

Arrest of top Brazilian general exposes military's role in January 8 coup

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Gen. Walter Braga Netto (ret.) was arrested last Saturday, December 14, for alleged obstruction of justice in the investigation of the January 8, 2023 coup attempt in Brazil. The arrest of a four-star general is unprecedented in a country where even the bloody crimes of the US-backed military dictatorship (1964-1985) have gone unpunished. It has further exposed the critical role played by the military in the coup plot.

Braga Netto was one of the military officials closest to fascistic ex-president Jair Bolsonaro. Under Bolsonaro's administration (2019-2022), he served as the military's chief of staff and Defense Minister. In Brazil's October 2022 election, Bolsonaro chose him as his vice-presidential running mate.

His arrest came three weeks after the Brazilian Federal Police (PF) indicted Bolsonaro, General Braga Netto and 35 other members of the Bolsonaro government, 25 of them military officers, for the crimes of violent abolition of the democratic rule of law, coup d'état and criminal organization to "maintain ... Bolsonaro in power, preventing the inauguration of the legitimately elected government" of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Workers Party - PT).

According to the PF report on the coup attempt, General Braga Netto was a "central figure in the acts aimed at subverting the democratic regime in Brazil." He is the person most cited, with 98 references to him in the report.

One of the most sinister elements of the coup plot was the "Green and Yellow Dagger" operation, which called for the assassination of Lula and Vice President Geraldo Alckmin, as well as the "arrest/execution" of Supreme Court (STF) Minister Alexandre de Moraes, who has been the rapporteur in numerous investigations against Bolsonaro since 2019, including in connection with the attempted coup. Minister Moraes was also president of the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) between 2022 and 2024, making him the central target of attacks by Bolsonaro and his political entourage in their baseless allegations of fraud in Brazil's electronic voting system and the consequent results of the 2022 election.

The coup plot called for Braga Netto to become the coordinator of an "Institutional Crisis Management Office" to "advise the then President of the Republic JAIR BOLSONARO in the management of the facts arising from the institutional rupture," according to the PF report. This office was to be

primarily occupied by military personnel, serving as the pillar of a dictatorship.

Moraes' "arrest/execution" was scheduled to take place on December 15, 2022. It was aborted because, according to the PF report, "the then [Army] commander, General FREIRE GOMES, and the Army High Command rejected the use of ground forces to provide the necessary support for then-president JAIR BOLSONARO to promote an institutional break."

General Braga Netto's arrest for obstruction of justice was based on testimony given by Lt. Col. Mauro Cid to Minister Moraes and the Federal Police on November 21 and December 5. Cid, who signed a plea bargain agreement after being arrested for falsifying Bolsonaro's COVID-19 vaccination card, was the ex-president's aide-de-camp. He was also indicted in connection with the coup attempt.

In mid-November, Cid's plea bargain agreement was placed in question after the PF managed to recover messages and documents deleted from his electronic devices that showed he had omitted information about General Braga Netto's role in the coup plot.

In his subsequent testimony, which let the PF maintain his plea bargain agreement, Cid gave new details about the "Green and Yellow Plan" and confirmed that Braga Netto contacted his father, Gen. Mauro César Lourena Cid, asking for details of his son's plea bargain.

Cid confirmed that there was a meeting at Braga Netto's house on November 12, 2022, shortly after Bolsonaro's electoral defeat, which approved the "Green and Yellow Dagger" plan. Cid testified, according to the Federal Police, that "General Braga Netto delivered the money that had been requested to carry out the operation [Green and Yellow Dagger]. The money was delivered in a wine bag. General Braga Netto said at the time that the money had been obtained from agribusiness people."

In fact, Brazilian agribusiness was one of the powerful sectors of the Brazilian bourgeoisie that most supported the Bolsonaro government. After Bolsonaro's electoral defeat, it financed the protests by truck drivers who blocked roads across Brazil and the protest encampments in front of military headquarters demanding the intervention of the armed forces against alleged

electoral fraud.

