



May 22, 2025, marked the 10th anniversary of the *Adjunto de Comando*, a key leadership position in the Brazilian Army equivalent to the U.S. Army's CSM and, at the highest levels, the Sergeant Major of the Army. (Courtesy photo by Brazilian Army)

An Exchange That Redefined Brazilian Leadership

By Sgt. Maj. Mauricio da Silva Souza

Brazilian Army

For years, people have recognized that much of what we know comes from experience. As Army doctrine states, “traditional professions share essential characteristics. They provide a vital service to society, requiring expertise and skill developed through years of training, education, and experience” (Department of the Army, 2019, p. 1-1).

The military profession is no different. Young Soldiers often begin their careers eager, yet prone to hasty conclusions; over time, their experiences refine their abilities as leaders and advisors, fostering a culture of growth that strengthens the institution.

Building on a long-standing partnership, the Brazilian Army has been sending NCOs to the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Course (SMC) as both students and instructors for almost 30 years.

This exchange enhances NCO professional development by broadening perspectives, sharpening critical thinking, and improving their ability to lead and advise senior commanders. It also creates opportunities to interact with international peers, expanding cross-cultural awareness and interoperability.

The experiences gained at SMC marked a turning point for the Brazilian Army, influencing leadership culture and professional education. This article argues that the participation of Brazilian NCOs in SMC, both as students and faculty, has had a lasting impact on their professional development. It further contends that this experience inspired the creation of senior enlisted leadership positions such as command sergeant major (CSM) and sergeant major of the Army (SMA), whose implementation has led

to transformative advances in the Brazilian Army's culture, leadership, and institutional effectiveness.

Professional Growth Through SMC

The SMC plays a decisive role in shaping senior NCOs professional growth. As noted in the NCO Guide, "education is broader than training. It prepares learners to be critical and analytical thinkers for effective problem solving by facilitating the learning of principles, concepts, rules, facts, and associated skills and values/attitudes" (Department of the Army, 2025, p. 4-4).

SMC prepares its graduates to serve as decisive factors in their units' success. The unique learning environment at Fort Bliss has played a key role in advancing professional development.

Fort Bliss

The SMC, at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas, is an institution dedicated to developing leaders who think

both critically and creatively. It offers students a mature, learner-centered environment that not only gives essential information but also empowers them to actively construct knowledge and develop into initiative-taking leaders.

These leaders are fully prepared to serve as critical contributors to the success of their units' operational missions. The course extends its welcome to international students from a variety of allied nations, further enriching an exchange of perspectives, and strengthening multinational interoperability.

Brazilian Selection and Representation Abroad

The Brazilian Army places immense value on personnel selected for international assignments, particularly those picked to serve as students or instructors at the SMC. This selection represents both a significant professional milestone and a remarkable achievement in a military career.

According to Army doctrine, "the Army profession develops Soldiers and Army civilians to demonstrate character, competence, and commitment through career-long training, education, and experience" (Department of the Army, 2019, p. 1-1).

The selected Soldiers earn the institution's trust through demonstrated excellence. The opportunity to serve at SMC is not only a demanding mission but also a unique and transformative experience, fostering broadened perspectives vital to both the Brazilian NCO Corps and SMC itself.

Challenges and Adaptability

Brazilian Soldiers who attend the course report that both students and faculty face significant challenges which demand considerable effort to uphold the Brazilian Army's professional standards.

Language is, without question, the principal barrier — not only the language itself, but also the U.S. Army's terminology and methodology, as well as the vast array of acronyms and jargon inherent to the military environment. These factors demand near-immediate adaptation to ensure successful performance throughout the course.

Author Max McKeown, in his book "Adaptability: The Art of Winning in an Age of Uncertainty," famously said, "all failure is a failure to adapt. All success is successful adaptation. Adaptability is about the powerful difference between adapting to cope and adapting to win" (McKeown, 2012, p. 9).

In this context, sustained exposure, immersive language training, and strong



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institutional and personal commitment empower Brazilian service members to overcome integration barriers and become valued members of the team.

They do so not as foreign participants, but as senior NCOs who bring deep professional experience from their home country and make meaningful contributions to the academic environment.

Brazilian participation enriches the host nation's Soldiers learning and underscores the importance of sustaining this valuable exchange of experiences, which drives the Brazilian Army's institutional transformation.

