

SHADY BUSINESS:  
Corruption in the Brazilian Army before 1954\*

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. . . the climate of shady business,  
peculation, and embezzlement . . .  
unhappily has come, in recent  
times, to involve the country  
and even the army itself . . .  
"Manifesto of the Colonels"  
(February 1954)

An enduring paradox lies at the heart of Brazilian politics.<sup>1</sup> The Brazilian Army has long suffered from corruption at the highest levels so extreme as to create disquiet throughout the institution. Yet the Brazilian military, like other armed forces in Latin America, has justified its involvement in politics and society by accusing civilians of corruption. Despite repeated revelations of military corruption, soldiers and civilians as well have sometimes accepted the armed forces' use of this moral discourse. For example, an anonymous businessman wrote General Pedro Aurélio de Góes Monteiro on 30 November 1954: "The country is on the brink of financial and economic ruin. This state of things is the result of the abuses of past governments and of the deceased President Vargas and the generalized corruption. . . . The only solution for the reestablishment of confidence in the exterior would be *the delivery of the government to a military dictatorship*" (emphasis in the original).<sup>2</sup> Thirty years later, at the close of authoritarian rule in Brazil, a daring journalist named Carlos Alberto de Carli exposed rampant corruption within the military's intel-

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1. For a transcript of the "Manifesto of the Colonels," see Baldessarini (1957). Thomas Skidmore translated the Portuguese phrase "O clima de negociatas, desfalques, e malversação de verbas" as "the atmosphere of shady business deals, embezzlements, and misuse of public funds" (Skidmore 1986, 129).

2. For the memorandum calling for a military dictatorship, see "Memorandum: Situação política," 30 Nov. 1954, Box 9 (A), Arquivo Góes Monteiro, Arquivo do Exército (Rio de Janeiro).

ligence services. Yet Carli himself dedicated his book in part to “the armed forces—the moral reserves of our people” (cover page, Carli 1985).

Academic studies of corruption in Brazil also have sometimes failed to challenge the military’s rhetoric, in part because the army has restricted access to sources. Barbara Geddes and Artur Ribeiro Neto, for example, recently examined the institutional roots of corruption in Brazil in a brilliant article (see Geddes and Neto 1992).<sup>3</sup> Yet they largely ignored the Brazilian Army, one of the most powerful and corrupt institutions in the country. With recent scandals discrediting civilian leaders throughout the region, it is worthwhile to examine how corruption has plagued the Brazilian Army during the twentieth century.

Since the Brazilian Empire ended in 1889, the army’s waxing power in society has presented officers with growing opportunities to profit from their influence. During the first years of the republic, the army claimed that only its authority could end civilian patronage and embezzlement. Yet scandals rocked the military throughout the four decades of the Old Republic (1889–1930). Although these abuses shocked some junior officers, improprieties were usually confined to individual commanders. But as the army expanded its influence in the economy during the 1930s, the high command became involved in widespread, systematic, and long-term schemes to defraud public funds. Corruption (defined here as the illegal abuse or peddling of public authority for private financial gain) drew press attention to powerful commanders.<sup>4</sup> By 1954 some officers feared that corruption was endangering the military’s unity and influence. Thus only shortly before the Brazilian Army justified overthrowing the government by decrying civilian immorality, senior commanders believed that military corruption was tearing the army apart.

This paradox is significant because it has parallels throughout Latin America. Armies in the region have long constructed roles for themselves as “the moral guardians of the nation.” Yet many Latin American armies have suffered from corruption pervasive enough to affect their ties with civil society. In Nicaragua the Somoza family deliberately encouraged corruption in the Guardia Nacional as a means of isolating the institution from the people and binding it to the dictator.<sup>5</sup> A similar policy was followed by Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, Alfredo Stroessner in Paraguay, and successive presidents in Haiti.<sup>6</sup> In Guatemala the army’s economic influence allowed corrupt officers to amass private

3. Anthony Maingot has also written a useful study of corruption (see Maingot 1994).

4. For more on the definition and meaning of corruption, see Geddes and Neto (1992, 644–47).

5. On corruption in Nicaragua’s National Guard, see Rouquié (1989, 161–62); Booth (1985, 91–93); and Walker (1986, 26, 63–64).

6. On Trujillo’s corruption of the army, see Rouquié (1989, 167); on corruption in the Paraguayan Army, see Rouquié (1989, 182, 184). On corruption in the Haitian military, see Laguerre’s fascinating anthropological study (1993, 53–55, 148–69).

fortunes in complicity with civilian businessmen (see Woodward 1985, 243–44, 247). Elsewhere the drug lords have corrupted officers in Andean countries like Colombia and Bolivia and also in transit countries for drug shipments, such as Panama and Honduras.<sup>7</sup> Less material has been available detailing widespread corruption in the professional armies of the Southern Cone until recently.<sup>8</sup> But democratization has now opened new sources to scholars, a trend that should furnish fresh insight on this topic in coming years.<sup>9</sup> In the Brazilian case, such material suggests that even as the army modernized in the twentieth century, corruption was playing a growing role in military politics.

### *The Origins of the Army's Moral Rhetoric*

Like many of its counterparts in Latin America, the Brazilian Army has perceived its role as a dual one: to defend the country from external threats and to “regenerate the nation.” This belief goes back to the War of the Triple Alliance (1865–1870), in which Brazil defeated its smaller neighbor Paraguay only after years of bloody fighting. To Brazilian officers, the country's military weakness and battlefield losses could be explained only by the perfidy of civilian politicians who profited from the war while neglecting the military. In actuality, the local elites controlling the empire feared the military as an instrument of national authority beyond their control. Regional leaders had therefore tried to prevent the creation of a strong central army. As a result, the Brazilian Army was unprepared for war and then failed to benefit from hard-won victory. After peace was restored, the elite-dominated government slashed troop levels so quickly that commanders feared the government might replace the army with state militias. Resentful officers therefore blamed the regional elites dominating national politics for what they viewed as Brazil's political and economic backwardness. The frequency of political crises, the weakness of political parties, and the perception of civilian corruption all encouraged the army to adopt a rhetoric of morality in its struggle with regional elites. This discourse was eventually used to challenge civilian authority.<sup>10</sup>

As the imperial administration lost support among key civilian groups, the military increasingly clashed with the imperial government and its supporters. The army's lack of funds, the patronage system that

7. See Andreas and Youngers (1989); Andreas (1993); Abbot (1988); Washington Office on Latin America (1988, 1, 5, 6); and Goodman and Mendelson (1990). On corruption in the Colombian military, see Wesson (1986, 182).

