In court testimony, Bolsonaro and military chiefs acknowledge conspiracy to overthrow democracy in Brazil

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Last week, on June 9 and 10, the Brazilian Supreme Court (STF) questioned former President Jair Bolsonaro and those accused of comprising the "crucial nucleus" of the coup conspiracy that culminated in the January 8, 2023 insurrection in Brasilia. Of the eight defendants, six were military personnel, including former Army and Navy commanders and four-star generals.

The testimony, broadcast live nationwide, represents a landmark political event in Brazilian history. In a country that lived under a brutal military dictatorship for two decades, from 1964 to 1985, for the first time, generals appeared in the dock being questioned about their crimes against democracy.

The most significant fact that emerged from the testimony was the acknowledgment by Bolsonaro and the other defendants that the former president conspired with the armed forces command to prevent the inauguration of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the Workers Party (PT), who was democratically elected in 2022.

The meetings between the former president and military commanders to discuss plans for a coup d'état after Bolsonaro's electoral defeat had already been acknowledged by former Air Force commander Lt. Brig. Carlos de Almeida Baptista Júnior and Army commander Gen. Marco Antônio Freire Gomes, who testified as witnesses.

The former commanders stated that, at a meeting on December 7, 2022, former Defense Minister Gen. Paulo Sérgio Nogueira de Oliveira presented them with the document that became known as the "coup draft." The document provided for the transfer of power to the military and the annulment of the elections.

When questioned by the rapporteur of the case, Minister Alexandre de Moraes, about the December 7 meeting, Bolsonaro stated that he could not "guarantee that this or that matter was discussed on that day." He claimed, however, that the meetings with the military command "were largely due to the decision of the TSE [Superior Electoral Court], when we petitioned the TSE about possible vulnerabilities."

Bolsonaro was referring to a petition by his right-wing Liberal Party (PL) for the annulment of the results in the second round of the presidential elections, based on unsubstantiated allegations of fraud. Once the petition was denied, "it was up to us to seek an alternative in the Constitution," said the former president.

Bolsonaro further declared:

> Perhaps it was at that meeting. We studied other possibilities within the Constitution. ... As Commander Paulo Sérgio himself said, we had to be very careful on the legal issue, because we couldn't do anything outside of that. Obviously, we knew that. In a few meetings, we abandoned any possibility of constitutional action, we abandoned it and faced the end of our government.

Moraes questioned Bolsonaro: "Are you saying that the consideration ... of this issue of a state of siege, a state of defense, was due to the impossibility of an electoral appeal, is that right?" "Yes, sir," he replied.

Next, Attorney General Paulo Gonet, questioned the ex-president:

> **Gonet:** I would like to know if the defendant, Bolsonaro, understands that, because he does not accept a judicial decision, it is in accordance with the four lines of the Constitution to summon military commanders to discuss the matter.
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> **Bolsonaro:** It was an invitation. Why military commanders? I have the same training, we went to the same academy, we went to the same training schools; and the military, in good and bad times, are with you. I wasn't in the mood to invite anyone to discuss any issue, it fell to them. ... And I confess that I absorbed a lot of what they said and quickly came to the conclusion that there was nothing more to be done, that this government [Lula] was going to fall on its own, as it is falling now.

While acknowledging his conspiratorial deliberations with military commanders, Bolsonaro insisted that this could not be characterized as plotting a coup. "On my part and on the part of military commanders ... there was never any talk of a coup. A coup is an abominable thing," Bolsonaro said.

The fundamental thesis of Bolsonaro's defense—that the president's conspiracy with the military against the Republic was legitimate and constitutional—is extraordinary. Its goal is to subvert the Constitution and subordinate the most basic democratic principles to an order based on the unrestricted power of the executive branch, i.e., an order that effectively represents the dictatorship of the president supported by the armed forces.

This authoritarian thesis was systematically promoted by Bolsonaro throughout his presidency. He persistently presented the military as a "moderating power" standing above all other branches of government, and at the same time as "my army."

The arguments presented to the STF by Bolsonaro's military accomplices in the same way sought to normalize practices that have historically characterized ruptures with democratic order.

Former Navy commander Adm. Almir Garnier Santos also acknowledged the meetings in which he is accused of having expressed support for a coup d'état and placed his troops at its disposal. In his defense, Garnier stated:

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> There were several issues [at the December 7 meeting], the main one being the president's concern, which was also ours, about the countless people who were, shall we say, dissatisfied and taking a stand throughout Brazil, in front of Army barracks.

When asked by Minister Luiz Fux about the reasons for the military's "concern," Garnier replied:

> Concern about the issue of dissatisfied people on the streets, that this could lead to rioting... that public security agencies could lose control, or imagine that this could happen. This would normally bring responsibility to the last bastion of this thing, which is the Armed Forces. ... [They] are always ready for their constitutional missions.

The testimony of the former Minister of Defense was likewise revealing. General Nogueira recounted: "After the meeting, I approached the president and warned him of the seriousness if he was thinking about a state of defense, of siege, the consequences of future action. That was the meeting on the 7th [of December]." Presenting the execution of a coup d'état as a "serious" measure, the former minister sought only to distance himself from responsibility for its practical execution.

