Choosing a chief of joint staff

Lula and Jobim oversaw the important task of selecting the first chief of joint staff. Because the new law specified that the holder of the position was equal in rank to the commanders of the three armed services, the chief had to be able to establish an effective, working relationship with each of the powerful commanders. In 2010, Lula and Jobim chose José Carlos de Nardi, a retired four-star army general, to be the first to assume the post. The law said the defense minister nominated the chief, and the president made the

appointment. Etchegoyen said he played no role in the decision.

De Nardi was an easy choice because he was from the same state as Jobim and had known both Jobim and Etchegoyen for years, a former defense official said. De Nardi was an affable and well-liked officer who would be loyal to Jobim, and the powerful commanders would not see him as a significant threat to their status and power.

The choice of de Nardi gave the chief of joint staff a degree of separation from active-duty military. Because de Nardi was retired and the law banned him from taking any other military posts after service as chief, he was less likely to be influenced by other officers, especially the army, his “alma mater,” according to Azevedo.

Creating joint institutions

The task of creating the structure of the Joint Staff of the Armed Forces fell to the defense ministry’s Secretariat of Institutional Organization. The secretariat’s Department for Organization and Legislation, which in 2009 was under the leadership of a retired military officer, developed for the joint staff an organizational chart with three directorates: joint operations, strategic affairs, and logistics.

Neither the secretariat nor the minister had the authority to choose staff for the new units. The organizational chart informed the services about the positions each had to fill and the skill set each position required. The services then chose officers to serve on the joint staff. The positions were rotated among the services, with each service holding an office for two years. The Superior War College, a military academic institution under the authority of the defense ministry, created a special four-month joint staff training course for officers preparing to work in those posts.

Implementation of the National Strategy of Defense included decisions about the allocation of resources—such as weapons, bases, health facilities, armored vehicles, and helicopters—among the services and how to coordinate the use of military assets for joint operations.

Etchegoyen presented the services with proposals for how the branches could coordinate aspects of the projects contained in the National Strategy of Defense. The services had the opportunity to comment on the proposals and suggest changes. The process sometimes caused tension, but Etchegoyen and his staff attempted to negotiate an amicable solution before any plan went to the minister for approval. “We just tried to keep the friction below the minister,” Etchegoyen said.

Although the creation of a joint staff chipped away at the powers of the service commanders, Etchegoyen said, Jobim’s efforts to forge strong relationships with top officers helped minimize resistance. Jobim worked hard to build relationships with the commanders of the services. He made clear his intention to fight for increases in the defense budget, and although he was not a military officer, he wore a uniform at many public functions. “We experienced some resistance at one point or another,” Etchegoyen said. But “because of the ability of Minister Jobim to build relationships and an environment of confidence and trust, the relationship he had with the army commanders . . . we didn’t have huge problems.”

Attempting to reform military budgeting and acquisitions

Lula wanted to give Jobim’s defense ministry greater control over defense budgeting. In November 2010, the president issued a decree that created a Secretariat for Defense Products in the defense ministry. This was one of the proposals in the National Strategy of Defense that Jobim and Etchegoyen had not included in their reform legislation, which parliament had passed several months earlier. The secretariat was mandated to oversee procurement and to create a “unified direction” for future acquisitions. In addition to aligning the armed services’ purchasing plans with strategic goals, the secretariat would help develop Brazil’s defense industry.

The secretariat aimed to address several problems identified in the National Strategy of Defense such as the obsolescence of military

equipment, dependence on foreign defense purchasing, and poorly coordinated defense acquisitions. But it did not have the tools to do so and struggled to establish relevance and credibility, said Cortinhas, who worked with the defense research group. The service branches already had developed institutions to implement their own acquisition policies and priorities, and it would be difficult for civilians to assume that role. Secretariat staff did not have the political, human, and financial resources necessary to effectively scrutinize budgets. And because the military exercised tight control over access to information and expertise, the defense ministry's influence on budgeting remained limited to setting the overall amount of money available to each service.¹²

Still, outside of the Secretariat for Defense Products, Etchegoyen's office succeeded in involving the minister more closely in decisions about military equipment purchases, about how to distribute forces throughout the country, and about which units would be transferred, created, or terminated, according to the former defense official who did not wish to be named. Each service branch submitted a list of desired purchases. Etchegoyen's staff compiled the requests. The minister made the final decision about the defense ministry's priorities for procurement and the distribution of military resources.