8. Reports of military corruption in these countries often tend to be anecdotal (see Timerman 1987, 8–9).

9. For an example of the new material available to scholars, see Nickson (1995).

10. On the military's perception of itself as the nation's savior, see Hayes (1976); see also Comblin (1978, 76–77). On the army's ongoing conflict with rural elites, see Moraes (1991).

advanced incompetent commanders, and civilian corruption all infuriated military leaders. Only a few officers were dedicated positivists devoted to republican ideals. A rhetoric of morality, which depicted the military as the savior of the nation, rallied most commanders against the government. Floriano Vieira Peixoto (later the vice-president of the new republic) typified the officers' thinking: "As a liberal, which I am, I cannot wish for a government of the sword; but there is no one who does not recognize . . . that it is he [the soldier] who knows how to purify the blood of the social body that is corrupted like ours" (cited in Cardoso 1975, 30). By 1889 the situation had deteriorated so severely that rumors were circulating that Viscount Ouro Preto's liberal cabinet intended to arrest the military leadership. Dissident officers cited these rumors to persuade their reluctant colleagues that they must act to defend their institution. With the support of most officers, a powerful army faction overthrew Dom Pedro II on 15 November 1889. Claiming that only the army could end civilian corruption, officers then took control of the new republic that they had created.<sup>11</sup>

#### *Military Corruption in the Old Republic*

Yet army leaders lacked the power to govern. Overwhelmed by political challenges and rebellion, the army returned Brazil to civilian rule five years later, on 15 November 1894. As civilian politicians struggled to reassert civilian control over the armed forces, they realized that they could ensure commanders' loyalty by ignoring their wrongdoing. A disorganized system of political loyalty and military corruption soon evolved that became so widespread that it discredited the senior officers with the junior ranks. Some senior officers came to view their positions more as vehicles to personal wealth than as means of national service. By 1922, when the government ordered a popular military leader arrested, military corruption had helped define the institution's loyalties.<sup>12</sup> Senior officers who were profiting from the system supported the government, while their subordinates denounced civilian leaders. Officers were so angered by the government's plans to arrest Marshal Hermes da Fonseca that they met in the Clube Militar to discuss rebellion. Although outraged, senior officers counseled patience. This advice forced them to

11. For rumors that the government intended to replace the military with a militia, see Moraes (1991, 54); on officers' belief that the government intended to arrest beloved military leader Deodoro da Fonseca, see Hahner (1966, 42); for Edmundo Campos Coelho's argument that elite hostility to the army helped destroy the empire, see Coelho (1976, 45–46).

12. This system in which judicial blindness rewarded military loyalty was not unique to Brazil. Porfirio Díaz successfully used this tactic in Mexico (see Alexius 1976). Alfredo Stroessner also used corruption to strengthen his regime (1954–1989) in Paraguay (see Miranda 1990, 114–16, 150–51; Lewis 1980, 135–37). Military corruption in Paraguay survived Stroessner's overthrow (see Simón 1992; Sondrol 1992, 131, 133, 145).

confront junior officers intent on rebellion, who reminded their superiors of the corruption that had guaranteed their loyalty.

One young firebrand, Lieutenant Asdrúbal Gwaiier de Azevedo, took the lead among young officers denouncing corruption at this meeting. He accused commanders of sins so petty as to be humorous. For example, Azevedo claimed that General Francisco Ramos de Andrade Neves had used public funds to pay for numerous concubines.<sup>13</sup> Azevedo also sparked heated confrontations by accusing military leaders of everything from stealing coal intended for navy ships to embezzling public funds to pay gambling debts. Junior officers were particularly angered by the army's corruption during the Contestado Rebellion (1915–1916), when the institution battled a millenarian movement in the south of Brazil.<sup>14</sup> During this contest, one of the army's most corrupt officers, General Fernando Setembrino de Carvalho, had entered into a partnership with speculators. By granting merchants false receipts for provisions, Setembrino embezzled a large sum of money. Captain Tertuliano Potiguara also purchased nonexistent goods for the battlefield. Junior officers subsequently found packs labeled "grenades" filled with rocks and wagons stuffed with straw instead of uniforms. General Setembrino and Captain Potiguara together purchased twenty thousand pairs of boots that no soldier ever wore. According to Lieutenant Gwaiier, soldiers had even faced hunger during the fighting because of their commanders' corruption (see Sodré 1967, 204–7).

The moral bankruptcy of the high command undermined its authority to deter a faction of junior officers from their planned rebellion, which began on 22 July 1922. But senior officers quickly rallied enough troops to crush the uprising. General Setembrino, despised by junior officers for his corruption, then became Minister of War. As loyal as he was corrupt, Setembrino led the army against a second rebellion in 1924, when junior officers launched a guerrilla war to overthrow the government.<sup>15</sup> It took the army hierarchy more than two years of combat to suffocate the movement. Throughout this period, the rebels (known as *tenentes* because most of them were lieutenants) demanded reforms to end the corruption that they claimed was plaguing politics: a secret ballot, a free press, and the abolishment of patronage. Ironically, however, the rebels emphasized the corruption of the civilian order, while ignoring the army's wrongdoing. Junior officers were unwilling to endanger the

13. See the transcript of this confrontation (Sodré 1967, 202–8). This transcript is also reprinted in Moraes (1991, 141–47). The original document is Azevedo (1932). Despite a careful search, I have been unable to find an original copy of this document. But like Moraes, I believe that Sodré was quoting from an authentic publication.

14. For a history of the Contestado Rebellion, see Diacon (1991).

15. For more on the uprisings and their meaning, see Drummond (1986), Macauley (1974), and Forjaz (1977).

army's honor further by revealing that individual officers were corrupt. Moreover, junior officers blamed civilian leaders for their commanders' crimes because successive presidents had used military corruption as a political tool. Thus began a long tradition within the army in which officers ignored the internal roots of corruption and blamed it instead on "civilian politicians." Consequently, the rebels believed that in order to end military corruption, they had to destroy the existing political system.

Many former military rebels joined a civilian rebellion in 1930. On behalf of civilian leaders, tenentes infiltrated the army. When the revolt began on 3 October 1930, their work ensured that many units deserted the government cause. Before the fighting ended, the revolutionaries removed perhaps three-quarters of the officers in Rio Grande do Sul and the Northeast from their posts.<sup>16</sup> Collapsing from within, the army prevented a bloody civil war only by turning power over to rebel leader Getúlio Vargas on 3 November 1930. The Old Republic was finished. Delighted rebels idealistically believed that they could return the army to morality by ending the corruption that had bound officers to the established order.

### *Vargas and the Army*

Instead, the rebel victory brought the army chaos. The military as an institution had remained outside of the revolutionary forces. Not a single general had joined the revolt, which was led by a lieutenant-colonel. The tenentes replaced many "reactionary commanders" whom they believed to be corrupt, but this process undermined the army hierarchy. At the same time, the tenentes intervened in politics to demand sweeping changes to end the "corruption of the old order." As their dogmatic demands alienated traditional elites, the generals they had expelled plotted rebellion. Thus the former rebels lost both military and political support. As chaos threatened the state from both the political left and right, the tenentes fell from the favor of President Vargas. In this tense atmosphere, Vargas skillfully manipulated challenges to his government to move Brazil toward an authoritarian order based on military support. Desperate to end challenges to the military and the state, the army backed Vargas on 10 November 1937, when he closed the congress and founded the Estado Novo. The former military rebels had little influence over this new government. Instead, Vargas relied on more senior military commanders like General Pedro Aurélio de Góes Monteiro and General Eurico Gaspar Dutra, whom he had promoted to high positions since the revolution.