Brazil's Institutional Transformation

Authentic transformation requires systematic changes to organizational culture, processes, and leadership conduct, ensuring leaders translate goals into quantifiable outcomes.



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“Organizational transformation is a complex and multifaceted process that involves a fundamental change in the way an organization operates and delivers value to its stakeholders” (Christou & Piller, 2024, p. 303).

Those invaluable experiences are the professional foundation that Brazilian NCOs take back to Brazil. These institutional shifts culminated in one of the most decisive steps for the Brazilian NCO Corps in 2015: the creation of the *Adjunto de Comando*, the command sergeant major (CSM) position formally started at Fort Caxias, the Brazilian Army headquarters in Rio de Janeiro.

Adjunto de Comando: The Turning Point in Brazilian NCOs' Careers

Fort Caxias is where the Brazilian Army chief of staff plans and oversees military missions and administration. Brazil named the facility in honor of the Duke of Caxias, the Brazilian Army's patron.

The facility includes offices, conference rooms, and support spaces for daily operations and serves as the Brazilian Army's central decision-making hub, comparable to the Pentagon in the U.S., and serves as the base of operations for the *Adjunto de Comando*.

May 22, 2025, marked the 10th anniversary of the *Adjunto de Comando*, a key leadership position in the Brazilian Army equivalent to the U.S. Army's CSM and, at the highest levels, the Sergeant Major of the Army.

This role's establishment, and its alignment with the U.S. Army's senior enlisted structure, underscores the

growing recognition of the critical role NCOs play in supporting organizational effectiveness.

Its emphasis reflects an Army doctrine foundational principle: “noncommissioned officers are the backbone of the Army and are responsible for maintaining Army standards and discipline” (Department of the Army, 2019, p. 1-20).

By formally recognizing and empowering senior NCO advisors, the Brazilian Army shows a commitment to the NCO Corps' enduring.

Establishing the Adjunto de Comando Role

The Brazilian Army began implementing the *Adjunto de Comando* position by publishing an implementation guideline on May 22, 2015, which set out the role's framework on an experimental basis.

Shortly after, the Brazilian Army staff issued a new directive, formally creating the *Adjunto de Comando*

Course to prepare career NCOs to assume these new responsibilities.

Building on the Army's Transformation Concept, the Brazilian Army set up the position of *Adjunto de Comando* for military units on May 10, 2016, with the purpose of recognizing and valuing the NCO Corps, strengthening unit cohesion, and reinforcing the human dimension.

The U.S. Army's NCO education system has exerted a profound and lasting influence on the development and consolidation of this role in the Brazilian Army.

U.S. Army's Influence

The exchange of knowledge and practice has directly influenced the institutionalization of the *Adjunto de Comando* position in Brazil, aligning it with international standards while respecting the Brazilian military context.

As a result, the Brazilian Army has progressively strengthened its NCO Corps' legitimacy, visibility, and professionalization, receiving help from the U.S. Army's doctrinal maturity and educational frameworks while forging a uniquely Brazilian approach to senior enlisted leadership. All these actions have had a lasting, positive impact on the institution.

The Immediate Positive Impact

Every organizational change initially brings uncertainty and resistance, which are natural human reactions to the disruption of established routines. Effective leaders expect this resistance because people often fear the unknown and hesitate to abandon their comfort zones.

The Brazilian Army faced a similar challenge when implementing the CSM position. What was once an unfamiliar innovation gradually became an integral part of unit culture.

As Kotter (2013) explains, educating people in advance and communicating the rationale behind change are among the most effective ways to reduce resistance. This insight applies directly to military leadership: when subordinates understand the purpose of transformation, they are more likely to embrace it rather than oppose it.

Consequently, Brazilian commanders soon recognized the *Adjunto de Comando* as a valuable instrument to strengthen command teams and improve organizational effectiveness.

The presence of a senior NCO as a trusted advisor enhanced communication between officers and enlisted personnel and fostered mutual trust throughout the ranks.

Over time, CSMs became a symbol of professional excellence, inspiring others to pursue self-development and reinforcing a culture of adaptability, proving that embracing change strengthens the institution.

From Career Inspiration to Institutional Consolidation

With the creation of such a significant position, other NCOs began to perceive that, by being deeply committed to the Army's values and demonstrating extensive



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technical and professional expertise, there was now an attainable path for them to ascend to higher positions within the organizational structure at all echelons.