Building a civilian career path

Even though the National Strategy of Defense called for more civilians in the defense ministry and the creation of career paths for them, neither Jobim nor Amorim struggled to make significant progress on that goal.

The number of civilians with formal education in defense affairs had increased since the early 2000s, when the defense ministry began a joint program with the education ministry to fund defense studies programs at Brazilian universities. But civilians remained a minority in the defense ministry. Gabriel Pimenta, who studied the civilian role in the military at the Getúlio Vargas Foundation, estimated that in 2016, about 30% of

ministry employees were so-called pure civilians—meaning, no military background. The rest were active-duty officers and retired officers. The only career civil servants at the ministry were a small number of people employed by another ministry and seconded to the defense ministry. In general, civilian staff tended to be in low-level positions.

Several factors contributed to the dearth of civilian employees in the ministry. First, the regular civil service exam required for work in most government ministries did not provide access to the defense ministry. Pimenta said that that policy was justified partly because the defense ministry required expertise the civil service exam did not take into account. Still, he said, it was “terrible” that the government had never provided for a special entrance exam for the defense ministry. Further, military personnel distrusted civilians without defense experience and were reluctant to help them develop pertinent skills. Officers “are always resistant when talking to newcomers to the area” of defense, Pimenta said. “They are not willing to train you to be a better servant, and they are not willing to work with people who don't have formal training.” In addition, active-duty and retired military officers enjoyed access to well-paid positions in the ministry and did not want to lose their influence. Their resistance often was subtle but helped dissuade top policy makers from pushing hard to introduce a career trajectory for civilians in the ministry.

Money became an issue later. Amorim said one of the reasons for failure to implement a civilian career path was the financial downturn that struck Brazil in 2008. The ministry planned to recruit civilians but “got stuck with [budget] limitations and decreasing personnel in government in general,” he said. “I had to choose my internal battles. There is room to have more civilians and certainly to have a career, but . . . it's not bad to have a mixture. Retired officers have a role, and they have a lot of knowledge. But you cannot have only them, because it doesn't bring innovation or criticism.”

Although recruitment was difficult, Amorim's ministry gradually expanded the number of

civilians in upper-level positions. In 2013, the government installed a civilian as secretary-general to oversee the three secretariats in the ministry and a unit that managed operations in the Amazon. Amorim said the new post was partly intended to better coordinate the actions of the four units, which had operated with relative autonomy, but he added that his primary consideration had been to add another high-level civilian official in the ministry. Amorim said: “You didn’t have any [civilian] apart from the minister . . . above or at the same level as the commanders. . . . Now you do.” This aspiration did not long endure, however. In 2015, former army officer Joaquim Silva e Luna became the second person to hold the position.

Another step toward greater civilian influence in the ministry was the 2013 creation of the Pandiá Calógeras Institute, a defense ministry research group staffed exclusively by civilians. The institute started its work under Amorim, but the leader in creating it was Ramalho, the professor at the University of Brasilia who had been in the defense ministry in the early 2000s. The institute conducted research for the ministry and arranged events that brought together officers and civilians interested in defense affairs. “I made a point of having the Pandiá Calógeras Institute as a civilian institution directly linked to the minister,” Amorim said. “We talked to them all the time, but they were autonomous.”

