

Brazil's chief justice “turns the page” on military's involvement in Bolsonaro coup attempt

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On April 6, the president of the Brazilian Supreme Court (STF), justice Luís Roberto Barroso, participated in the annual Brazil Conference in greater Boston promoted by Harvard and MIT students. Hosting the country's authorities and multi-millionaires, the conference's affluent organizers themselves proudly dub it the “Brazilian Davos forum.”

After participating in a panel with Harvard's star professor Steven Levitsky on populism, democracy and the role of constitutional courts, Barroso delivered a press conference in which he described the role of the Brazilian military in the last 35 years as “exemplary.” The Brazilian justice criticized those who warn of the military's involvement in the coup attempt promoted by the fascistic former president Jair Bolsonaro, stating that he doesn't “take part in this process of denigration of the armed forces, on the contrary.”

After admitting, with an understatement, that “for some moments in the last years there has been a political involvement that is undesirable and incompatible with the Constitution” on the part of the military, Barroso concluded by reassuring the press that “this has been overcome and in life we must learn to turn the page.”

Barroso was speaking less than a week after the 60th anniversary of the bloody March 31, 1964 coup, in which the Brazilian military, backed by the US, overthrew elected president João Goulart of the Brazilian Labor Party (PTB), inaugurating a 21-year dictatorship that murdered and tortured thousands. His declarations echoed those of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, of the Workers Party (PT), who ordered the cancellation of any ceremonies in memory of the coup, declaring that the country must “know how to move

history forward, [instead of] always dwelling on it, always dwelling on it.”

As justice Barroso spoke in Cambridge, the Brazilian Federal Police (PF) continued its investigation of at least 18 high-ranking active duty or retired officers, including former commanders of the armed forces, for aiding Bolsonaro to prepare a coup d'état after his defeat in the 2022 Brazilian elections. The plot culminated in the January 8, 2023 fascist assault on the government headquarters in the capital Brasília.

Barroso's and Lula's attempts to cover up for the military's role in coup attempts, whether 60 years ago or under Bolsonaro's administration, reveal the rot of Brazil's bourgeois rule as a whole. Thus, Bolsonaro and his clique are to be presented as isolated from the military as an institution which, according to them, plays a strictly constitutional role.

Seeking to counteract the destabilizing effect of Bolsonaro's coup attempt while keeping his collaborators in Congress, the military and leading business circles, in June, the Brazilian electoral authority decided to suspend his political rights for eight years—or two presidential electoral cycles. Bolsonaro was found guilty of abusing his presidential powers for electoral gain by summoning foreign ambassadors in July 2022 to present his baseless claims that the Supreme Electoral Court (TSE) was preparing to rig the October elections.

In a major escalation of the crisis, on March 15, the STF declassified sworn testimony by the former commanders of the Army, Gen. Marco Antônio Freire Gomes, and of the Air Force, Carlos de Almeida Baptista, Jr. Both former commanders have recognized that the military chiefs were presented with the so-

called “coup minutes,” i.e., a draft document establishing a state of siege by the military and the extension of Bolsonaro’s rule. They have also declared that the Navy commander, Adm. Almir Garnier, offered his forces to carry out the coup.

In the latest in a series of sworn testimony, Bolsonaro’s main aide, Col. Mauro Cid, declared that the former president’s chief-of-staff and running mate in the 2022 elections, Gen. Walter Braga Netto, had asked the Liberal Party for financial resources to illegally deploy Army special forces in support of the demonstrations by Bolsonaro’s fascist supporters. The PF investigation had already pointed to the participation of such special forces—the so-called “kids pretos”—in the January 8 assault on Brasília. The new revelations about Braga Netto provide the first direct link between Bolsonaro’s clique and the January 8 assault.

Braga Netto has also recently been implicated in the case of the 2018 murder of Rio de Janeiro city councilor Marielle Franco, of the pseudo-left Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL). On March 24 the PF arrested two well-known Rio de Janeiro’s politicians and the city’s former police chief, deputy Rivaldo Barbosa, as the masterminds of the execution. Barbosa was directly appointed as police chief by Braga Netto, who was then the head of the unprecedented military federal intervention in Rio, which took control of the state’s security forces. Barbosa’s nomination came against the advice of the state’s intelligence organs, which had identified credible links between him and the so-called militias, gangs chiefly composed of former police officers.

The rapid development of the political crisis has left the Brazilian authorities treading on thin ice. On April 11, the Attorney General’s Office (PGR) decided not to press charges against Bolsonaro for his holing up at the Hungarian embassy in Brasília between February 12 and 14, only four days after he surrendered his passport to the PF. The police saw the stay as a possible prelude to a request for political asylum and sought to charge Bolsonaro with obstruction of justice—which would implicate Hungarian diplomatic staff as well.

On April 6, the cases against Bolsonaro also drew the intervention of the far-right billionaire Elon Musk, who started a series of posts on his X/Twitter pointing to the so-called “Twitter Files,” making public and criticizing

as “authoritarian” and “against the Brazilian Constitution” court orders to block Brazilian far-right accounts on the social media. The orders were directly connected to the investigations against Bolsonaro led by STF justice Alexandre de Moraes, who was personally named as a “dictator” by Musk.

Musk’s action prompted Moraes to include him in an investigation that formally began to counter online threats to authorities made by the far right but remains classified by the STF. Bolsonaro immediately endorsed Musk’s “revelations” and his lawyers are reportedly looking for a way to use Musk’s accusations of abuse as part of Bolsonaro’s defense in court.



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