

Brazilian Federal Police report covers up military's role in January 8 coup attempt

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On November 26, Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes released an 884-page Federal Police (PF) report on the January 8, 2023 coup attempt in Brazil.

The previously sealed report charged Brazil's fascistic former president Jair Bolsonaro and 36 other members of his government, 25 of them military officers, with the crimes of violent abolition of the democratic rule of law, coup d'état and criminal organization to "maintain ... Bolsonaro in power, preventing the legitimately elected government" of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Workers Party - PT) from taking office.

The charges raised in the PF report led to the arrest, on December 14, of Bolsonaro's vice-presidential running mate, General Walter Braga Netto. As the WSWs reported, "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."

The public exposure of the participation of high-ranking military officers in the plotting of a fascist coup and the move to prosecute some of them is testimony to the explosive political situation in Brazil. While the internal disputes within the Brazilian bourgeoisie are emerging in open political struggle, none of its warring factions can present a long-term, let alone a progressive, solution.

The PT and the supposedly "democratic" wing of the bourgeoisie it represents are advancing a completely bankrupt response to Bolsonaro's and the generals' dictatorial conspiracy. This is exposed by the Federal Police report itself, which was concocted to present the coup bid as the work of rogue officers, while suggesting that the Armed Forces as an institution prevented the coup from succeeding.

The PF report concluded that, since 2019, Bolsonaro and his allies sought to undermine Brazil's "Democratic Rule of Law." This included their false claims that the country's electronic voting system was rigged, despite the repeated debunking of these allegations by experts.

Following Bolsonaro's loss of the October 2022 election to Lula, he and his allies devised the "Green and Yellow Dagger" plan, which included a plot to assassinate Supreme Court judge Alexandre de Moraes, then the president of the Superior Electoral Court (TSE), as well as Lula himself and his running mate, Geraldo Alckmin.

PF evidence suggests that the assassinations, scheduled for December 15 and aborted at the last minute, were intended to trigger a military-led seizure of power and installation of an "Institutional Crisis Management Office." Bolsonaro and his allies planned to create this junta through a decree, dubbed the "coup draft". This document was based on a disputed interpretation of Article 142 of Brazil's Constitution, which allegedly grants the military a "moderating power" to resolve conflicts between branches of government and ensure "law and order."

The Federal Police claims that the failure of Bolsonaro's coup plot was "due to circumstances beyond his control," mainly because "the then-Army commander, Gen. Marco Antônio Freire Gomes, and the Army High Command rejected the use of ground forces to provide the necessary support."

According to the report, the three Armed Forces commanders discussed the "coup draft" on December 7 and 14, 2022. It was eventually supported just by Navy commander Adm. Almir Garnier. Garnier, former Defense Minister Paulo Sérgio Nogueira, and Bolsonaro were the only military chiefs to be indicted by the PF.

The narrative that General Freire Gomes and the Army High Command were the "saviors of democracy" is a patent fraud. While emphasizing their refusal to adhere to the plot prepared for December 15, the PF deliberately ignored Freire Gomes' active role in the "triggering event" of January 8, 2023.

Parallel to the plot to assassinate Lula and Moraes, Bolsonaro's allies instigated and financed a series of roadblocks and encampments in front of Army barracks across the country, demanding the military intervene to overturn the election.

The Armed Forces leadership, notably including General Freire Gomes, supported the protests and encampments, including one at the Army Headquarters in Brasília.

On November 11, 2022, they issued a statement defending "popular demonstrations" against Lula's election. The generals invoked the military's "unrestricted and unwavering commitment to the Brazilian people" and historic role as a "moderating" force—the claim at the core of the "coup draft."

Rather than a fortuitous coincidence between the military chiefs' November 2022 statement and the "coup draft," it is clear that the plot was actively discussed with the Army High Command.

According to the PF report, on November 7, 2022, days before the note from the military chiefs, General Mario Fernandes, former executive secretary of the General Secretariat of the Presidency in the Bolsonaro government and author of the "Green and Yellow Dagger" Plan, sent a message to General Freire Gomes. It stated: "[T]he current demonstrations tend to escalate, providing trigger events for the action of the Security Forces against the popular masses." Such a "trigger event" did indeed occur on January 8, 2023.

Critically, General Freire Gomes prevented the dispersal of the encampments in front of military institutions at the end of December 2022. When General Gustavo Henrique Dutra, then the military commander at Planalto (the presidential palace and seat of the Brazilian government), ordered the break-up of the encampment in front of the Army headquarters in Brasília, where a large part of the fascist mob that attacked the three branches of government on January 8, 2023 assembled, Freire Gomes denounced him as "irresponsible" and "inconsequential."

These crucial facts were timidly reported in the PF report, which stated that, among other factors, the "deliberate inertia of members of the Armed Forces in not dissipating the demonstrations taking place in front of military installations fed the expectation that a military coup was imminent, with its epilogue materializing in the acts of January 8, 2023."

Nonetheless, the report glosses over the active role of General Freire Gomes. This apparent contradiction, one of the most important elements

in dissociating the Army High Command and the Armed Forces as a whole from the coup attempt, was addressed in a November 29 report in *Folha de S. Paulo*, which also drew attention to a change in the attitude of the Federal Police towards General Freire Gomes.

Headlined “PF downplays note and changes treatment of former Army chief, who goes from suspect to shield against coup,” the report stated that the first version of the Federal Police report “still gave important weight to the public note signed by the commanders of the three forces on November 11, 2022.”

However, in its final version, *Folha* pointed out, “there is no mention of the suspected omission in the face of the coup plot, the 2022 note is treated in a lateral manner, and the general’s resistance is described as the main reason why Bolsonaro did not carry out the coup attempt.”