16. See Protógenes Guimarães et al. to Getúlio Vargas, 2 May 1931, p. 6. GV 31.05.02/1, Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil, Fundação Getúlio Vargas, Rio de Janeiro (hereafter cited as CPDOC, FGV).

The coup in 1937 altered the older system of corruption in which military leaders had exchanged political loyalty for judicial blindness. Vargas did not necessarily punish wrongdoing by his powerful backers in the military. When one anonymous general (the Minister of the Supreme Military Tribunal) decried Minister of War Eurico Gaspar Dutra's suspicious purchase of defective munitions and obsolete weaponry, he was rebuked by the president.<sup>17</sup> But if key commanders still enjoined immunity from investigation, the nature of military corruption had changed nonetheless. No longer was corruption confined to isolated officers who sold military supplies or stole army funds. Instead, sophisticated and organized forms of military corruption became common as members of the Brazilian military became involved in economic development.

After the turn of the century, economic issues became increasingly important to the Brazilian military as the high command realized that a strong army could not exist in a weak nation.<sup>18</sup> Traditional means of defense became meaningless when a withdrawal of credit or a blockade of petroleum could paralyze the country. Accordingly, officers during the 1930s adopted a concept of defense popular in South America in which the army was responsible for managing state-led development. After the events of 1937, the Vargas regime quickly expanded the government's authority over the economy by creating a series of regulatory agencies.<sup>19</sup> The army—on paper and in practice—soon came to dominate these organizations, an outcome that altered the nature of military corruption. The army had acquired economic influence without creating mechanisms to control abuses. Moreover, the secrecy enveloping the *Estado Novo* protected those who were corrupt. Even before Vargas's coup, civilians who criticized police or military corruption were liable to arrest and torture.<sup>20</sup> After 1937 the army no longer needed to fear public opinion. Moreover, the army took control of the state police, especially in the federal capital of Rio de Janeiro. No longer could the state or society check military abuses. One result was that officers at the highest levels of the army

17. Unfortunately, although José Pessoa described this general's encounter with President Vargas, Pessoa did not name him. See Pessoa's unpublished autobiography, JP 53.00.00 dv, folder 13, pp. 19–20, CPDOC, FGV.

18. On the army's growing concern with development, see Wirth (1970), Smith (1976); Martins (1976); and Coelho (1976, 106–7). On the army's perception of its role in broader perspective, see McCann (1984) and Nunn (1972, 1983).

19. On the army's influence over government regulatory agencies, see Smallman (1995, 91–95). See also Wirth (1970) and Moura (1986, 24–25).

20. For example, on 21 Dec. 1935, Domingos Vellasco denounced police corruption in a speech to the Chamber of Deputies. Filinto Muller, the head of the secret police, then telegraphed Vellasco to say that he would invite the congressman to examine police spending records except that Vellasco lacked all moral authority. Shortly afterward Vellasco was arrested as "a Communist rebel," which he interpreted as punishment for his speech. Vellasco claimed to be the only deputy arrested who was threatened with physical violence. See the documents and telegrams dating from 21 Dec. 1935 to 30 Mar. 1936 in Box 5, Folder A, *Arquivo Góes Monteiro*, *Arquivo do Exército* (Rio de Janeiro).

hierarchy allied with business leaders to reap profits from their influence over regulatory agencies. Terror and censorship concealed these changes during the Estado Novo. But by the time Brazil returned to civilian rule in 1945, corruption within the military had become so horrific that it shocked the public.

Newspapers were filled with accounts of military corruption. Admiral Renato de Almeida Guilhobel was called before the congress to justify irregular expenditures in the navy. Groups of officers received long prison terms for embezzling funds from an air force academy. General Angelo Mendes de Morais, who had entered politics in Rio de Janeiro, became infamous for his outrageous corruption and blatant intimidation.<sup>21</sup> Although all branches of the armed forces were rocked by scandal, the political and economic influence of the army afforded its senior members added opportunities for wrongdoing. Consequently, numerous public scandals involved high-ranking army leaders. For example, several army generals were investigated for improprieties in purchasing massive amounts of grain from the United States.<sup>22</sup> To junior officers, it seemed that the army was sinking into a sea of mud. Bewildered commanders, struggling to understand the wave of corruption, blamed it on the large number of officers occupying civilian posts. Yet this belief that civilians were somehow corrupting soldiers ignored actual trends within the military.

Officers' contact with civilians would have meant little without the army's involvement in development. It was true that businessmen sometimes bribed politically influential officers to advocate government policies favoring business interests. For example, according to the U.S.

21. On Admiral Guilhobel's appearance before the congress, see "Manobras da quinta coluna," *Tribuna da Imprensa*, 18 Sept. 1951, p. 4. In January 1951, a scandal surfaced at the technical aviation school in São Paulo, where the treasurer proved corrupt. A number of officers—including one general—received lengthy prison terms. See "Numerosos oficiais e civis envolvidos no escândalo," *Diário de Notícias*, 7 Jan. 1951, sec. 2, p. 1. For information on General Mendes de Morais's involvement in politics, see "Eis os nomes dos criminosos," *Tribuna da Imprensa*, 23 May 1950, p. 1; "Os bandidos de Mendes de Morais," *Tribuna da Imprensa*, 24 May 1950, p. 1. In 1952 a government inquiry named him as a participant in a corruption scandal involving the Banco do Brasil, and the general tried hard to justify the large sums in his banking account. See Estados Unidos do Brasil, Congresso Nacional, Câmara dos Deputados, *Anais da Câmara dos Deputados*, vol. 43, Sessions of 18–20 Nov. 1952 (Rio de Janeiro: Serviço do Instituto de Geografia e Estatística, 1953), p. 84.

22. In 1946 Brazilian generals purchased U.S. wheat with the aid of Vieira Machado, the exchange director of the Banco do Brasil. Most of the wheat later rotted when the United States refused to grant Brazil the necessary export contracts. Grave irregularities in this purchase later prompted a government investigation, which emphasized the role of then Minister of War Canrobert Pereira da Costa. See José Pessoa's unpublished autobiography, JP 53.00.00, folder 13, pp. 22–23. For background on the purchase, see the memo of 30 Apr. 1946 in the records of the U.S. Army Staff in Rio de Janeiro, E57, B12, RG 319, Suitland Branch, National Archive-USA; see also U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: The American Republics, 1947*, vol. 8 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), 475–80.



