

Generals and 'Chicago Boys' loom large in Brazil's next government



Brasilia, October 31 (RHC)-- Brazil's far-right President-elect Jair Bolsonaro is likely to tap army generals and an ultra-neoliberal-free-market economist for key roles in his cabinet. A former army captain who styles himself as an outsider despite spending a long career in Congress, has mostly sought prospective ministers with little political experience.

The cabinet will have "four or five generals," according to the head of Bolsonaro's Social Liberal Party, Gustavo Bebianno. That is likely to be controversial in a country still scarred by a brutal military dictatorship that lasted from 1964 to 1985.

"By promising to name generals to his government, he is trying to create an image of order, but a lot of the likely picks have zero political experience. That will make it hard to negotiate with Congress," said Geraldo Monteiro, a political scientist at Rio de Janeiro State University. "He wants to reinvent the way the country is governed by ending the 'presidency by coalition.' It will be his biggest challenge," said Marcos Coimbra, a political strategist at Mackenzie Presbyterian University in Brasilia.

Some of the likely picks to run Latin America's largest country and the world's eighth-largest economy

when Bolsonaro takes office on January 1st include Bolsonaro's economic guru Paulo Guedes, a liberal economist trained at the University of Chicago — long the high cathedral of free-market economics. He has been a popular pick with the business sector, ensuring that the markets welcomed Bolsonaro's march to the presidency with a surge.

Bolsonaro himself has confessed he understands "nothing" about economics and says he will name Guedes to head a "super-ministry" bringing together the current ministries of finance, trade and planning, plus the secretariat for public investment. Guedes held a press conference after Bolsonaro's victory during which he vowed to overhaul Brazil's economic model, reform the pension system and privatize state enterprises.

The one experienced political operative in the lineup is Onyx Lorenzoni, tipped to be named chief of staff. Lorenzoni, who is 64, is a veteran lawmaker -- first in the state legislature of Rio Grande do Sul, then in the lower house of Congress -- and was a chief strategist on Bolsonaro's campaign.

Bolsonaro is a gushing admirer of Augusto Heleno Ribeiro, his military academy instructor in the 1970s and probable defense minister. The general was the first commander of Brazil's United Nations peacekeeping mission in Haiti, launched in 2004. Bolsonaro wanted him to be his running mate, but Heleno's PRP party rejected the overture -- so the candidate instead gave the vice presidential nod to another general, Hamilton Mourao.

Bolsonaro said in an interview last year that Heleno could have "any post he wants" in his government, and that he would have loved to be a minister in a Heleno presidency. Another general, Oswaldo Ferreira is tipped for transport minister. The former head of the army's department of engineering and construction, he would be responsible for infrastructure and its environmental impact under Bolsonaro.

In a recent interview, he said that in his road-building days in the 1970s, "there was no prosecutor's office or Ibama (the environmental agency) to bust everyone's balls." As for Marcos Pontes, the fighter pilot and astronaut was the first Brazilian in outer space. An avid Bolsonaro backer, he has been floated for the post of science minister.

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