

Brazilian defense minister sees no reason for setting up U.S. military base in his country



Brasilia, January 9 (RHC)-- Brazil's Defense Minister General Fernando Azevedo e Silva says he sees no reason to allow the United States to establish a military base in the South American country, in direct defiance of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who said he would be open to the idea.

The defense minister made the comment at the Tuesday edition of Valor Economico, adding that the matter "is complex" and he had not yet discussed it with the president.

"This needs to be carefully evaluated. I don't see what the reason is for such a base," Reuters further quoted him as saying.

Separately on Tuesday, the Brazilian daily newspaper Folha de Sao Paulo, citing unnamed sources, reported that Bolsonaro had backtracked on the idea.

Bolsonaro, 63, who took office on January 1st, announced in a televised interview last week that he might be willing to allow an American base in Brazil as a way to "counter Russian influence" in Venezuela, a move that would mark a dramatic shift in direction for the largest South American country's foreign policy.

Later, Silva said in an interview that Bolsonaro, a former army officer-turned-politician, had yet to discuss his plans with the defense ministry, the part of the government that the minister said would oversee any such move.

Furthermore, Brazil's Ministry of Defense said that it had not been informed of the so-called U.S. base proposal by the president. "The president has not discussed this with the defense minister," said Major Sylvia Martins, a spokeswoman for the ministry.

Additionally, Reuters cited an unnamed top military official that the Brazilian Armed Forces are against a U.S. base in the country and Bolsonaro's comment has not been well received by the military.

Bolsonaro is an ardent admirer of U.S. President Donald Trump and the White House's policies, particularly those with regard to opposing the so-called "authoritarian regimes" of left-wing governments in Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela.

The right-wing Brazilian president, who is also known as "Tropical Trump," has sparked controversy by following Trump on relocating his country's embassy in Israel to the occupied Jerusalem.

If the Brazilian president follows through with the plan, the Latin American country would become the third nation -- after the U.S. and Guatemala -- to have an embassy in the highly sensitive city, which is the third holiest Muslim site.

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