Central Intelligence Agency, the Sampaio Refinery Group paid some army officers to oppose the creation of a state monopoly in petroleum during the early 1950s (U.S. CIA 1982, 30). Unlike the situation in the Old Republic, however, military corruption under the Estado Novo resulted as much from the army's economic power as from its political influence. In 1952 Brazilian Congressman Olavo Bilac Pinto of the conservative União Democrática Nacional (UDN) argued before the congress that the state's increasing intervention in the economy had tended to corrupt the state itself.<sup>23</sup> As a corollary to this observation, the evidence suggests that the army's growing economic power also encouraged organized corruption. No longer was corruption restricted to isolated individuals and the misappropriation of military funds. Rather, officers increasingly relied on the army's economic influence for their collective advantage, as was revealed by a major military scandal.

### *The Character of Military Corruption*

CEXIM (Carteira de Exportação e Importação do Banco do Brasil) was the branch of the national bank responsible for granting export and import licenses. An agency with immense influence, it came under constant political pressure, as shown in surviving letters from cities and municipalities. If CEXIM granted a license for a generator, it could bring electricity to an entire town. Conversely, if CEXIM denied a request for railway equipment, a city in the interior could remain isolated. Although CEXIM theoretically prevented unnecessary purchases from weakening Brazil's balance of trade, it soon fell under the influence of powerful officers. These commanders wielded their power within the state to interfere in CEXIM decisions for their personal benefit. For a price, officers would guarantee businessmen and municipalities that their foreign purchases would be approved and financed.

In June 1952, the police department covering robbery and fraud in Rio de Janeiro arrested a number of CEXIM functionaries. One of these bureaucrats, Domício de Oliveira Torres, confessed to having personally delivered 2,400,000 cruzeiros to General Antônio José de Lima Câmara, the former head of police in the federal district. According to Torres, General Lima Câmara had then divided the funds among military conspirators involved in CEXIM's business. General Lima Câmara denied facilitating the purchase of foreign material and swore to prosecute "the impostor Torres." Still, the situation was extremely awkward, especially

23. For Olavo Bilac Pinto's speech, see Estados Unidos do Brasil, Congresso Nacional, Câmara dos Deputados, *Anais da Câmara dos Deputados*, vol. 42, Sessions of 14–17 Nov. 1952 (Rio de Janeiro: Serviço do Instituto de Geografia e Estatística, 1953), 296–97. Modern scholarship has supported Bilac Pinto's argument. Geddes and Neto recently argued that state intervention in the economy has encouraged corruption in Brazil's civilian government (1992, 648).

because Lima Câmara was being investigated by individuals formerly under his command. The scandal involved so many officers that any convictions would have badly damaged the army's reputation. Equally important, many other members of the army high command were involved in similar schemes to benefit from the army's control over other regulatory agencies. Lima Câmara's arrest could have set a dangerous precedent. Accordingly, in July 1952 when Brazilian papers revealed the names of the officers involved in the CEXIM scandal, the army acted decisively. Infuriated, General Rio Pardense, who held Lima Câmara's old post commanding the Departamento Federal de Segurança Pública, imposed censorship on police reporting. Because the military had controlled the police in the federal district since the establishment of the Estado Novo, investigations into military corruption took place at the sufferance of the Estado-Maior do Exército (the General Staff). The investigation into General Lima Câmara's corruption was brought to an early close.<sup>24</sup>

### *Corruption of the Army Hierarchy*

As this example suggests, officers like General Lima Câmara enjoyed a measure of security despite their wrongdoing because the army hierarchy itself had organized networks of corruption. One particular scandal involving the sale of arms to the Dominican Republic clearly revealed the complicity of the army hierarchy in corruption. General Canrobert Pereira da Costa served as Minister of War during General Dutra's term as president (1946–1951), and Dutra may have wanted Canrobert to succeed him. That he did not do so was partly the result of events set in motion in March 1948, when Major Salvador Fabián Parra of the Dominican Army arrived in Brazil to negotiate an arms deal. Because negotiations took place at a very low level, the U.S. military attaché worried that General Canrobert might not know of these discussions with Rafael Trujillo's military force. The attaché asked his government for permission to inform the Minister of War. Yet the General Staff was well aware of the Dominican proposal. Despite U.S. pressure to delay the sale, the Brazilian Army reached an agreement with Trujillo's representative shortly afterward. The high command of the Brazilian Army sold the

24. For congressional discussions of the Banco do Brasil and CEXIM, see Estados Unidos do Brasil, Congresso Nacional, Câmara dos Deputados, *Anais da Câmara dos Deputados*, vol. 43, sessions of 14–17 Nov. 1952 (Rio de Janeiro: Serviço do Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 1953), pp. 54, 296–97. On the functionary's confession, see "Nossos dias: Ainda presos sem culpa oficiais da FEB," *Jornal de Debates*, 20 June 1952, p. 3; see also "Nega o General Lima Câmara ter recebido o dinheiro," *O Globo*, 14 June 1952, p. 3. On General Rio Pardense's imposition of censorship on police reporting, see "Nossos dias: Escreve Antonio Gerard," *Jornal de Debates*, 18 July 1952, p. 3.

Dominican Republic grenades, ammunition, and rifles and other weaponry even though they were in short supply in the Brazilian Army.<sup>25</sup>

This transaction was kept secret from senior commanders outside the General Staff because the Minister of War and his supporters planned to profit from the sale. The Dominican government sent payments for the weaponry to the Banco do Brasil to be credited in dollars to the Ministry of War's account. But Canrobert had these funds transferred to a shaky bank founded by his friend Marino Machado de Oliveira, who sold the funds on the black market and deposited the equivalent into the ministry's account in his bank. The difference between the black-market price and the official exchange—millions of cruzeiros—vanished. Although this arrangement was profitable for some high officers, it proved costly when the bank failed. Oliveira sold the bank, along with the army's deposit of sixty-four million cruzeiros. The army regained its monies only by paying a massive indemnity to the bank's new owners.<sup>26</sup>

Canrobert's careful plan began to unravel in 1949, when General José Pessoa Cavalcante de Albuquerque asked for equipment to arm his troops. The officer controlling war materials told him that the army had sold these supplies to the Dominican Republic. The angry General Pessoa launched his own investigation. Despite stonewalling by nervous commanders, Pessoa slowly discovered the truth. He wrote to Canrobert criticizing the arms sale and the secrecy with which it had been carried out. By March 1950, General Pessoa (and probably other officers) knew the scale of Canrobert's corruption. On 3 April 1950, Canrobert announced that he would not run for the presidency.<sup>27</sup>

By late 1951, proof of Canrobert's corruption had been uncovered by a commission of inquiry created to investigate wrongdoing at the

25. For U.S. concerns about the arms deal, see the U.S. military attaché's classified message dated 16 Mar. 1946, RG 319, E57, B12, Suitland Branch, U.S. National Archives; and the classified message of 18 Mar., 1946, RG 319, E57, B12, Suitland Branch, USNA. On the high command of the Brazilian Army's approval of the sale, see the letter of General Alvaro Fiuzo de Castro, Chief of the Army General Staff, to General José Pessoa, 24 June 1949, JP 48.08.11 vp, doc. 3, CPDOC, FGV.

