

Ministry of National Defence
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ACTA 2024

*The role of the military in political transitions:
from the 18th century to the present day*

XLIX International Congress of Military History

1 - 6 September 2024, Lisbon

Volume I





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OPENING SESSION

**Speech by the
Minister of National Defence**

Nuno Melo

Chief of the General Staff of the Portuguese Armed Forces, General Nunes da Fonseca,
President of the International Commission of Military History, Professor Massimo
de Leonardis,

Chief of Staff of the Navy, Admiral Gouveia e Melo,

Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Cartaxo Alves,

Chief of Staff of the Army, General Mendes Ferrão,

National Director of the Public Security Police, Chief Superintendent, Luís Carrilho,

Commandant of the Military University Institute,

Lieutenant General Hermínio Maio,

President of the Portuguese Commission of Military History, Major General João
Vieira Borges,

Admirals, Generals, and members of the Armed Forces,

Excellencies, distinguished guests and participants,

Ladies and gentlemen.

It's a great pleasure to be here at the Military University Institute for the opening ceremony of this year's Congress of the International Military History Commission.

We are both proud and honored to host this event once again, marking 15 years since the International Congress was last held in Portugal.

I want to extend a warm welcome to everyone taking part in this event, particularly to the distinguished delegates and guests from abroad. We're delighted to have you in Portugal.

But before I begin my address, my first remarks are to acknowledge the remarkable efforts of the Portuguese Commission of Military History.

I want to commend the Commission's President, Major General João Vieira Borges, along with the entire team and staff at the Ministry of Defence and the Military University Institute, for their dedication and hard work in organizing this significant international event.

I'm impressed with the varied and substantial audience gathered here today, along with the remarkable roster of speakers and moderators.

The academic and cultural programme that the organizing commission has prepared for these six days promises to be both enriching and engaging.

As Defence Minister, I would now like to share a few thoughts and perspectives on the core theme of this event – the role of the military in political transitions.

Well, in Portugal, we have a profound understanding, and we know too well, shaped by centuries of experience, of the pivotal role our military has played throughout our nation's almost nine centuries of history.

From the very inception of our kingdom, the military has been integral to our identity. Our existence as a nation has been forged through the courage and sacrifice of our soldiers.

Additionally, our military and the Armed Forces have consistently been the guardians of our sovereignty, freedom and independence during the critical turning points of our nation's history.

We owe it to our military that Portugal stands today as one of the world's oldest nation-states.

A defining example of this was the military's role in the Carnation Revolution, where the Captain's Movement led the coup in the early hours of 25th April 1974.

These actions toppled the former regime and ensured a peaceful transition of power to a National Salvation Junta.

Equally significant, nonetheless, was the military's decisive action on 25th November 1975, when a group of moderate members of the armed forces thwarted [prevented] a counter-coup inspired by the extreme left.

This Government will also be taking long-overdue steps to appropriately recognize the historical significance of the 25th of November, as a crucial moment in our history.

All in all, the combined effects of these developments and the actions undertaken by our military ultimately stabilized our democratic path and secured the existence of a truly liberal and representative democracy in Portugal.

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Carnation Revolution this year, we recognize our military's role in the peaceful transition, ensuring that civilian governance was firmly established and remaining steadfastly loyal to the Constitution.

But there's another feature that makes the April Revolution stand as a singular case in History.

The Portuguese revolution kicked off and paved the way to an unprecedented global wave of revolutions and transitions to democracy that Professor Samuel Huntington famously labelled as the "Third Wave of Democratization" in his seminal thesis published in 1991.

Today, however, we no longer assume that the historical process will inevitably lead to democratization, freedom, or eternal peace.

Many analysts now argue that we're currently experiencing a new age of conflict, and some even suggest that we're undergoing a period of democratic decline - troubling reverse transition toward more autocracy and more authoritarianism.

Today's international politics is therefore more about Huntington and Kissinger, rather than Kant and Fukuyama.

Many of these shifts are being fuelled by great power politics, geopolitics and competing world views. This increasingly challenges the liberal international order and erodes the rules-based international system.

Ultimately, this unstable world order endangers our democratic values and jeopardizes our collective security in the West.

This is why we continuously deploy military personnel to support other nations in their fight for self-determination, as they struggle to overcome conflict, and as they undergo similar transition processes to peace and freedom.

At the same time, Western nations face similar and shared challenges: recruitment and retention issues, difficulty inspiring our youth to commit to a life of service, the need to foster national identity and patriotism, and the responsibility to preserve our military heritage for future generations.

I strongly believe that the military will remain key to address these challenges and the opportunities that lie ahead of us. Although most of these require a national response, Allied nations are increasingly aware that this is a pressing issue that demands urgent attention.

Which is why this government has made it a political priority to improve the working conditions and overall well-being of our men and women in uniform, including our veterans and war heroes.

Having said this, I want to express my deep appreciation for all your invaluable work in studying the history of warfare, military campaigns, military transitions, among other critical topics.

And I'm pleased to see the emergence of a new generation of military historians who are making their work accessible to a wider audience.

Your research will play a vital role in preserving the legacy of our Armed Forces, and it will undoubtedly inform and shape the future of national and global security.

Understanding our military history is essential to ensure that the lessons of the past continue to guide us.

I wish you all a productive and stimulating conference, filled with fruitful and thought-provoking discussions.

I hope you enjoy your stay with us, and I wish you all the best.

Thank you.