

On Brazil's Independence Day, Lula government seeks to strengthen armed forces

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In recent weeks, the political crisis in Brazil has reached a new stage as a series of investigations, stemming from corruption scandals to the plots for a coup d'état, are getting increasingly closer to the former fascist president Jair Bolsonaro and his political and military circle. In response, the government of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Workers Party, PT) has redoubled its commitment to protect and politically rehabilitate the armed forces that conspired alongside Bolsonaro to overthrow democratic forms of rule in Brazil.

In the latest attempt in this direction, the PT decided to use the celebration of Brazil's Independence Day on September 7 to link the armed forces to "democracy" and "national unity," while seeking to "depoliticize" and "re-signify" the green and yellow of the Brazilian flag that in recent years became the symbol of the fascist movement connected to Bolsonaro.

In the last two years, the Independence Day celebrations joined massive military parades with demonstrations of Bolsonaro's fascist supporters calling for a new military dictatorship. The armed forces, which fully promoted the president's challenge to Brazil's electronic voting system, were the co-organizers of last year's political-military rallies of September 7.

This process unfolded amid the COVID-19 pandemic, in which a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry of the Brazilian Senate pointed out nine crimes committed by Bolsonaro. Today, he is being investigated in more than 20 cases before the Federal Supreme Court (STF), the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) and other judicial bodies.

The collaboration of the Brazilian armed forces with Bolsonaro has already led to 13 military officials being investigated, with the possibility of this number increasing in the coming period and reaching the senior army officers who participated in his government. One of them, Bolsonaro's former personal assistant, Lt. Col. Mauro Cid, has been under arrest since the beginning of June for having falsified Bolsonaro's vaccination card. He is also being investigated in seven other cases, including the January 8 coup attempt and the illegal sale in the US of jewelry received by Bolsonaro from foreign dignitaries.

On Cid's cell phone, seized in May by the Federal Police,

was found the so-called "coup draft," which, according to the STF minister in charge of the investigation, Alexandre de Moraes, provided a "legal and juridical roadmap for the execution of a coup d'état."

After remaining silent in a previous appearance before the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPI) of the Brazilian Congress investigating the January 8 coup, Cid only last week spoke for more than 22 hours in two sessions with the Federal Police. A plea bargain proposal was submitted to the Supreme Court on Wednesday. According to a source who spoke to *GloboNews* journalist Andrea Sadi, Mauro Cid's statements focused on the "coup script" and were described as "broad, diverse and bad for Bolsonaro."

She also reported that "military officials in the Bolsonaro government are ... concerned about what he can report about involvement and meetings with Heleno, Braga Netto, and new characters from the military nucleus." Gen. Augusto Heleno was head of the Bolsonaro government's Institutional Security Office (GSI), and Gen. Walter Braga Netto was Bolsonaro's chief of staff and his vice-presidential running mate. Both may be summoned to give evidence before the CPI.

Among the high-ranking military personnel involved in corruption schemes and in the January 8 coup plots are Gen. Mauro César Lourena Cid, the father of Lt. Col. Mauro Cid, and Gen. Paulo Sérgio Nogueira, former minister of defense in the Bolsonaro government.

In this context, in which the top ranks of the armed forces are heavily implicated in Bolsonaro's coup plot, the Lula government is doing everything it can to shield them. The daily *Globo* reported on August 28 that, as the investigations into the military progressed, Lula's defense minister, José Múcio, and Army Commander Gen. Tomás Paiva "have launched an offensive in recent weeks to try to avoid damaging the image of the armed forces." They are advancing the claim that it is necessary to "preserve the institution" and "individualize the conduct" of the military personnel involved in the January 8 attacks.

As part of this offensive, a meeting was held on August 23 between Gen. Paiva, Minister Múcio, and the president, and rapporteur of the CPI, Arthur Maia, and Eliziane Gama, who have been fraudulently reiterating that the armed forces not

only did not take part in the January 8 coup but prevented it from happening.