Building a policy-making process

The 2010 defense law required the defense ministry to produce three policy documents every four years: the National Strategy of Defense, the National Defense Policy, and the National Defense White Book. The defense strategy set out the country’s long-term strategic goals and the role and desired capabilities of the armed forces. The defense policy articulated basic principles about Brazil’s security, defense, strategic guidelines, and objectives for the armed forces. The white book explained the current state of the armed forces, the strategic environment, and the country’s defense policy. It included descriptions of how defense institutions functioned and data on the numbers

and types of weapons systems held by each service branch.

The Directorate of Strategic Affairs in the joint staff had the lead role in creating the three documents, but Jobim’s ministry instituted a policy that incorporated input and advice from a variety of contributors in government, from the armed forces, and from external civilian specialists.

Within the ministry, working groups met regularly to discuss specific policy areas. For example, a defense industry working group consisted of the secretary of defense products, an adviser to the defense minister, and the joint staff’s chief of strategic affairs.

The ministry also invited civilian defense experts—primarily university professors—to discussions during the policy-making process and took external advice seriously. Nongovernmental organizations were not represented because they were not active on defense issues in Brazil, according to Pimenta, but Etchegoyen saw the meetings as very important for building civilian interest in defense issues.

“The final product had the minister’s touch, but it had been produced by a lot of people in a lot of meetings,” Etchegoyen said. “The strategy was to involve the most people we could.” All documents passed through a committee that included representatives of other ministries, government agency personnel, and experts from outside of government. The ministry drafted the documents concurrently, and the drafting process took two years.

In August 2011, after four years as defense minister, Jobim left the position. His departure came less than a year after Dilma Rousseff, Lula’s handpicked successor, became president. The new defense minister was Amorim, who had been the country’s longest-serving foreign minister. Amorim took an active role in preparing the 2012 defense policy documents, which bore his name along with the president’s.

Etchegoyen had left the ministry several months before Jobim so he could take command of an armored division. Another military officer replaced Etchegoyen as military adviser, although

the job no longer had a strong focus on implementation of the National Strategy of Defense.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

As Lula and Jobim worked to bolster civilian control over defense policy, a long-simmering dispute about transitional justice threatened to derail their reform process. Lula's administration had sought a way to redress human rights abuses committed during military rule, 1964–85. By all accounts, the military junta had overseen the disappearance of hundreds of Brazilians and subjected tens of thousands of people to imprisonment, torture, or forced exile.

The president's governing coalition included politicians who had suffered at the hands of the military regime, including Rousseff, who served as Lula's chief of staff from 2005 to 2010 and who succeeded him as president. In the 1970s, military officers had detained her for several months and subjected her to beatings and electric shocks.¹³

In December 2009, Lula unveiled an initial version of the National Action Plan on Human Rights created by the Secretariat for Human Rights. A key feature of the plan was the establishment of a National Truth Commission to investigate allegations of crimes committed during the era of military rule. The plan also proposed revising a 1975 amnesty law to enable the prosecution of members of the former military regime.

Although Jobim and the military commanders were aware that Lula was developing the plan, Etchegoyen said some of the provisions jolted the defense establishment. Jobim and the service commanders said the plan violated a government agreement that restricted how far any official inquiry could go in addressing past crimes by the military. The issue was extremely sensitive because the proposal challenged the negotiated basis for Brazil's transition from military rule to civilian rule in the 1980s, according to Luís Fernandes, a professor at Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro who had worked on defense policy issues in several government positions. The

transition agreement promised amnesty for members of the regime and for guerrillas who had fought against the military government.

Jobim and the three commanders collectively threatened to resign in a mass exodus of defense leaders that would jeopardize implementation of the National Strategy of Defense. Faced with that prospect and the political troubles the resignations could cause, Lula shelved plans to create the truth commission, and although Lula's government never sent legislation to Congress to create the commission, the dispute continued to simmer. Amorim said the proposal was the most difficult challenge he faced when Rousseff appointed him defense minister in 2011. The incoming president chose him for the job in part because he had the diplomatic skills needed to mediate among military officers and other groups involved in the dispute over past abuses, he said.

