

Police raids against former president Bolsonaro and generals expose coup plot in Brazil

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13 February 2024

In a dramatic intensification of the political crisis in Brazil, on February 8 the Federal Police (PF) carried out a series of raids targeting fascist former president Jair Bolsonaro and a number of retired generals and other high-ranking officers who served either in his cabinet or in commanding military positions during his presidency.

The raids marked the fourth round of police operations in as many months stemming from the investigations into Bolsonaro's plans to nullify the results of the 2022 general elections, which he lost to current President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the Workers Party (PT), and remain in power as a dictator.

Investigators were following leads produced through a plea bargain deal struck by Bolsonaro's former aide, Col. Mauro Cid, who was arrested on May 3, 2023. For the second time in as many weeks, police raided addresses connected to Bolsonaro, this time including the offices of his Liberal Party (PL). There, agents found a copy of a decree to be issued after his October 2022 electoral defeat announcing a "state of siege" and promising new elections. As a result of the latest operation, Bolsonaro had his passport confiscated by the PF and is barred from leaving the country.

Raids were also carried out against the entire military clique surrounding Bolsonaro. This included the former Army commander, Gen. Paulo Sérgio Oliveira, who was serving as defense minister at the time the coup was being plotted; Adm. Almir Garnier Santos, then serving as Navy commander; Gen. Augusto Heleno, then serving as intelligence chief; and Gen. Walter Braga Netto, then Bolsonaro's chief of staff and running mate. Also targeted were Anderson Torres, then justice minister, who was deeply implicated in the fascist assault on the capital Brasília on January 8, 2023; and Valdemar Costa Neto, the president of the Liberal Party, who was also arrested for illegal possession of a firearm.

A key figure in the coup plot was revealed to be the then head of the Land Operations Command (Coter) of the Army, Gen. Stevan Theóphilo Gaspar de Oliveira. According to messages found in possession of Colonel Cid, General Gaspar de Oliveira committed Army troops for the enforcement of the coup, with

the sole demand that the decree imposing the State of Siege be signed by Bolsonaro himself.

While all the targeted generals are currently retired, the operation also resulted in the arrest of a number of high-ranking active duty officers. The most prominent among them, Col. Bernardo Romão Corrêa Neto, was arrested on Sunday after the Army ordered his return from the Inter-American Defense College in Washington D.C., where he was stationed in December 2022, days before Lula's inauguration. Investigators believe that Neto, who was taken into custody upon his arrival at the airport in Brasília, was tasked with selecting loyal special forces (known as "Kids Pretos") commanders to be at the head of arrest operations during the coup.

Among the extraordinary amount of evidence uncovered by the investigations is a recording of a July 5, 2022 cabinet meeting in which Bolsonaro repeated his bogus electoral fraud charges and urged his ministers to "act now on plan B," because it would be harder to nullify the elections after results were announced by the Electoral Court (TSE). During the meeting, then intelligence chief General Heleno floated a plan for the use of spies to support a "turning of the table" before the elections. He was interrupted by Bolsonaro who called for the discussion to be continued in private. Messages were revealed in which General Braga Netto called for lower-ranking officers to pressure the Army commander, General Freire Gomes, to support the coup and "offer his head [to the lions]" if he continued to vacillate.

The investigation pieces together a number of elements uncovered previously, most significantly testimony offered by Cid that a coup was actively discussed among the military command, with the Navy commander Admiral Garnier Santos and six out of 16 members of the Army High Command committing to it.

It also provides the context for previously disclosed evidence of a vast undercover "parallel" spying operation within the Brazilian Intelligence Agency (Abin), which reported to Gen. Heleno. This scheme, the target of two large PF operations less than two weeks before, illegally used Israeli-made spying software, called First Mile, to track the positions of at least

1,500 individuals, including members of Congress, STF justices and prosecutors. The aim was to gather compromising evidence to be used to blackmail or arrest them when the coup was unleashed.

Despite the wealth of evidence, the political establishment—from the PT administration to congressional leaders and the corporate press—remains ambivalent about the arrest of Bolsonaro, fearful of provoking any shocks to the already compromised bourgeois order in Brazil.

This fact was highlighted by growing calls in the press for the leading judge in the case, STF justice Alexandre de Moraes, to hand the task over to the Attorney General's Office (PGR) and the full body of the Supreme Court. These worries were expressed in the February 10 editorial of the leading Brazilian daily *Folha de S. Paulo*, headlined “Let there be justice, not revenge,” which noted the extensive evidence that Moraes himself was a major target of the coup plot, and called into question his impartiality.

Such hesitancy is rooted in a fundamental contradiction. Bolsonaro and his fascistic clique are not being opposed by a faction of the bourgeoisie committed to democratic forms of rule. The frail and misnamed “democratic broad front” led by the Workers Party is as committed as Bolsonaro to defending the unchecked rule of finance capital, which is fundamentally incompatible with democracy and is itself working for the establishment of a police state in Brazil.

While the bourgeois “broad front” led by the PT in a temporary and precarious alliance with the courts and sections of the military has been compelled to act against Bolsonaro for its own political survival, it depends on the same reactionary forces that only a year ago the former president tried to mobilize in his authoritarian conspiracy.

Critical sections of the Brazilian bourgeoisie opposed Bolsonaro's coup because they saw it as precipitous and likely to fail. They took note of the doubts in the prospects for a coup's success expressed by US imperialism, which communicated to Bolsonaro that it would not stand behind his takeover. With the help of the PT administration, they are seeking to overcome such hurdles by vastly expanding police powers, showering the military with new weapons and contracts and seeking to lull the population into believing the armed forces are essentially committed to constitutional rule.

The persisting threat of a fascistic development of the Brazilian state is highlighted by the critical role assumed by General Theóphilo Oliveira over the first year of Lula in office. Now exposed as a key figure in Bolsonaro's coup plot, he was at the center of establishing extra-constitutional relations between the Brazilian Army and US imperialism in the aftermath of the failed coup. This has included actions that have repeatedly run counter to the official line of Lula's Foreign Office.

Early into Lula's term, General Theóphilo was at the center of a diplomatic crisis concerning the direct negotiations

between the Brazilian Army and the Ukrainian government for the sale of 450 armored vehicles to be used against Russia, defying Lula's ostensibly neutral stance on the war. Shortly after, as head of the Land Operations Command, he oversaw the “First International Seminar on the Land Military Doctrine of the Brazilian Army” which, behind the backs of the PT administration, invited representatives of the United States and leading NATO members, while excluding Brazil's BRICS allies Russia and China.

The continued contacts between US officials and the far-right Oliveira, even as US President Joe Biden embraced Lula at the White House and US diplomats hailed Lula's election, expose the political bankruptcy of the idea promoted by the PT and its pseudo-left allies that American imperialism represents a hindrance to a new dictatorship in Brazil.

These same forces have insisted, for over a year now, that the investigation into the fascist conspiracy in the Brazilian state must be conducted in secrecy and fully controlled by Moraes and the Federal Police. This has allowed, despite significant evidence having been revealed, the PF and the Supreme Court to conceal from the public the bulk of the information collected.

Despite the official claims, the secrecy of the procedure has nothing to do with effectively finding and charging the guilty. It is designed to concoct a fraudulent narrative that pins the entire blame for the coup plots on Bolsonaro and his personal “gang,” while maintaining that their miserable failure is due to the military's supposed commitment to democracy.

The PT government, a defender of capitalist austerity, fears the prosecution of Bolsonaro and the military coup-plotters escaping the limits of a criminal case and triggering a political mass movement of the working class that calls into question the legitimacy of the capitalist order as a whole.



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