26. See José Pessoa's unpublished autobiography, JP 53.00.00 dv, 13 (sec. 2), pp. 16–19, CPDOC, FGV; see also the anonymous note received by José Pessoa (he knew the author, but his notation is illegible) in JP 48.08.11 vp/A, CPDOC, FGV. On the liquidation of Banco Central Brasileiro, see "Liquidação extra-judicial do Banco Central Brasileiro," *O Globo*, 3 May 1954, p. 8. Ironically, Marino Machado de Oliveira went on to become a director of the Banco do Brasil. See Pessoa's autobiography, JP 53.00.00 dv, 13 (sec. 2), p. 17, CPDOC, FGV.

27. In June and August of 1949, Pessoa wrote the Minister of War two letters of protest concerning the arms sale to the Dominican Republic. When Canrobert called him a liar, Pessoa replied that Brazil's security had been gravely weakened. See Pessoa's letters to the Minister of War of 8 June 1949 and 12 Aug. 1949, JP 48.08.11 vp, docs. 3–4, CPDOC, FGV. See also Canrobert's reply to Pessoa of 2 July 1949, JP 48.08.11, vp, doc. 10, CPDOC, FGV; and the letter from General Orestes da Rocha Lima (Director of War Materials) to the Minister of War, 11 June 1949, JP 48.08.11 vp, doc. 9, CPDOC, FGV. On Canrobert's declaration not to run for the presidency, see "Está chegando a hora do Brigadeiro Gomes," *Tribuna da Imprensa*, 4 Apr. 1950, p. 1.

Banco do Brasil. Originally, the commission's study was to be confidential, intended only for President Dutra and the head of the bank. But when word of the commission's findings leaked to the press, the congress launched a bitter debate over whether to publish the inquiry's final report. During this fight, Canrobert was given a copy of the document, probably by his political allies in the congress. The report implicated Canrobert in two cases of possible corruption, one of them the Dominican arms scandal. Canrobert immediately wrote the press, defending himself and criticizing the chair of the inquiry, Miguel Teixeira de Oliveira. This step sparked an angry exchange of letters between the two men in the press.<sup>28</sup> If Canrobert thought he could intimidate Teixeira, he was mistaken. Teixeira assured Canrobert sarcastically that he had no intention of further investigating irregularities in the arms sale to the Dominican Republic. At the same time, he publicly described the scheme and reported that the commission had found evidence confirming details supplied by an anonymous accuser.<sup>29</sup> Canrobert was so humiliated that in later years he was reduced to petitioning Minister of War Ciro do Espírito Santo Cardoso for his political support. Cardoso issued a dispatch declaring that Canrobert merited the army's confidence, an act indicating that the army would not tolerate any criminal investigation into the general's activities.<sup>30</sup>

### *Corruption and Military Politics*

Although the Dominican arms scandal did not involve the misuse of the army's economic influence, it was typical of the period in that military corruption had political overtones. Canrobert was not the only officer involved in this plot. Networks of officers had united within the army to ensure their mutual profit and guarantee their security. This corruption also allowed senior officers to build a following within the

28. These letters between Canrobert and Teixeira revealed irregularities in the purchase of wheat from the United States and also in the sale of arms to the Dominican Republic. Canrobert probably made the situation worse by criticizing Miguel Teixeira and blaming the wheat scandal on President Dutra. See "Sobre o inquérito do Banco do Brasil," *O Globo*, 21 Nov. 1952, pp. 1, 6; and "A carta do General Canrobert," *O Globo*, 22 Nov. 1952, pp. 1, 4. The Banco do Brasil continued to be the target of investigations into corruption for years to come. In 1953 the UDN launched a congressional inquiry into the bank's dealings with one of Vargas's allies (see Skidmore 1986, 125–26).

29. See "A reposta do Sr. Miguel Teixeira," *O Globo*, 24 Nov. 1952, p. 8. This article also outlined irregularities in the arms sale to the Dominican Republic, such as the payment of commissions, and the exchange of dollars at an illegal rate. It quotes from an interview that Canrobert gave to *O Globo* on 28 Jan. 1952 defending the arms sale. After a lengthy congressional debate, the inquiry ("Inquérito do Banco do Brasil") was made public. I have not yet found any remaining copy of the report, however. On the debate over whether to publish the report, see "Revelações sobre o inquérito do Banco do Brasil," *Diário de Notícias*, 11 July 1952, p. 4; and "Mais revelações sobre o inquérito do Banco do Brasil," *Diário de Notícias*, 12 July 1952, p. 3.

30. See José Pessoa's unpublished autobiography, JP 53.00.00 dv, 13 (sec. 2), pp. 24–25, CPDOC, FGV.

military to support their political aspirations, a common strategy in Latin America.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the changing character of military corruption profoundly influenced politics within the army. Earlier in the century, the army had been divided among powerful generals who fought to control the institution. These generals had built up followings based on blood ties, regional affiliations, and personal charisma.<sup>32</sup> During the *Estado Novo*, however, corruption became a common means for high commanders to create informal networks of power within the institution. Generals like Canrobert used corruption to provide rewards for followers and withhold spoils from opponents. Given the military's control over the police, investigations into corruption probably did less to stamp out this blight than to eliminate the losers in military power struggles. In this sense, military corruption significantly influenced factional conflicts within the Brazilian Army in the years following World War II.

Although the army had long suffered from internal contests for power, these conflicts intensified with the return to democracy. During the cold war, the army split into two blocs according to responses to the unprecedented power of the United States. A "nationalist faction" favored state-led development, neutrality in the cold war, and a cool stance toward the United States. The "internationalist faction" favored development in alliance with foreign capital, anti-communism, and a close alliance with the United States.<sup>33</sup> Both groups fought to impose their political program on the military as an institution. A key arena of struggle was the *Clube Militar*, an unusual social center in that it was an elected body within an authoritarian institution. Because of its organization, its prestige, and its journal, the *Clube Militar* represented a major prize. As both blocs struggled to seize control of this institution, they began to resemble political parties in that they lobbied civilians, published propaganda, collected intelligence, conducted polls, and raised funds.<sup>34</sup> During this national campaign, the international officers benefited from their ties to business elites, who offered their military allies both political expertise and money. Members of the internationalist faction later said that the substantial funds they raised contributed to their ultimate victory in 1952, when they seized control of the *Clube Militar*.<sup>35</sup> It is also clear, however,

31. In Cuba, for example, the army acquired extensive power during the 1930s as it took over social-welfare tasks. This experience led to widespread corruption within the army as officers misused their power for personal gain. Army Chief of Staff Fulgencio Batista tolerated corruption in order to co-opt dissident officers. This policy guaranteed Batista the military support he needed to govern directly and through puppet presidents (see Pérez 1976, 101–6).

