

Brazil's former defense minister arrested in attempted coup probe

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Bolsonaro and his former defence minister Walter Braga Netto whisper together during a meeting

General Walter Braga Netto, right, served as Brazil's defense minister from 2021 to 2022 under then-President Jair Bolsonaro [File: Ueslei Marcelino/Reuters]

Brasilia, December 15 (RHC)-- Brazilian police have arrested a former defense minister and top ally of ex-President Jair Bolsonaro as part of an investigation into an attempted coup to overturn the results of the

South American country's 2022 election.

General Walter Braga Netto was formally accused last month, alongside Bolsonaro and 35 others, of plotting a coup to keep the former far-right president in office following his failed re-election bid.

Prosecutors have yet to file formal charges against Braga Netto, who served as Bolsonaro's chief of staff from 2020 to 2021 and as defence minister from 2021 to 2022.

The arrest on Saturday stemmed from allegations of obstructing the collection of evidence, the Federal Police said in a statement. It came after investigators uncovered evidence of a larger role for Braga Netto in the alleged coup plot than previously thought, according to Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes, who ordered the arrest.

Braga Netto has denied any role in the alleged conspiracy. His lawyers did not immediately respond to requests for comment from the news agencies Reuters and The Associated Press.

In November, Brazil's Federal Police unsealed the final report of its investigation into the plan to keep Bolsonaro in office by overturning the 2022 election victory of his left-wing rival, current President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

Federal Police portray Braga Netto as one of the plot's leaders and say he was also involved in pressuring military leaders to sign on to the coup. The 884-page document described a multi-step scheme that included systematically sowing distrust of the electoral system among Brazilians, drafting a decree to give the plot a veneer of legal basis, pressuring top military brass to go along with the plan and inciting a riot in the capital.

According to the investigation, the plan included a plot to assassinate Lula, Vice President-elect Geraldo Alckmin and de Moraes, the Supreme Court justice. Investigators have accused Braga Netto of greenlighting the assassination plan at a meeting with the plotters inside his home. The federal police also said Braga Netto provided funds to those involved in the plot.

On Saturday, the police force said the retired general tried to meddle in the investigation by attempting to get details of depositions with Mauro Cid, a Bolsonaro aide who is cooperating with police.

In a statement, federal police said it served two search warrants in connection with the arrest.

The searches took place at Braga Netto's residence in Rio de Janeiro and the home of retired colonel Flavio Botelho Peregrino in Brasilia, the army said in a statement.

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