Gen. Augusto Heleno, Bolsonaro's Minister of Institutional Security (GSI), agreed to answer questions only from his defense team. When asked if he "coordinated any action by Abin (Brazil's Intelligence Agency) to produce reports or documents with false information about the elections," Heleno replied, "There was no mood for that," and was interrupted by his own lawyer, who demanded, "Yes or no, General."

The widespread acceptance of these fascist ideas within the Brazilian military command is exposed by the fact that they were promoted not only by the defendants in the case. General Freire Gomes, whom the official narrative has credited with "saving democracy," also defended the "constitutionality" of the conspiratorial discussions between the commanders and the president.

In their testimony to the STF, Bolsonaro and the fascist military presented the political framework for a battle they intend to wage outside the confines of the courts.

A few days after his deposition, Bolsonaro called for a confrontation with the STF process. "Enough of this farce," he wrote on Instagram last Friday. Presenting the case as a "plot to persecute political opponents and silence those who dare to oppose the left," he demanded: "This political process disguised as criminal action must be stopped before it causes irreversible damage to the rule of law in our country."

The former president's eldest son, Flávio Bolsonaro, was even more belligerent in an interview with *Folha de São Paulo*, published last Saturday. Stating that "amnesty is the honorable way out for everyone," he threatened that a conviction of his father would provoke a "popular" and "international reaction" that "are not under our control."

Flávio outlined a scenario in which his father is convicted and supports a candidate in the 2026 presidential elections. "Not only will [Bolsonaro] want to support someone who backs amnesty or pardon, but who will carry it out." Assuming that such a pardon for his father will be challenged in the Supreme Court, he added: "It's a very bad scenario, because we're talking about the possibility and use of force."

As Flávio's reference to "international resistance" indicates, the Brazilian fascists are waging their struggle not only within the national political arena.

Days before testifying to the STF, Bolsonaro was questioned by the Federal Police in the investigation opened against his second son, Eduardo Bolsonaro. He is accused of obstructing and threatening the ongoing proceedings against the former president through his activities in the United States.

In February of this year, Eduardo Bolsonaro resigned from his position as federal deputy and moved to Texas to coordinate directly with the openly fascist wing of the Republican Party. Since then, the Trump administration has promoted a series of measures to "put pressure" on the Brazilian judicial system. More recently, Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated that the US government is "strongly considering" sanctions against Alexandre de Moraes.

Jair Bolsonaro himself has stated on several recent occasions that "Brazil cannot get out of this situation on its own" and that US intervention "is very welcome." Spreading the lie that the PT government is "handing Brazil over to China" and providing "material that Russia ... China does not have" for the "construction of atomic bombs," Bolsonaro declared: "I have already passed this on to Trump's team. ... They are concerned ... that Brazil will consolidate itself as a new Venezuela."

There is little doubt that if Bolsonaro and the military were to stage a coup in Brazil today, it would be backed by Washington.

Besides the direct coordination of Trump with the Brazilian fascists, there exists a profound correlation between the decomposition of democracy in Brazil and in the United States.

Bolsonaro's conspiracy was openly based on the example of the coup orchestrated by Trump on January 6, 2021. From the first day of his second term, Trump has been promoting the continuation of this conspiracy to establish a presidential dictatorship in the US.

The events of recent weeks mark a new stage in this ongoing coup. As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained in its statement "Seven Days in June: Trump's unfolding coup d'état":

> While troops patrol the streets of Los Angeles under the pretext of responding to protests, the true epicenter of this operation is the White House.
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> The historical parallels are to the brutal military dictatorships imposed across Latin America in the 1970s—in Chile, Brazil, Argentina and elsewhere—where capitalist governments, unable to rule through existing institutions, responded to social crises with mass repression, disappearances and terror. What is involved, however, is not the military overthrowing the president, but the sitting president overthrowing the Constitution.

These measures culminated in a massive military parade in Washington on Saturday, June 14, coinciding with Trump's 79th birthday. In another article, the WSWS stated:

> A new political framework is being established in America, in which the federal government operates outside any legal restraint, carrying out actions that are not only unprecedented in scope but brazenly illegal and unconstitutional.

This "new political framework" that Trump seeks to impose in the US coincides directly with the perspective publicly defended by Bolsonaro and the Brazilian military before the Supreme Court.

But the deepening political crisis is being driven not only from the right. Trump's offensive is being met with a growing uprising by the working class and other sections of the population in the US. Trump's fascist military parade last Saturday, which was a public fiasco, was met with the largest protests in US history, largely spontaneous.

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The victory of this struggle requires the formation of an internationalist, socialist movement led by the working class. The central question is the building of a revolutionary leadership that consciously expresses these objectives.

In Brazil, the reactionary response of the PT and the Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL), which occupy the position of the official “left,” has been the promotion of a “broad front” of the bourgeois establishment against Bolsonaro.

Far from containing the advance of fascism, the PT and the pseudo-left are paving the way for its resurgence. At the same time, the pro-capitalist PT government is on a collision course with an inevitable mass social eruption of the working class.

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