32. Officers were also united by shared educational experiences (see McCann 1989, 51–54).

33. For more information on the struggle between these two factions, see Manor (1978), Peixoto (1980), Skidmore (1986, 100–108), and Smallman (1995, 182–321).

34. On the similarity of military factions to political parties, see Rouquié (1980, 9–24).

35. See Nelson de Mello's interview in *História Oral*, 1983, p. 310, CPDOC, FGV.

that when the internationalist faction lost an earlier election in 1950, its response was shaped by the corruption that had bound it to business elites.

### *A Rival Military Club*

On 6 January 1951, a public scandal provided a suggestive glimpse of the extent to which corruption and other kinds of ties to civilian leaders were influencing military politics. On that summer night, police raided the *Clube Social-Militar*, founded six months before by Captain Luiz Outeiro Porto Alegre. One of the most enthusiastic founders of a mortgage bank for the original *Clube Militar*, he had become embittered after his fellow officers failed to elect him president of the organization. Less than a month after the internationalist faction lost an election in the official *Clube Militar*, Porto Alegre founded an alternative center in June 1950. But the *Clube Social-Militar* quickly ran into financial difficulties. To overcome the problem, club directors permitted gamblers to run games in the club's offices. A mysterious banker known only as Biachi provided the *Clube Social-Militar* with the necessary equipment. Other business arrangements also must have been made: the owners of the building never troubled the club's management, despite the fact that the club paid no rent on its tenth-floor apartments.

On entering the club, a casual observer would have been struck by the somber furnishings of the first room. Beyond this façade were other rooms containing six game tables and a bar. Bingo boards were stored inside a closet. There was even a medicine cabinet in case a gambler was overcome by emotion. The club quickly proved to be extremely popular, as the fashionable elites of Rio de Janeiro flocked to the games. The links between corrupt officers and business elites had reached the point where the two groups enjoyed cordial social relations that guaranteed the success of the new establishment. When the police raided the building, they found receipts detailing the club's considerable profits.

The officers who ran the *Clube Social-Militar* frequently bragged that the police would never set foot in it because they were protected by Minister of War Canrobert. It is certainly unlikely that a large number of officers could have created such an organization without the approval of the army hierarchy. Canrobert already had ties within the banking community that allowed obtaining funding for the gambling center. It is evidently not coincidental that the *Clube Social-Militar* was founded only a month after Canrobert's opponent won the presidency of the official *Clube Militar*, an outcome that probably ensured Canrobert's support for the new organization.

The casino operated without interference for several months. Because it was a military organization, the civilian police were afraid to

intervene. But late in December of 1950, the police went to the army and asked officers to back a raid on the Clube Social-Militar. The police explained that officers were running the club and the police feared "lamentable incidents." The Minister of War ordered the commander of the First Military Region to send the necessary troops. Some observers believed that the Minister of War's decision proved that the club's directors were lying when they claimed to have his support.<sup>36</sup> But General Canrobert and his cabinet may have acted more to protect themselves than from a sense of outrage. Certainly, questions remain about Officer Pereira da Costa, the civilian police officer placed in charge of the matter. It is not clear whether he was a relative of General Canrobert Pereira da Costa. But documents discovered during the raid on the club suggest that this police officer in fact had close ties to the corrupt officers whom he was investigating.

On the night of the raid, the military police joined their civilian counterparts. Under the command of Officer Pereira da Costa, the police quickly cordoned off all escape routes and then forced their way into the club, while numerous reporters watched. One hundred and fifty persons attempted to flee, including retired officers. Other members hurled threats at the invading police. The civilians, who represented the city's business elite, were taken to police headquarters. The directors of the Military Social Club were taken to the barracks of the military police. Originally, the police wanted to take a statement from the club president. Officer Pereira da Costa, however, decided that this step was unnecessary. Remarkably, when the club's safe was opened later, it was found to contain a letter addressed to Officer Pereira da Costa. This document proved to be a letter of recommendation, asking him to employ one Major José Carlos Teixeira Coelho. The safe also contained the campaign material of Adhemar de Barros, who earlier had promised to support the campaign of General Canrobert if he ran for the presidency.<sup>37</sup> No evidence exists that any of the military members of the club were ever punished.

While frustratingly incomplete, this incident suggests the extent to which corruption had reshaped military politics as the army hierarchy formed ties to business elites. No longer did senior officers use these ties only for personal profit. Instead, civilian allies and the financial resources they commanded had become essential tools in army politics. In this case,

36. See "Aponterá em juízo os policiais subornados," *Diário Carioca*, 7 Jan. 1951, Blue Section, pp. 9, 12. For more on the police raid and Military Social Club, see "200 contraven-tores detidos no cassino," *Diário Carioca*, 6 Jan. 1951, Blue Section, pp. 8, 12; and "Fechado um cassino," *Correio da Manhã*, 6 Jan. 1951, p. 12.

37. See "O Clube Social-Militar," *Diário Carioca*, 10 Jan. 1951, Blue Section, p. 8, 12; see also "O cassino rendeu mais de meio milhão em alguns meses," *Correio da Manhã*, 10 Jan. 1951, p. 12. On Adhemar de Barros's promise to support Canrobert's campaign, see the interview with Ernani do Amaral Peixoto in *História Oral*, 1985, p. 652, CPDOC, FGV.

it is probable that the directors of the Clube Social-Militar told the truth, that they were supported by both Canrobert and the army hierarchy. After suffering a humiliating defeat in May 1950, these leaders may have decided to create another institution to undermine the original Clube Militar.<sup>38</sup> Certainly, corruption was no longer an isolated sin that civilian presidents tolerated to guarantee military loyalty. Instead, widespread military corruption bound army officers to civilian elites, encouraged fund raising for factional struggles, tied officers to their superiors, and united the army hierarchy in its struggle with dissident officers.

### *The "Manifesto of the Colonels"*

This state of affairs outraged many commanders. Although some officers had joined networks of corruption, far more officers remained outside these conspiracies. Junior officers were especially offended at what they viewed as widespread corruption damaging their institution. A sense of crisis pervaded the army. Older officers could remember how, at the end of the Old Republic, the hierarchy's lack of moral authority had helped the tenentes undermine the institution from within. Elsewhere in Latin America, junior officers' dissatisfaction with military corruption sometimes threatened military unity.<sup>39</sup> By 1954 senior officers in Brazil had decided that major reforms were needed immediately to end military corruption. In February of that year, more than eighty colonels and lieutenant colonels signed a manifesto and presented it to the Minister of War, General Santo Cardoso. It soon was leaked by an anonymous officer to the press, where it created a political sensation.

Many historians have correctly argued that this statement represented an attack on the government, which junior officers believed was neglecting the military.<sup>40</sup> Certainly, officers were angered by reports that the government intended to double the minimum wage at a time when

38. Indeed, this idea survived the closure of the Clube Social-Militar in January 1951. Later that same year, internationalist officers were so angry over nationalist control of the Clube Militar that they declared their wish to create an alternative organization, "Clube do Exército." See "Não houve reunião dos generais," *Ultima Hora*, 27 Sept. 1951, p. 1; and "Não houve reunião," *Correio da Manhã*, 28 Sept. 1951, p. 8.

