

Brazilian Army prepares for “Capitol scenario” in coming presidential election

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On January 6, as the US marked one year since the coup attempt led by Donald Trump at the US Capitol, there was an ominous report about the Brazilian military’s preparations for the presidential election this coming October.

Reporter Igor Gielow of *Folha de São Paulo* reported that the Brazilian Army has altered its 2022 schedule, advancing all of its 67 military exercises to before the elections. In private conversations, the journalist reports, the Army High Command justified the changes on the grounds of “fears” of “incidents of violence during or after the October election.” During this period, they reportedly determined, “the entire force must be available for potential needs.”

According to the *Folha* article, military chiefs speak among themselves about a possible “Capitol scenario”—referring to the January 6 siege of the US Capitol in Washington—organized by “radical supporters” of Brazil’s fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro.

Although presidential nominations have yet to be made official, the coming election in Brazil will likely be centered on a contest between Bolsonaro, recently affiliated with the Liberal Party (PL), and former President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva of the Workers Party (PT). With record levels of popular disapproval, Bolsonaro’s chances of reelection are seriously in question. The most recent poll, released by Quaest/Genial on Wednesday, points to the possibility of Lula’s victory in the first round with 45 percent of the vote, followed by Bolsonaro with 23 percent.

However, the fascistic president has already made clear that he will not bow to the results at the ballot boxes. Bolsonaro has given ample prior warning of his plan to carry out a coup d’état if he is defeated at the polls—just as Trump did in the US. The Brazilian

president’s immediate response to the storming of the Capitol in January of last year, after supporting Trump’s claims of electoral fraud, was to state that “if we don’t have printed ballots in 2022...we’re going to have worse problems than the United States.” Since then, extraordinary political events in Brazil have highlighted the mortal crisis of bourgeois democracy in South America’s largest country.

In late March, Bolsonaro fired his defense minister and the entire command of the armed forces. This act, unprecedented in Brazilian political history, occurred as the president called for the total subordination of the Armed Forces to his administration’s agenda, particularly to his rejection of all measures to control the COVID-19 pandemic being implemented by local governments. The episode coincided with the 57th anniversary of the US-backed coup in Brazil in 1964, which ushered in a 20-year-long military dictatorship. This grim anniversary was openly celebrated in the first military order of the day issued by Bolsonaro’s new defense minister, General Walter Braga Netto.

A further escalation of the political crisis took place in May, when a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPI) began its investigation into the Bolsonaro administration’s homicidal response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The CPI was the target of repeated public threats not only from Bolsonaro, but from the military commanders themselves, who made it clear that they would not accept being judged by the elected civilian legislature.

While the CPI’s initial hearings were being held, Bolsonaro led far-right rallies in which he reaffirmed his coup plans. One of the demonstrations included the presence on the platform of his former health minister, General Eduardo Pazuello, who was being questioned at the time by the CPI for his criminal administration of

the COVID-19 crisis, especially in the city of Manaus. The mere presence of Pazuello, an active military officer, at a political demonstration represents a violation of the military code justifying his arrest, which never occurred.

At the same time, Bolsonaro demanded that the Congress approve his so-called “printed ballot amendment” to the Constitution, threatening that without it he would prevent the 2022 elections being held. Heeding the president’s conspiratorial demands, Congress brought the proposal to a vote in August. Not only did the military endorse the president’s “concerns” about “fraud” at the polls, but, at Bolsonaro’s request, staged a parade of tanks through Brazil’s capital, Brasilia, while the Congress was preparing to vote. Astonishingly, the bill was approved by most members of Congress, while not reaching the two-thirds majority required for a constitutional amendment.

A month later, on September 7, Bolsonaro called for a national day of protests against an alleged plot, supposedly headed by the Supreme Court, to oust him from power. The fascist demonstrations, with banners calling for a military intervention and for the assumption of absolute powers by the president, constituted a dress rehearsal for a coup by Bolsonaro.

In every one of these critical moments, the corporate media acted in unison to anesthetize public opinion in the face of political threats unparalleled in recent decades. The same attitude was taken by the corrupted bourgeois opposition to Bolsonaro headed by the PT, as well as by the pseudo-left petty-bourgeois tendencies gathered in and around the Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL). According to these forces, each of these episodes was testimony to the strength of bourgeois institutions and the “democratic commitment” of the Armed Forces in the face of Bolsonaro’s lunatic adventures.

In reporting on the Army’s latest maneuvers, *Folha* has repeated these same cynical arguments. In a recent episode of its daily podcast featuring Igor Gielow, titled “How the Army prepares for the risk of a Brazilian-style [storming of the] Capitol,” the journalist did his best to trivialize as much as possible the discussions taking place within the military command and to present the military as the champion of democracy. “I don’t see any possibility [of the Armed Forces]

supporting a civil disobedience by the president,” he stated.

Gielow’s explanation that the reason for the generals wanting to be able to mobilize all of their troops is to contain “episodes of violence” like those at the US Capitol makes no sense. For that purpose, a battalion or two of military police would suffice. The clear concern of the military command in having all its forces gathered at “H hour”—or paraphrasing US General Mark Milley, Brazil’s “Reichstag moment”—is guaranteeing a unified response of Brazil’s military forces to a coup d’état. Whether they would back Bolsonaro’s bid to seize power as an authoritarian dictator, oppose it or seize power themselves is an open question.

Although the PT remains completely silent on the matter, the policy being consistently pursued by Lula in his race for the presidency is to vie with Bolsonaro for the support of the reactionary national bourgeoisie and the armed forces. Instead of preparing a mass mobilization against the imminent coup threats, combined with growing social inequality and the deadly, out of control COVID-19 pandemic, Lula seeks to sell himself to the ruling class as its most capable representative in blocking the growth of such a movement. Alongside the PSOL, the PT sought to prove itself along these lines by derailing the massive demonstrations against Bolsonaro and his homicidal response to the COVID-19 pandemic that erupted last year.

For Brazil’s working class and youth, to believe that the military is preparing to block a coup promoted by Bolsonaro and his supporters is political suicide. The forces that seek to minimize the serious dictatorial threats in Brazil are paving the way for the rise of an authoritarian regime. These risks can only be eliminated through a mass movement of the working class mobilized against the entire capitalist system and in the struggle for international socialism.



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