Earlier this year, the Federal Police also stated in a report on the investigation into the January 8 coup that, “considering the position of guarantor agents, it is necessary to move forward in the investigation to ascertain possible ... conduct by omission due to the fact that [General Freire Gomes and Lt. Brig. Batista Júnior] were aware of the acts that were being carried out to subvert the democratic regime and yet, as commanders of the Army and Air Force, they remained inert.” In the same vein, the Joint Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPMI) of the Brazilian Congress, whose report was published in October of last year, called for the indictment of General Freire Gomes.

The coup was to be consummated on January 8, 2023 with a decree imposing a Law and Order Guarantee (GLO) operation, using as a pretext the inability of the Federal District Security Forces to stop the invasion of the headquarters of the Three Branches of Government in Brasilia.

At the time, the Federal District’s security secretary was the former justice minister in the Bolsonaro government, Anderson Torres, who allowed the fascist mob to reach the headquarters of the Three Powers without resistance from the Federal District’s Military Police. Torres, who was one of the authors of the “coup draft,” was indicted by the PF.

At the suggestion of Lula’s defense minister, José Múcio Monteiro, 2,500 troops were ready for the GLO operation. Lula, however, refused to sign off on their deployment, saying a few days later that “then the coup that people wanted would be happening. Lula ceases to be the government so that some general can take over the government.”

The intention to use the invasion of the headquarters of the Three Powers as a “triggering event” was also corroborated in a message recovered from the cell phone of Bolsonaro’s former aide-de-camp, Lt. Col. Mauro Cid. According to the PF report, “On the afternoon of January 8, 2023, MAURO CID began to receive photographs of the acts taking place on the Esplanade of Ministries sent by his wife, GABRIELA CID. In response, MAURO CID said that if the Brazilian Army [EB] left the barracks, it would be to join the coup d’état. He says: ‘If the EB leaves the barracks ... it’s to join.’”

Pressure on the Army High Command

A fundamental part of the coup plan was to pressure the Army High Command to go along with it. This included January 8 itself, which, according to the PF report, had “the objective of co-opting the support of the Armed Forces in order to carry out the coup d’état,” given the inability of the Lula government to act and the need for the military to reestablish order.

General Fernandes was also one of the organizers who worked to ensure that the coup plan had the support of the Army High Command. The main way of putting pressure on the Army High Command was through protests and encampments in front of Army installations demanding military

intervention. Their aim was to repeat what happened in the successful 1964 US-backed military coup against Brazil’s bourgeois nationalist president João Goulart.

According to the PF report, on November 4, 2022, Fernandes wrote to General Luiz Eduardo Ramos, former chief minister of the General Secretariat of the Bolsonaro government, about the need to “inflare the masses” and that “they should stay on the streets,” because “maybe that’s what the High Command, what Defense wants. The popular outcry, as it was in [19]64.”

After Bolsonaro’s electoral defeat, there were proposals for General Braga Netto to return to his post as Defense minister with the aim of pressuring the Army High Command into joining the coup. He had left the position on April 2, 2022 to run for vice-president.

Summarizing the situation in the Army High Command, Col. Reginaldo Vieira de Abreu (ret.), former chief of staff to General Fernandes, said in an audio obtained by the Federal Police that, of the 16 four-star generals in the High Command, “Five don’t want it, three want it a lot and the others are in a comfort zone.”

This is far from the High Command opposing a coup. In an interview on November 28 with the *Café da Manhã* podcast, Carlos Fico, a professor of Brazilian history at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, said: “In Brazilian history there is a recurring pattern ... coups, attempted coups, military pronouncements begin with a small group of the most daring military officers. The majority of the officers, especially the general officers, remain more or less waiting to see what happens and when this initial group is successful, then there is a gradual adherence.”

This “recurring pattern,” he added, “is what makes me view with certain caution the reading according to which the Army High Command, for the most part not having joined the coup plans, would then have guaranteed Brazilian democracy.”

Brazil’s Armed Forces have always justified the 1964 military coup and the bloody 21-year dictatorship that followed. Throughout the Bolsonaro administration, they commemorated annually the so-called “revolution of 1964” as a “milestone for democracy” against the “threat of communism.”

As the military chiefs’ note of November 11, 2022 made clear, there is a longstanding consensus within the Armed Forces on their role as the “moderating power” in Brazil. In the 1988 Constituent Assembly, its members put pressure on constituent deputies, including with the threat of a new coup, so that Article 142 would empower the Armed Forces “to guarantee the constitutional powers and, at the initiative of any of them, law and order.”

According to historian Fico, “The military has seen itself, since ... the Proclamation of the Republic [in 1899], ... as having the right to intervene in politics, because all Brazilian constitutions, except that of 1937 ... give them this absurd capacity, which is to guarantee constitutional powers.”

Undoubtedly, this is also the position of the Army High Command. If the former Army commander, General Freire Gomes, disagreed with the “Green and Yellow Dagger” plan that envisaged the assassination of Minister Moraes, President Lula and Vice-President Alckmin, that doesn’t mean he wouldn’t endorse a less brutal plan.

In Brazil and Latin America as a whole, the historical response of the ruling elites to political, social and economic crises has been to turn to the military to impose brutal dictatorships against the working class. Today, the crisis of Brazilian and world capitalism is far deeper than in 1964.

If the coup planned after Bolsonaro’s electoral defeat failed to succeed, that doesn’t mean that there will not be new attempts. On the contrary, the military has been given the opportunity to learn from and correct mistakes made in connection with the January 8 events.



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