

Bolsonaro's military parade draws heavy criticism



Jair Bolsonaro is under pressure for his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and faces investigations into a series of unproven election fraud allegations?

Brasilia, August 11 (RHC)-- Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, under pressure for his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and facing investigations into a series of unproven election fraud allegations, has

drawn more criticism after presiding over a military parade outside the presidential palace.

Smiling with military top brass at his side, the far-right leader on Tuesday stood atop the palace steps in the capital, Brasilia, as a long convoy of tanks and armoured vehicles filed through the seat of power in the South American nation.

Critics said the display was reminiscent of Brazil's 1964-1985 military dictatorship, for which Bolsonaro, a former army captain, is openly nostalgic.

"This is pathetic," said Senator Omar Aziz, chair of a Senate committee investigating the Bolsonaro government's widely criticised handling of the coronavirus crisis, which has killed more than 563,500 people in the country, according to Johns Hopkins University data. "Our democracy has the means to defend itself from a coup-mongering outburst," Aziz said.

Bolsonaro has seen a drop in popularity in recent weeks after alleged irregularities surfaced in his government's procurement of COVID-19 vaccines from India. He has also been accused of corruption – an allegation he denies.

In the face of mounting pressure, the president has intensified his longstanding claims that Brazil's electoral system is rife with fraud -- accusations that have been rejected by leading Brazilian jurists and other experts as without merit.

Critics said Bolsonaro is taking a page out of the book of former United States President Donald Trump, whom the Brazilian leader has long idolised, in order to sow doubt before next year's presidential election.

Recent polls show Bolsonaro would lose at the polls if former left-wing President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva chooses to run against him in October 2022.

The Brazilian Supreme Court and Supreme Electoral Court have ordered Bolsonaro investigated for potential crimes in his unrelenting campaign against the electronic voting system, which Brazil has used since 1996.

The military parade came on the same day Congress debated a Bolsonaro-backed bill to overhaul the system. Bolsonaro insisted there was no link between the military parade and the legislation before Congress.

Officially, the event was for the armed forces to give the president an invitation to upcoming military exercises outside the capital. However, it is the first time tanks have filed past the presidential palace, Congress and high court since the dictatorship era.

"The president is using this tank parade to try to intimidate Congress and the Supreme Court," political scientist Mauricio Santoro of Rio de Janeiro State University told the AFP news agency. "He wants to show the armed forces are on his side."

Nine opposition parties issued a joint statement condemning the display, including Lula's Workers' Party.

Soldiers arrested a group of protesters who tried to block the convoy. A small crowd of Bolsonaro supporters also attended, some carrying signs calling for the military to intervene to "Save Brazil."



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