39. For example, following World War II, junior officers in Cuba were horrified by revelations of corruption among senior commanders. The army chief of staff had embezzled money from the armed forces' retirement fund, while commanders siphoned off funds to pay nonexistent soldiers. The corruption grew so severe that the even the quality of food and clothing in the Cuban military declined. By 1951 junior officers believed that only a coup could end this public disgrace. Denouncing civilian immorality, they overthrew the government on 10 May 1952 and returned Fulgencio Batista to power. See Pérez (1976, 125–32). On corruption and political unrest among junior officers in El Salvador after World War II, see Booth and Walker (1993, 38). Junior officers in Guatemala during the 1980s believed that corruption in the military government had strengthened the guerrillas and weakened the army. They therefore overthrew General Romeo Lucas García in 1982 (see Wesson 1986, 166).

40. For one example, see Thomas Skidmore's classic *Politics in Brazil, 1930–1964* (1986, 127–29).



military salaries were not keeping pace with inflation. Officers complained in the manifesto that this step would demoralize the military because officers would lose status. The government, officers argued, should increase spending on the military. Yet the manifesto should not be read as merely an attack on President Vargas. In fact, it made no reference to any broad political issue. The document referred to the Vargas administration but criticized equally the military itself. The colonels were frightened by the extent to which junior officers had become disillusioned by military corruption, and the colonels wanted reforms to end conditions that they believed were encouraging such wrongdoing.

The colonels began the manifesto by complaining of the grave problems existing within the army. The lower ranks were losing confidence in their superiors. Institutional cohesion was in danger. The colonels therefore called for a "campaign of renewal and cleansing amidst the armed forces" and committed themselves to reestablishing discipline.<sup>41</sup> The authors of the manifesto recognized that the discontent among junior officers had arisen in part from purely military reasons, such as the difficulty of gaining promotion in certain branches of the service. But the manifesto observed that junior officers also were displeased about military corruption.

Many officers had assumed civilian posts where they had become involved in scandals that were constantly making headlines and damaging the prestige of the armed forces. Moreover, these dishonest officers were misusing their positions to acquire more than just monetary rewards. Behind the colonels' complaint lay the fact that officers who worked in government regulatory agencies had used their influence to form alliances with business elites and other officers. These informal networks of officers and civilians wielded their power to ensure their military supporters rapid promotions and political power. Military corruption thus was shaping the very power structure of the army. This situation had already sparked dangerous jealousies among officers. According to the manifesto,

Unhappily, these [institutional problems] are not the main causes of the unrest and discontent that is spreading throughout the entire army. There is an exodus of soldiers to civilian jobs that always have better pay. . . . There they are not always able to remain immune to the intrigues of partisan politics and outside the wave of administrative corruption that brings scandals to the newspaper headlines. This causes incalculable damage to the prestige of the armed forces. Each case disturbs even more those who prefer to dedicate themselves entirely to professional duties, mainly because these positions (loosely considered to be of military interest) qualify their possessors to compete for the diverse promotions and commands that pertain to those in armed service. Besides, many of them use this very

41. For a reprint of the memorandum, see Baldessarini (1957, 363–66). Brigadier General Thales e Azevedo Villas Boas repeated this memorandum verbatim in a circular that he sent to the most important generals and the Minister of War on 23 Feb. 1954. See Box 9 (A), Circular 95-85, *Arquivo Góes Monteiro*, *Arquivo do Exército* (Rio de Janeiro).

unusual situation to obtain advantages, sometimes of a military nature, sometimes of a political character. (Baldessarini 1957, 365)

The manifesto went on to complain of “the climate of shady business, speculation, and embezzlement” within the country and the military. Although the colonels stated that the standard of “honesty and administrative decorum” within the army was above criticism, they also argued that barriers were needed to prevent corruption from spreading from civilian society to the military (Baldessarini 1957, 365).

This document is interesting for several reasons. The colonels did not attack corruption on the grounds that it was morally wrong. Rather, they argued that corruption had become so pervasive that it was undermining discipline within the army because honest officers resented the abuses being committed by their peers. This complaint illustrates the immense impact that corruption had already had on the military. It is also significant that the colonels argued that corruption was penetrating the army from outside. The colonels spoke of the need to build barriers to keep corruption from “overflowing” into the army, as if the institution were adrift in a sea of corruption. Historians such as Thomas Skidmore have accepted the military’s rhetoric of morality and interpreted the manifesto as a protest against civilian corruption (see Skidmore 1986, 128–29). Certainly, army reformers were worried about the extent to which business leaders in Brazil had formed illicit ties with officers in the high command. Yet military corruption had not been introduced into the institution from without. Rather, it had intensified within the army ever since the establishment of the *Estado Novo*, when officers had acquired economic influence. Six generals and seventy-nine officers were serving in “civilian capacities” in 1951.<sup>42</sup> It was the power that these posts gave the army hierarchy that encouraged military corruption, not nameless civilian leaders.

### *The Military Overthrow of a “Corrupt President”*

Yet like the *tenentes* before them, the colonels criticized civilians for corrupting the military rather than directly attacking members of their own institution. In part, soldiers adopted this approach because they remembered past presidents tolerating corruption to ensure officers’ loyalty. In addition, the military’s discourse of morality had deep historical roots enabling it to unify the institution, particularly at moments of crisis. This rhetoric remained so powerful that while some officers protested against military corruption, other commanders could use this discourse to call for overthrowing Vargas.

There was no question that the Vargas government suffered from

42. See “Seis generais e 79 oficiais do Exército em funções civis,” *Tribuna da Imprensa*, 8 Aug. 1951, p. 8.

corruption. For example, members of the conservative UDN pointed out improprieties at the Banco do Brasil, which had benefited Vargas's supporters (Skidmore 1986, 125, 132).<sup>43</sup> Yet many members of the military as well as the UDN had also been implicated in wrongdoing at the bank during the Dutra administration. What was taking place in part was that business elites who controlled the conservative UDN were successfully exploiting the army's moral rhetoric to justify a military overthrow of Vargas. Their alliance with the army reflected a significant change in the pattern of military corruption.

In the early years of the republic, when presidents had tolerated military corruption in return for political loyalty, the army had been bound to the government. But as high officers came to profit from the military's economic influence, the army increasingly allied itself with business elites. This situation had become dangerous for the government by Vargas's second administration: corruption no longer united the army with the president but rather with the president's opponents. Some officers were aware of the problem of military corruption. But when their interests dictated that President Vargas should no longer govern, the army and its civilian allies successfully phrased their demands in terms of "morality."