Rousseff's government drafted new legislation to create the truth commission but removed the most controversial provisions. Amorim helped negotiate the terms with members of Congress. "One of the crucial aspects of the law . . . was that it preserved the amnesty that had been passed during the military government," he said. "In a way, the bargain was that you keep the amnesty while the commission investigated what happened." The final law accommodated the armed forces' concerns by creating the commission but giving it no authority to prosecute members of the old regime.

But even without the threat of prosecution, the issue of cooperation between the military and the National Truth Commission was a political tangle. Amorim had the sensitive task of pressing the armed forces to supply information to commission members. "There were difficult moments," he said. "I tried to create better contacts and a better atmosphere between the members of the commission and the military commanders." His efforts included organizing informal gatherings to encourage communication.

When the commission accused the military of failing to make public certain important documents related to human rights violations,

Amorim directed officials to uncover documents and send them to the public archives and to the commission. Amorim also provided assurances that commission members could visit military facilities mentioned by victims of the military regime.

In December 2014, the commission released its final report on human rights violations committed by the military regime. The document identified 434 dead or missing people and listed the names of 377 people whom the commission held responsible for deaths and abuses during the period of military rule.¹⁴ About 100 of those named as perpetrators were still alive. The commission said they merited prosecution.¹⁵

Although the report also discussed crimes by opponents of the military regime, some military officers criticized the commission, its procedures, and the final report as politically biased “When the commission released the reports in 2014, I personally signed a note to the press against . . . the way [the commission] did it,” Etchegoyen said. The report named Etchegoyen’s father, who was deceased, among the perpetrators.

Rousseff, who was president at the time, praised the report for presenting facts that otherwise would have been lost to history.¹⁶

ASSESSING RESULTS

Although major tasks still remained at the end of Lula’s presidency in 2011, Jobim and Amorim had made progress on the goals set by three presidents, from Cardoso to Rousseff. Military officers, civilians in government, and outside experts collaborated in formulating defense policy documents, the joint staff held key strategic planning functions, and the three branches cooperated on important matters.

Policy

The drafting and implementation of the National Strategy of Defense gave civilians—for the first time—a credible voice and active role in determining Brazil’s defense policy. Under civilian leadership, officers in the joint staff worked with civilians in the ministry, other government

officials, and external contributors to develop policy documents that guided the development of the armed forces. The defense minister gained command authority over the military.

Academic observers, including Pimenta and Fernandes, said policy documents provided consistent, clear guidance for defense institutions. The ministry invited external civilian specialists to participate in policy making. Through negotiation and compromise, the groups often found common ground. For example, the military supported civilian policy goals such as the drive to increase Brazil’s military cooperation with other countries and engage in global peace operations. Brazil had not been involved in any war for decades, and international military operations were attractive for soldiers and officers seeking experience to advance their careers.

In 2012, the government submitted the first new set of three defense policy documents to Congress, which approved them. Amorim said the National Strategy of Defense remained largely unchanged from the 2008 version because many points still had not been implemented. He had more of an impact on the National Defense Policy, which incorporated more foreign policy objectives than had previous versions.

Ministry capacity

Service in the defense ministry and cooperation with civilian defense officials became essential parts of an officer’s career path. “When I entered the ministry in 2003, there was only one general among the army’s four-star generals who had experience in the defense ministry,” Ramalho said. “When I came back to the ministry in 2011, there were only one or two generals who had *not* been in the defense ministry.” Under Lula and Jobim, it became nearly impossible to gain high-level promotions in the military without demonstrated experience in working in a civilian-led ministry.

The higher desirability of ministry jobs within the military was not matched by increased ministry capacity on the civilian side. In addition, civilians continued to hold only a small proportion of the

higher-level jobs in the defense ministry. Cortinhas reported in 2016 that of 1,693 employees in the defense ministry, only 343 were civilians performing work of a “certain level of importance.” Etchegoyen blamed a lack of qualified civilians, saying many retired officers held civilian positions “because they were people who knew what to do. We didn’t have another solution. . . . You have to keep the system working. If the soldiers go home and you have only civilians, it would collapse. They wouldn’t know what to do. You need people who know the difference between a corporal and an admiral.”

