

Brazil to redeploy troops to Amazon to fight deforestation

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Preliminary data released on June 4, 2021, signaled deforestation of Brazil's Amazon in May 2021 extended this year's surge compared to 2020. (Photo: AP)

Brazil's president is sending troops back to the Amazon to bolster policing against logging and other illegal land clearance, acting amid international criticism of a surge in deforestation and just two months after withdrawing a similar military mission.

President Jair Bolsonaro's decree calls for soldiers to go to the states of Para, Amazonas, Mato Grosso and Rondonia through the end of August. The order, which was published Monday in Brazil's official gazette, didn't provide details about the number of troops to be deployed nor the cost of the operation.

Vice President Hamilton Mourão told reporters earlier this month that the deployment could be extended beyond two months with the arrival of the dry season, when people burn forest to clear land for farming and ranching.

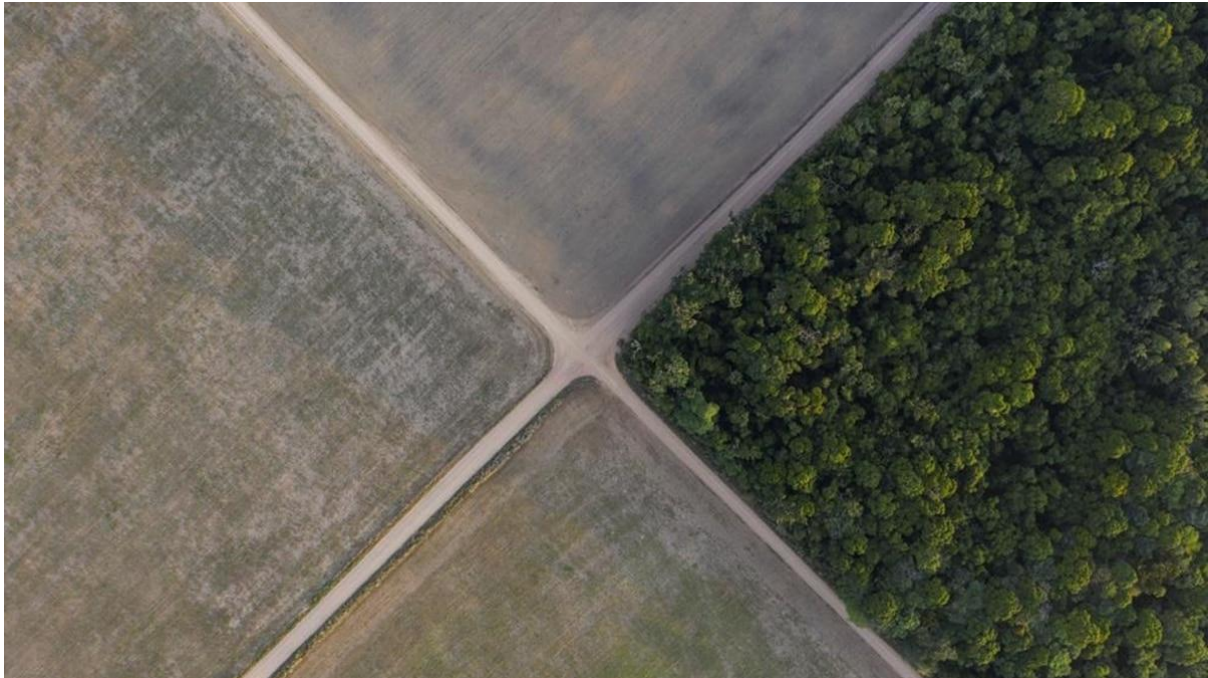
[Amazon deforestation had edged upward](#) for several years, then it surged after the 2018 election of Bolsonaro, who repeatedly called for development of the rainforest. The destruction has elicited an international outcry and, more recently, an effort by U.S. President Joe Biden's administration to urge Bolsonaro to get tough on illegal logging.

This will mark the third time that Bolsonaro has dispatched troops to the Amazon, following two "Operation Green Brazil" deployments, the most recent of which ended in April. Each mission involved thousands of soldiers. Still, environmental experts have said the military was ill-prepared and had limited efficacy.

In 2020, deforestation in Brazil's [Amazon reached a level unseen](#) since 2008, according to official data. And 98.9% of deforestation had indications of illegality, either done near springs, in protected areas or carried out without requisite authorization, according to data released this month by the MapBiomas Project, a network of nonprofits, universities and technology companies that studies Brazilian land use. Brazil's environmental regulator levied fines in just 5% of these cases, the group found.

Márcio Astrini, executive secretary of the Climate Observatory, a network of environmental nonprofit groups, called the latest military deployment a “smokescreen that will allow the government to claim to be fighting deforestation. He noted a previously successful initiative, largely funded by the Norwegian and German governments, has been suspended since 2019.

“The government has adopted a series of measures that simply destroys the state’s monitoring capacity, like stopping environmental fines, Astrini said. He added that the regulator has also ceased destroying machinery used for illegal logging.



A fragment of Amazon rainforest stands next to soy fields in Belterra, Para state, Brazil. (Photo: AP)

Bolsonaro’s plan to send soldiers comes as the US. administration has called for curbing Amazon deforestation in order to [help arrest climate change](#). Bolsonaro has said Brazil lacks enough funds to do so on its own, despite the fact the nation did so at the start of this century.

The U.S. has made clear it would only be willing to contribute once Brazil registers concrete progress, of which there has so far been no sign. Talks between the U.S. and Brazil’s environment ministry have stalled, three Brazilian government officials told The Associated Press, speaking on condition of anonymity because they weren’t authorized to speak publicly.

The decision to deploy troops is partially meant to demonstrate the government’s good intentions to the U.S., one of the officials added.

On June 23, Environment Minister Ricardo Salles announced his resignation, giving up his post amid sharp criticism of his tenure and two investigations into his actions involving allegedly illegal timber operations. He has denied all wrongdoing.

Source:<https://www.indiatoday.in/science/story/brazil-to-redeploy-troops-to-amazon-to-fight-deforestation-1820791-2021-06-29>