By 1954 Brazilian newspapers were constantly reporting on corruption in the presidential palace. One of Vargas's bodyguards, Gregório Fortunato, was so angered by press criticism of the president that he planned to kill an outspoken journalist named Carlos Lacerda. The assassin he sent failed to kill the writer and instead fatally shot Major Rubens Florentino Vaz, a young air force officer serving as one Lacerda's bodyguards. The air force quickly traced the plot back to the presidential palace. Although no evidence was found that Vargas himself was involved in the assassination attempt, police and air force investigations into the murder uncovered evidence of corruption in the presidential household, which Vargas's opponents quickly seized upon. As Skidmore has noted, accusations of corruption enabled some officers to persuade reluctant colleagues of the necessity of overthrowing Vargas. On 23 August 1954, twenty-seven army generals issued the "Manifesto à Nação" demanding that Vargas resign. The generals claimed that the president's "criminal corruption" had compromised his "indispensable moral authority" to govern (Skidmore 1986, 141).<sup>44</sup> Faced with an ultimatum,

43. For more information on corruption in Vargas's administration, see Skidmore (1986, 139).

44. On the manner in which accusations of corruption persuaded reluctant officers to rise up against Vargas, see Skidmore (1986, 140). Similarities exist between Argentine and Brazilian politics during this period. In Argentina the perception that Juan Perón was corrupt created widespread dissatisfaction within the army, which dissident officers used to rally support for a successful military coup in 1955. See Potash (1980, 51, 54, 61–63, 147–50). The

Vargas refused to leave the presidential palace. On 24 August 1954, he put a revolver to his heart.

Vargas's suicide did not end the army's involvement in politics, however. Less than ten years later, the army again challenged a president in the name of morality. Many civilians at first accepted this justification, despite instances of military corruption. Military scandals came to public attention less frequently than those of civilian leaders because the army influenced the police and intimidated the press. Moreover, civilian politicians proved reluctant to denounce military corruption because it was a politically dangerous act. Rather, civilian elites used the army's moral rhetoric to persuade officers to oust the elites' political opponents. Accordingly, in 1964 civilian leaders expected the army to hand the government over to conservative politicians after a coup overthrowing President João Goulart.

Instead, the Brazilian Army argued that civilian society and politics had become so corrupt that only a prolonged period of military tutelage could cleanse the nation. Under the cover of this moral rhetoric, the Brazilian Army itself became increasingly corrupt during military rule.<sup>45</sup> Because of the army's power, many multinational corporations were obliged to include generals on their boards. Much like what happened during the authoritarian *Estado Novo*, military corruption flourished in an atmosphere of secrecy and terror. Yet despite military wrongdoing, the army never abandoned its century-old moral justification for its political involvement.

### *Conclusion*

The contradiction between military corruption and the Brazilian Army's claims to be the moral guardian of the nation has long lain at the heart of Brazilian politics. The army has acted in politics according to important institutional interests that have nothing to do with the desires of the minority of its members who were corrupt. Yet the public's acceptance of the military's own rhetoric gave the army a certain legitimacy when it chose to intervene in civilian affairs. It is disturbing that the military's rhetoric has remained effective throughout the twentieth cen-

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extent to which the Argentine Army itself suffered from corruption during this period would make an interesting topic for future research.

45. On the public perception that corruption grew in Brazil during the last decade of military rule, see Geddes and Neto (1992, 647). For more information on military corruption during this period, see Carli (1985). At one point during an investigation into military corruption, General Newton Cruz appeared before the inquiry and threatened to close the congress if one witness appeared (see Carli 1985, 9). His reaction resembled that of former Chilean dictator General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, who was angered by investigations into military corruption after Chile returned to democracy in 1991. Still in command of the armed forces, Pinochet ended civilian inquiries by calling Chilean troops to the barracks (see Loveman 1991, 36–37).

ture, maintaining this old pattern. In 1993 Jair Bolsonaro, a Brazilian congressman and former soldier, strode before the Chamber of Deputies to call for an immediate return to military rule. He stated unequivocally, "I am in favor of a dictatorship. We will never resolve serious national problems with this irresponsible democracy."<sup>46</sup> Horrified, the president of the chamber tried to strip Bolsonaro of his mandate. But the president had to back down when Congressman Bolsonaro rode an upsurge of popular support. Middle-class Brazilians wrote polite letters to the editor in Brazilian newspapers, while slum residents posted banners saying "Armed Forces, Take Over."<sup>47</sup> A large part of Bolsonaro's appeal came from his insistence that this course of action would end the political corruption that had horrified Brazilians, especially after President Fernando Collor de Mello was impeached for corruption in 1992.<sup>48</sup>

While Bolsonaro's speech certainly did not represent the views of most Brazilian officers, the civilian response to his statements illustrated the continuing power of the army's moral rhetoric. Given the sad series of political scandals that have shaken Brazil, Venezuela, and Colombia, this outcome was perhaps not surprising.<sup>49</sup> In this context, historians should take advantage of current democratization to conduct further research on military corruption in Latin America. With new sources constantly becoming available, the present moment represents a unique opportunity to gain insight into this topic. Moreover, at a time when many Latin Americans are exhausted by political corruption, it is also worth remembering that the army has never been an appropriate tool for moral cleansing.

46. "A Soldier Turned Politician Wants to Give Brazil Back to Army Rule," *The New York Times*, 25 July 1993, section 4, p. 7.

47. *Ibid.*

48. For information on Collor's corruption and subsequent impeachment, see Weyland (1993). Other Latin American armies have also continued to employ moral rhetoric to justify military involvement in civilian affairs. In July 1996, General Enrique Salgado, the army general in command of the police force in Mexico City, replaced every senior member of his department with military officers. He defended this militarization of the police as the only possible means of ending civilian corruption. See "Mexico City Police Chief Puts Military Officers in Top Posts," *The Oregonian*, 10 July 1996, p. A3.

49. Nonetheless, recent scandals have also involved Latin American armies. For example, on 18 July 1994 a bomb attack on a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires killed eighty-seven people and wounded two hundred more. In connection with the case, Argentine investigators raided an army base and arrested twelve soldiers for illegally selling military supplies such as bazookas and helicopters. Prosecutors claimed to have found circumstantial evidence linking these corrupt officers (and an Argentine congressman) to the bombing. In late July 1996, four police officers were indicted for homicide in the bombing, while the investigation into this complex case continued. See "Argentina Indicts 4 Current, Ex-Police in 1994 Bombings," *The Oregonian*, 1 Aug. 1996, sec. A, p. 3; "Jewish Center Bombing Still Mystery," *The Oregonian*, 23 June 1996, sec. A, p. 8; see also "Argentines Protest Bombing as Death Toll Reaches 44," *The New York Times*, 22 July 1994, sec. A, p. 8; "Argentina Questions 12 in Blast at Jewish Center," *The New York Times*, 2 Dec. 1995, sec. A, p. 3; and "8th Argentine Arrested in Jewish Center Bombing," *The New York Times*, 4 Dec. 1995, sec. A, p. 6.

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