

Bolivia

Bolivian general arrested after apparent coup attempt

Military vehicles leave central plaza in La Paz hours after armed soldiers force their way inside



Bolivian General Juan José Zúñiga, centre, is arrested following an apparent coup attempt in the capital of La Paz on Wednesday © Claudia Morales/REUTERS

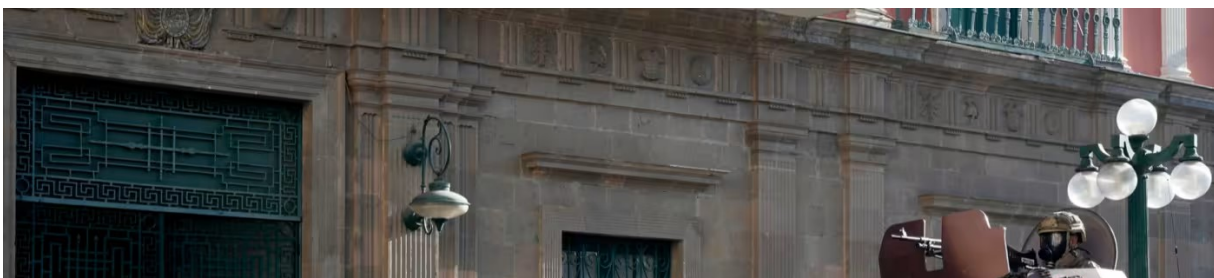
Joe Daniels in Bogotá 10 HOURS AGO

Bolivia's armed forces have arrested the general accused of launching a botched coup on Wednesday.

Juan José Zúñiga, who commanded the South American country's army, was detained in La Paz in front of television cameras on Wednesday night, capping a dramatic few hours in which armed soldiers attempted to storm the national palace.

President Luis Arce gave a televised statement to denounce an attempted putsch shortly after an armoured military vehicle rammed into the entrance of the presidential palace and soldiers funnelled in. The troops had just taken control of Plaza Murillo, a historic central square.

"Today the country is facing an attempted coup d'état," he said in the address. "Once again the country is up against those who want democracy in Bolivia to be cut short."





© Juan Karita/AP

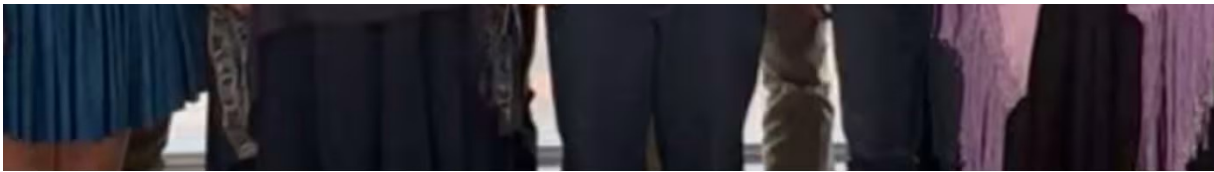
Arce, a onetime protégé of former leftist leader [Evo Morales](#), called on Bolivians to “mobilise against the coup plotters”. He then replaced Zúñiga with an army commander who called on the soldiers to stand down.

Within a few hours, Arce was victoriously pumping his fists in the air and thanking supporters in Plaza Murillo after soldiers withdrew in a convoy of military vehicles.

Earlier Zúñiga, in military uniform, told a television crew outside the palace that “the three chiefs of the armed forces have come to express our dismay”. He said there would be “a new cabinet of ministers, surely things will change, but our country cannot continue like this any longer”.

Zúñiga also demanded the release of several jailed politicians, including two opposition leaders: former president Jeanine Áñez — who briefly led Bolivia from 2019 to 2020 — and Luis Fernando Camacho, a former provincial governor.





Luis Arce, centre, speaks during the apparent coup attempt © Lucho Arche/Reuters

As Zúñiga was arrested he told television crews that he had been acting at a request made by Arce during a meeting days earlier. “It is necessary to prepare something to raise my popularity,” he quoted Arce as saying, without providing evidence.

Interior minister Eduardo del Castillo later said Zúñiga was seeking to boost his profile and “bring down the democratically elected government”. He said a former navy vice-admiral had also been taken into custody.

Zúñiga this week said Morales — who initially claimed victory in a disputed presidential election in 2019 but later [resigned](#) — should not be allowed to run again for president.

Tensions have been rising in Bolivia in recent weeks as Arce and Morales — formerly allies from the ruling Movement Towards Socialism party — have been engaged in a caustic split.

Morales, who still wields significant influence, called on his supporters to mobilise in support of democracy. “We will not allow the armed forces to violate democracy and intimidate people,” Morales posted on X.

PLAY | 00:55

Military vehicles appear in the centre of La Paz, the capital of Bolivia © Reuters

[Bolivia](#), a landlocked country of 12mn people in the high Andes, has experienced

numerous coups since gaining independence in 1825.

Morales, a former coca farmer who led the country from 2006 to 2019, has said he will run against Arce in next year's presidential election. His term was marked by democratic backsliding as he championed indigenous rights.

Meanwhile, the economy has been struggling amid dwindling reserves of foreign currency and natural gas, the country's main export.

The military action on Wednesday drew swift international condemnation.

The US was "closely monitoring" the situation and urged "calm and restraint", a White House National Security Council spokesperson said.

Josep Borrell, the EU's top diplomat, said: "The EU condemns any attempt to break constitutional order in Bolivia and overthrow democratically elected governments."

Luis Almagro, secretary-general of the Organization of American States, called on the army to submit itself to the "legitimately elected civil power" in Bolivia.

[Copyright](#) The Financial Times Limited 2024. All rights reserved.