Professors who taught defense studies programs disagreed. Neto of the Getúlio Vargas Foundation said there were many qualified young candidates for defense ministry jobs. “There’s a growing number of civilians with expertise on security issues and defense policy,” he said. “In academia, we now have dozens of graduate programs in international security and defense policy, as well as a lot of grants from the ministry of education to fund research on defense issues.”

Ramalho said members of the three service branches still viewed career civil servants as threats to their power and influence in the ministry. “The services understand that the day you create a civilian service in the defense ministry . . . these people will take control of the information,” he said.

Jointness

The creation of a joint staff improved cooperation and interoperability among the armed services in some areas more than others. Admiral Ademir Sobrinho became the second Chief of Joint Staff of the Brazilian Armed Forces in 2015. He said the new structure helped create a common language among the service branches, and officers who served in the joint staff interacted with other services and brought new ideas back to their branches. Sobrinho said that interoperability—the capability to share information, equipment, and other commonalities—between the services was fairly effective when it came to determining how the forces could achieve the strategic goals set out

in defense policy documents. But the forces struggled to work together to fulfill short-term tactical objectives. Sobrinho cited a number of priorities for changing equipment and doctrine, one of which was making the radio systems of the three branches compatible.

The biggest deployment of joint military forces in Brazil involved a series of border operations that began in 2011—one year after creation of the joint staff—to combat drug smuggling and human trafficking. The operations, which deployed about three times per year, included equipment and thousands of soldiers drawn from the three service branches. The operations served primarily to demonstrate state authority in remote areas where smuggling was a major problem, but they also achieved some success in confiscating contraband, including 20 metric tons of drugs in 2013.¹⁷ The joint staff also shouldered much of the responsibility for security during the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics, both of which took place in Brazil.

The structure of the joint staff remained a work in progress, and lack of direct authority hobbled the chief of joint staff. Although the position was responsible for overseeing joint operations, the chief shared with the three service commanders the decision about which commander was in charge of each operation. Ideally, in a joint staff “the commanders should be responsible for preparing the forces, and the joint staff should be responsible for deploying the forces, which is not really what happens now,” Ramalho said in 2016. “The joint staff is responsible for deploying in only very specific situations, limited in scope and time period.”

In 2016, Sobrinho acknowledged that the position of chief of joint staff still lacked prestige and credibility six years after creation of the position. He said he had to tread carefully with the leaders of the service branches and that it “takes time to be accepted.”

In 2016, Sobrinho acknowledged that the position of chief of joint staff still worked toward greater prestige and credibility among the forces, but he was confident he it would reach that goal.

“The way is long, it involves the breaking of traditions, but it is safe,” he said.

The commanders of the service branches “are older and have more autonomy and more resources than the chief of joint staff does,” Ramalho said. “As long as we have these dynamics, we will never have serious jointness in Brazil.”

Budget oversight

Despite civilian gains in some areas of defense, the service branches retained a high degree of autonomy, especially regarding investments and budgeting. Each chamber of Brazil’s bicameral Congress had a foreign affairs and defense committee that reviewed military budgets, but Pimenta said legislators generally did not exercise any significant oversight authority. Similarly, officials at the defense ministry and outside observers said civilians performed little close scrutiny of military budget proposals.

The air traffic control system, which had been under the authority of the defense ministry in 2007, also came under greater civilian control. A civil aviation authority began work in 2007 and was subordinate to the president, although it was linked to the defense ministry budget.¹⁸ Although air traffic controllers remained air force personnel, civilians along with some retired air force personnel managed the authority. As of 2016, there had been no major civil aviation disasters under the civilian-led civil aviation authority since the July 2007 crash. Gradual improvement of the air traffic control system included a modernization project in 2013 that upgraded the system’s technology ahead of the 2014 football World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games.¹⁹

REFLECTIONS

During 2007–10, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva set in motion a reform agenda in the face of stern opposition by an entrenched military. Until then, the minister of defense had been too weak to provide effective policy leadership and serve as an interlocutor between the political aims of the government and the goals of the armed

forces. No minister had stayed in the job for even two years.

