

Lula fires Brazil's army chief in wake of pro-Bolsonaro riots

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Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has replaced the army chief following rioting by supporters of former President Jair Bolsonaro [Eraldo Peres/The Associated Press]

Brasilia, January 21 (RHC)-- Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has dismissed the country's army chief General Julio Cesar de Arruda in the wake of the storming of several government buildings by the supporters of former President Jair Bolsonaro.

Lula did not immediately release a statement on the replacement, but the official website of the Brazilian armed forces said General Julio Cesar de Arruda had been removed as head of the army. The AFP and Reuters news agencies also reported on the firing, citing military sources.

Arruda was replaced by General Tomas Miguel Ribeiro Paiva, who had been head of the Southeast Military Command. The move comes weeks after supporters of Bolsonaro stormed the National Congress, the presidential palace and the Supreme Court in Brasilia two weeks ago, on January 8th. Rioters had called for the military to intervene to overturn Bolsonaro's loss to Lula in the presidential election.

In the immediate aftermath of the riots, Lula said he suspected collusion by “people in the armed forces.” More recently, the left-wing Brazilian leader said that his government would purge hardcore Bolsonaro loyalists from the security forces. He also removed several dozen soldiers from his security detail following the unrest.

To date, more than 2,000 people have been arrested in connection with the riots. A Brazilian Supreme Court justice has also authorised adding Bolsonaro to its investigation into who incited the unrest.

Bolsonaro, a retired military officer, maintained close ties to the armed forces throughout his presidency. Arruda had attended a meeting with Lula on Friday, accompanied by the commanders of the navy, Marcos Sampaio Olsen, and air force, Marcelo Kanitz Damasceno.

Defense Minister Jose Mucio Monteiro told reporters after the meeting that the country’s armed forces had no direct involvement in the riots but added that any military personnel involved would have to “answer as citizens.”

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