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**Teaching Military History in Portugal. Rethinking Military History. Post-Graduate reflections and contributions to Military Sciences and Future Security Challenges.**

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**Abstract:**

This paper intends to analyze the teaching of military History in Portugal through the five-year experience of the network composed by four civilian universities and four military academies. Also aims to contribute, at an international level, to rethinking military History from the outputs, reflection and contributions of the Portuguese MA program. So far, our experience was to train future military historians not to be introspective, but to be doers: writers, broadcasters and tour-leaders. Those who focus on thought concentrate on thinking about war, specifically, but not only, military doctrine. This leaves out an instructive subject, the history of military history, and the light it throws on the practice and theorizing of war.

One of the main issues that we intend to discuss is a set of problems around the military history but also for the consideration of war in the ancient, medieval and modern world. For example, a perception, if not futuristic ideology, of modern warfare in terms of a Revolution in Military Affairs, based on weaponry and control systems that few powers can afford or, even more, use effectively, lends itself to a teleological and deterministic approach to military history focused on developments in technological capability. At present, in reaction against the technological determinism and the Eurocentrism that dominate conventional accounts of military history and the modern imaging of war, there is a renewed interest in the role of perception in the understanding of best practice,

and in changing notions of legitimacy in the application and goals of force. Both direct attention to 'cultural' factors in the history of war.

Aside from the traditional habit of relating willpower, and everything bound up in that term, to supposed 'cultural' norms (a habit seen for example in religious warfare), there was also an important interest in what we would term 'cultural factors' as attempts made to understand long-term historical processes in secular terms. For example, the consequences, for warfare, of the anthropological character of differential social development, particularly between settled and nomadic societies. That approach thereafter became far less prominent, as the industrialization of economies, and related social transformations, had a comparable impact on the understanding of historical change, with developments in material culture ('things') being crucial to the capability and character of specific societies. In many respects, we are still in that age, just as, although with different causes and consequences, nineteenth century 'organic' theories of social identity also remain important. An emphasis on material culture apparently makes sense not only of the history of the West, but also of its relationship with other cultures and of the relative strength of the West. Other reflexing point focus the concepts as varied as military cultures, and national interests, all underplay the diversity of circumstances and views that exist states, societies and regions, and assert a false coherence. To provide apparently clear building blocks for analytical purposes.

The Portuguese MA in Military History puts an emphasis on such concepts related to the key aspect of Eurocentricism: the long-standing use of Western analytical concepts to describe global military history. This is a usage that in part stems from the nature of language and from a general failure to probe the wider resonances of analytical concepts, not least their role in ranking achievement. From the teaching program results a set of relations linked to the evaluation of the contexts within which military activity took and takes place, not least assumptions about whether governmental-social systems were best suited to military success. This is an approach that is generally conceptualized in Western terms, although it is crucial to note variations within the West: the military trajectory, strategic culture, force doctrine and public norms are very different between the European nations, and with other regions in the world.

There is a tendency to see the Western state, a defined body with unlimited sovereignty, as the model for governmental development, and to claim that Western expansion,

especially at the expense of governmental systems that were not suited to the maintenance of substantial standing forces, demonstrated the validity of this analysis. However, this model does not adequately explain the varied nature of governmental structures and political developments in the present day at the global scale, nor the complex relationship between these developments and military capability. There is also the issue for military historians of the foreshortening of the past: it is problematic to read back from the later failure of societies and governmental systems that were not suited to the maintenance of substantial standing forces to argue that they were bound to be conquered by Western powers.

This entails repeating the misleading perception of the automatic relationship between disciplined, drilled, well-armed and adequately-supplied permanent firepower forces, and those that were not so armed, and therefore were apparently bound to be conquered; with the comparable government dimension presented in terms of the superiority of states able to mobilize and direct resources. This approach draws on the cultural. Ethnic and geographical structuring of *value* in Western military history and thought, but it suffers from presupposing a common goal against which different states could be judged. In practice, the degree of organization required to create and support a large, permanent, long-range navy, or large, permanent armies, was, across most of the world, not necessary to maintain military forces fit for purpose. A central conceptual problem, therefore, is how best to acknowledge, appreciate and analyze the diversity of military experience.

In Portugal military History at university level intends, today, to focus on synoptic works that offer answers, as well as an account of progressive development, and even apparently universal laws that provide guidance to such questions as how to win battles or how best to combat terrorism. However, the clarity of simple explanation in the dominant approach is unhelpful, and provides a very poor background when considering modern doctrine. It is useful to consider military history as a varied and changing subject, with all the consequences that entails for the contingent character of present judgements, and the need for doctrine to remain dynamic, rather than assume apparently immutable rules. Remove the sense that military history is a matter of finding common situations and themes encapsulated. Nowadays military historians need to see themselves as operating within an intellectual discipline in which interpretations change. This also offers a different approach to the interest shown in war by other

subject specialists, such as political scientists and anthropologists. This gives to the historical work on subjects such as the causes of war a different quality to social science approaches.