Over the years, the Brazilian Army institutionalized the CSM not only at the battalion level but also at brigade and division levels, consolidating the understanding that employing capable and resolute Soldiers enhances units' abilities to accomplish their mission and achieve the expected standards of performance and readiness.

This evolution proved that recognizing and empowering NCO leadership is not merely a personnel decision but a force multiplier that strengthens the entire Army's operational effectiveness.

The *Adjunto de Comando* does not work solely in the operational space; it also serves as a trusted conduit between commanders and Soldiers. By offering a channel for subordinates to share professional or personal challenges, Brazilian CSMs enable commanders to gain greater situational awareness of issues that would otherwise remain unseen. This proximity allows leaders to make more informed decisions about Soldier welfare, readiness, and employment.

Ultimately, CSMs ensure that leadership remains connected to the human dimension of command, while the presence of the SMA at the strategic level guarantees that enlisted perspectives continue to shape institutional policies and long-term decisions, closing the loop between tactical realities and strategic vision.

Having consolidated its senior enlisted leadership model internally, the Brazilian Army then faced a natural next step — comparing its institutional maturity with the U.S. Army, whose SMA structure served as the original benchmark for transformation.

Comparing the Sergeants Major of the Army in the U.S. and Brazil

The SMA is the U.S. Army's primary voice for its enlisted force, directly informing the Chief of Staff on issues affecting Soldiers, families, and communities.

While both the U.S. and Brazilian Armies use a senior enlisted advisor, the positions differ in institutional maturity. The U.S. SMA is a decades-old fixture within the Army's organizational culture, while the Brazilian position is still in development.



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The U.S. Army's SMA

The Sergeant Major of the U.S. serves as a critical link between the enlisted ranks and high command, ensuring policies and strategic decisions reflect the realities faced by Soldiers.

The NCO Guide, Training Circular (TC) 7-22.7, defines the SMA's role as "the voice of the NCO Corps, addressing enlisted Soldier issues to all officers" (Department of the Army, 2025, p. 2-4).

George W. Dunaway, second Sergeant Major of the Army from 1968 to 1970, emphasized that the most rewarding aspect of the position was the ability to influence Army-wide policies related to enlisted personnel and ensure those concerns received the highest level of attention within the command structure (Dunaway, n.d.). This direct advocacy makes the Army more responsive and highlights the enduring importance of NCOs.

The Brazilian Army's SMA

In contrast, Brazil set up the *Adjunto de Comando do Exército* in 2015 to enhance enlisted representation and bridge the gap between the high command and its Soldiers' experiences.

While inspired by the U.S. model, this position reflects Brazil's unique military structure and culture.

As the Brazilian Army Social Communication Center notes, the senior enlisted advisor "assists the commander in assessing troop morale and advising on matters of interest to the enlisted corps" (Brazilian Army, 2019).

This direct line of communication ensures the commander receives critical feedback from the force, fostering a more responsive and effective Army.

Comparison and Institutional Maturity

A comparison of the two systems reveals a difference in institutional maturity. The U.S. SMA is a long-established and widely recognized position, whereas the Brazilian *Adjunto de Comando do Exército* is a developing role still establishing its identity and impact. This difference in age, however, does not reflect a disparity in importance within their respective armies.

As Huntington (1957) observed, military institutional change is typically gradual, evolving through established traditions, norms, and roles. Brazil's continued consolidation and growth of the SMA position demonstrably enhances its potential for greater international influence.

The contributions of its four SMAs to date are evidence of this progress and signal a commitment to developing a robust and impactful senior enlisted leadership capability.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates that the exchange of experiences between Brazilian and U.S. Army NCOs, through student and faculty participation at SMC, has demonstrably strengthened professional development and, crucially, inspired the creation of the position of *Adjunto de Comando*, a landmark achievement for the Brazilian Army.

After a decade of refinement, this program proved both sound and practical. Its success underscores the value of international NCO education programs, offering considerable benefits to partner nations worldwide.

Continued collaboration between Brazil and the U.S., through exchanges, joint education, and shared doctrine, reinforces mutual trust, enhances interoperability, and improves multinational efforts' operational efficiency.

Shared investment in enlisted leadership, and the reciprocal development of senior enlisted positions like the CSM and *Adjunto de Comando*, is a key driver of sustained organizational achievement.

This collaboration's success affirms that empowering the NCO Corps, through education, exchange, and developing dedicated senior enlisted leadership positions, is not merely a professional imperative, but a strategic advantage for any modern army. ■

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