Moved to act by his domestic and international ambitions for Brazil, Lula made a number of decisions that facilitated progress. By placing Nelson Jobim—a well-respected politician—in the minister of defense position, keeping him there for more than four years, and empowering the position with more legal authority over the military, the president bolstered the defense ministry’s credibility and effectiveness.

Lula’s choice of Jobim as defense minister was instrumental in securing support for defense reforms not only from the public but from the military itself. A much stronger leader than his predecessors, Jobim came to the position with an extensive résumé of public service and a high public profile. His personality, demeanor, and dedication were important assets. Officers respected his decisive leadership style, and he took strong measures to signal his support for the armed services, including wearing a uniform in public and threatening to resign when the proposed National Truth Commission appeared to place officers at risk of prosecution.

Another significant appointment was Lula’s choice of a defense establishment outsider, Roberto Mangabeira Unger, to create the reform agenda by way of a new position as secretary of strategic affairs. In addition to being a well-known politician, Unger was a writer and philosopher with international credentials. “It was necessary to have someone from the outside, and it was [Unger] who understood the importance of that to create a process and a program,” said Antonio Jorge Ramalho, who was with the defense ministry in the early 2000s and later taught at the University of Brasilia. As Unger started working on the National Strategy of Defense, it became clear that negotiation and partnership were crucial elements of the reform process. Proponents had to secure active involvement by Jobim and military officers if they were to develop buy-in from the defense ministry and military leadership.

Sérgio Etchegoyen, an army general who had led implementation of the strategy and had

become a cabinet-level security adviser to the president in 2016, said: “When you have to change a culture, have to make such deep changes, you have to attract allies. . . . You have to create a partnership. It takes more time to do that, but you have more effective results.” Etchegoyen stressed the importance of informal negotiations when considering sensitive issues such as resource allocation and the division of responsibility among the services. As an army general, he said, he was able to keep many discussions primarily among officers and insulate the minister from relatively minor disputes.

Although active-duty and retired military officers still far outnumbered civilians in higher-level positions in the defense ministry, their greater interaction created an environment that allowed for collaboration in defense policy making. The joint staff, which consisted of military officers, was in close contact with the civilian-led secretariats in the ministry. And working groups and forums for external experts ensured that a large and diverse group of contributors had opportunities to influence the content of defense policy documents.

The collaboration of military and nonmilitary contributors contributed to acceptance of the policy documents as legitimate sources of policy guidance. Civilians both within and outside government had opportunities to review and critique drafts of the documents. Military officers had ample opportunity to make their cases for the weapons and resources they wished to acquire. The final drafts easily gained high-level approval because all of the parties involved had had two years to make their feelings known. Within the

ministry, civilians and officers cooperated closely through multiple working groups.

The slower progress on creating a civilian career path resulted from the combined influence of several things. There was no pressure from voters to force the government into action, but there were deep vested interests within the military that made change hard. Creating new, permanent civil service positions could push military officers out of their ministry posts, which represented a source of additional income. Change would be possible only if a president or strong defense minister took a personal interest in increasing the number of civilians in the ministry and was prepared to fight back against powerful opponents and endure the consequences.

Although the Joint Staff of the Armed Forces remained relatively weak in 2016, junior officers had begun to view the joint staff as a place to build a military career. Still, strengthening the institution remained a work in progress. An important future step would be to grant the chief of joint staff a position in the chain of command above the three force commanders. The chief could then take a more active role in organizing and conducting joint operations, and the position would garner the respect of other officers.

Future reforms in Brazil’s military appeared likely to be gradual, as a new generation of officers came to appreciate the necessity of civilian leadership in a democratic government, the value of jointness and cooperation with other service branches, and the importance of change in enhancing the power and resources of armed forces.

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