More significantly, Minister Múcio, General Paiva, along with the heads of the Navy and Air Force, met with President Lula on August 19. Exposing the “extraordinary nature” of the meeting, veteran journalist Jânio de Freitas said in his weekly program on August 25 that “the government owes a clearer explanation of what happened there. ... The population has a right to know.” However, Lula remained silent about the meeting, with the website *Terra* reporting that a source present said the president “reiterated [his] confidence in the armed forces.”

The cowardly stance of the Lula government concerning the most significant attack on Brazilian democracy since the 1964 military coup has been widely criticized, including by members of the PT itself. Federal Deputy Carlos Zarattini said in an interview with *Forum* last Monday, “The government should withdraw its veto of the CPI through Múcio to prevent an investigation into the military who participated in coordinating the [January 8] coup.” Previously, the Lula government, which was supposed to be the most interested in shedding light on the events of January 8, had worked hard to prevent the CPI itself from being set up.

However, the belief that the cover-up of the military’s role is being carried out only by Minister Múcio is belied both by recent developments and by the record of previous PT governments to the military. Lula has kept Mucio in office even after he praised the pro-coup encampments in front of the Army General Barracks that prepared the attack on the headquarters of the three branches of government as “demonstrations of democracy.” The defense minister has repeatedly insisted that the page must be turned on the January 8 coup as quickly as possible.

In early August, the Lula government fulfilled its promise made immediately after the January 8 coup of an investment of 53 billion reais (US\$10.6 billion) for numerous armed forces programs. In contrast, the announced budgets for health and education were 45 billion reais and 31 billion reais, respectively.

According to the government’s website, this investment aims to “generate employment and foster neo-industrialization,” strengthening the “national defense capacity” and the “Defense Industrial Base. ... Currently, the sector represents around 5 percent of the gross domestic product and generates 2.9 million direct and indirect jobs.”

In a harsh response, the Brazilian associations of Defense Studies, Social Sciences, and Political Science wrote in a joint note, “The budget allocated today to the armed forces is not compatible with the construction of a democratic society ... The government cannot continue to be held hostage by an institution marked by a coup tradition.”

If the Lula government is “held hostage,” this is not because of external pressure but because of its own policies. What has

prevented the PT from drawing the fundamental lessons from the years of military dictatorship in Brazil between 1964 and 1985 and, more recently, from the coming to power of an ardent supporter of military dictatorship like Bolsonaro, is its nationalist and pro-corporate character.

Today, this program is leading the PT to repeat and deepen, in a much more explosive international context marked by the war in Ukraine, the policy that its previous governments implemented between 2003 and 2016, paving the way for new defeats of the Brazilian and international working class.

During this period, the the PT governments of Lula and Dilma Rousseff strengthened and increased the autonomy of the Brazilian armed forces, which received the most significant investment in their history. As is being repeated today, they were considered by the PT governments of the time as part of their national economic development strategy, which led to the creation of specialized defense divisions in large Brazilian companies, such as the giant contractor Odebrecht, now involved in constructing Brazil’s nuclear submarine project.

As part of its “active” foreign policy, Brazil commanded the United Nations “peace operation” in Haiti, led by General Heleno. Domestically, they were used to suppress protests against the 2014 World Cup, the 2016 Olympic Games, oil privatization and countless other mass demonstrations. At the same time, when confronted by the military, the PT governments of Lula and Dilma Rousseff capitulated. In the most significant episode, the National Truth Commission, which ran from 2011 to 2014 and investigated military crimes under the Brazilian dictatorship (1964-1985), was ended without a single charge against the military.

The main military document of the PT government, the 2008 National Defense Strategy, summed up the PT’s program on the military: “the national project for the military forces [is a] means of uniting the nation above social class differences.”

As the history of Brazil and Latin America has shown over the last century, the policy of “national unity” of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist governments has only paved the way for strengthening the extreme right and the threat of new military coups in the region.

For the working class in the region, the only answer to this threat is not “national unity” but the development of the class struggle as part of a fight for internationalist socialism. This, in turn, requires the assimilation of the International Committee of the Fourth International’s long struggle against bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalism and building national sections of the ICFI worldwide.



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