The Federal Police report pointed out that Gen. Mario Fernandes (ret.), “then Executive Secretary of the General Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic, was the link between the then government of President JAIRO BOLSONARO and the coup protesters, who were camped out in front of military installations calling for an institutional break.” General Fernandes is also the alleged author of the “Green and Yellow Dagger” plan and took part in the meeting at Braga Netto’s house on November 12, 2022.

Since Cid’s testimony, three more military officers were indicted on December 11 by the Federal Police in connection with the coup attempt. Among them was Lt. Col. Aparecido Andrade Portela (ret), who helped raise money from agribusiness for the January 8 coup. He is a close friend of Bolsonaro’s and was a deputy to Senator Tereza Cristina, who was Bolsonaro’s minister of agriculture and previously one of the most prominent representatives of agribusiness in the Brazilian Congress.

Braga Netto’s arrest prompted the Lula administration’s defense minister, José Múcio, to repeat the fraudulent narrative that the January 8 coup plot was the work of rogue military personnel, while the Armed Forces as an institution supposedly saved Brazilian democracy. On December 17, he said that although the military was “embarrassed” by Braga Netto’s arrest, it “was no surprise to anyone.”

However, General Braga Netto is no mere rogue officer. On the contrary, he personifies the military’s growing prominence in the country’s political life, a process that began at the end of the PT governments that ruled the country from 2003 to 2016, and which was fueled by the last decade’s growing economic and social crisis.

Having been blooded in the criminal United Nations “peace-keeping operation” in Haiti, under the PT government of President Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016), the Armed Forces began to suppress domestic social unrest through Law and Order Guarantee (GLO) operations, which allow the military to take charge of public security.

The government of Michel Temer (2016-2018), Rousseff’s successor, intensified this use of the military, particularly in the 2017 general strike against his labor and pension reforms and in the 2018 truckers’ strike. Meanwhile, he increasingly turned to the generals to fill key positions in his government, including in an unprecedented way in the Ministry of Defense.

It was during Temer’s administration that General Braga Netto began to stand out politically. As Eastern Military Commander (2016-2019), he headed the GLO operation in Rio de Janeiro during the 2016 Olympics, and, in February 2018 he was appointed federal intervenor in Rio’s public security. The appointments of Gen. Joaquim Silva e Luna as Minister of Defense, also in February 2018, and Braga Netto as head of public security in Rio were unprecedented milestones in the erosion of the civilian control over the military established after

the fall of the military dictatorship in Brazil.

The Bolsonaro government intensified this process, filling its cabinet with military personnel, including the tapping of Gen. Hamilton Mourão for vice-president. The presence and importance of the military in the Bolsonaro government increased as the economic and social crisis driven by the COVID-19 pandemic intensified. The most notorious of these appointments was that of General Braga Netto as chief of staff in early 2020, when he took charge of the Bolsonaro government’s criminal response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In April 2021, Braga Netto took over as Bolsonaro’s defense minister amid both the deadly second wave of the pandemic and the most serious military crisis since the end of the dictatorship after Bolsonaro fired the entire military command to align the Armed Forces behind his coup plans. In July 2021, Braga Netto, accompanied by the three heads of the Armed Forces, threatened the Brazilian Congress, saying that there would be no elections in 2022 if there were no “printed and auditable” ballots—a longstanding demand of Bolsonaro in his campaign to discredit electronic voting in Brazil.

Shortly before leaving the Army High Command and the Defense Ministry to run for vice president alongside Bolsonaro, Braga Netto ordered the publication of an order of the day to be read to the troops commemorating the military coup of March 31, 1964, as a “historical milestone in the political evolution of Brazil” against “the anti-democratic ideals of the communist uprising.”

Throughout this process, the PT and its pseudo-left satellites complacently portrayed reactionary generals like Braga Netto and Mourão as the “adults in the room” who would contain Bolsonaro’s coup-mongering. As the growing revelations from the Federal Police make clear, nothing could be further from the truth. Meanwhile, the objective crisis driving the Brazilian and global ruling elites to turn toward dictatorship continues to intensify. This poses the urgency of a conscious break with the PT and the pseudo-left and the building of a genuine revolutionary leadership in the working class.



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