

Brazil's Bolsonaro signs military pact with Trump

By Bill Van Auken
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Brazil's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro winds up a five-day trip to the US today after signing a US-Brazilian military pact and discussing with US President Donald Trump the escalation of the drive for "regime change" in Venezuela.

Trump and Bolsonaro met Saturday night at the US president's Palm Beach resort, Mar-a-Lago, where the two committed themselves to a "strategic alliance" for the defense of "democracy in the region."

While bilateral trade relations were on the meeting's agenda, White House sources said that the main point of discussion was Washington's campaign to bring down the Venezuelan government of President Nicolas Maduro and install a US puppet regime headed by the right-wing politician Juan Guaidó.

Even his Western backers acknowledge that popular support for Guaidó, who swore himself in as "interim president" in January of last year and then staged an abortive coup attempt last April, has dissipated. Nonetheless, he recently conducted an international tour seeking to drum up support for even harsher economic sanctions against Venezuela or even military intervention.

A senior US official who briefed reporters on Saturday just before the Trump-Bolsonaro meeting said that the Trump administration was determined to implement a "kind of Monroe 2.0 doctrine," referring to the nearly 200-year-old canon of Washington's foreign policy in the Western Hemisphere, which in the second half of the 20th century served as a justification for a series of US-backed coups that brought military dictatorships to power over much of Latin America in an attempt to crush the revolutionary movement of the region's working class.

The resurrection of this doctrine, whose invocation had been dropped by US administrations in recent decades because of its long and bloody history, was aimed, according to the administration official, at "external actors that, frankly, are incompatible with a lot of the values and things that bring the entire Western Hemisphere together...being, obviously, the Chinese and Russian involvement in the Western Hemisphere." He added, "We truly feel that the Western Hemisphere is the hemisphere of the Americas, for the people of the Americas."

In relation to Venezuela, the official said that "in the days

and weeks to come, there's going to continue to be escalation toward the maximum pressure that we seek and that we've set as our policy."

"Hopefully, we don't have to get ever to 100 percent maximum pressure, but we are all dedicated, along with our allies—Colombia and Brazil in particular...to achieve that democratic transition...in Venezuela," he added. Asked by a reporter whether that meant military action, the official stated that "all of those measures are on the table and all of those options are on the table."

Bolsonaro's government prepared his trip to the US with a gesture of support for Washington's aggression against Venezuela. It withdrew all of its diplomatic personnel from the country and ordered all Venezuelan diplomats to leave Brazil or face forced expulsion.

The Brazilian president's visit to Florida was preceded a week earlier by a White House meeting between Trump and Colombia's President Iván Duque, in which the discussion also centered on Venezuela. This week, US troops were sent to Colombia for joint exercises with the country's military.

The Venezuelan government protested the back-to-back meetings between Washington and Latin America's two most right-wing regimes. "Why should the United States and Brazil or the United States and Colombia have Venezuela on their military agenda?" demanded Foreign Relations Minister Jorge Arreaza at a meeting with diplomatic personnel in Caracas. He went on to charge that Washington is preparing a naval blockade—an act of war—against Venezuela to enforce the sanctions it has imposed on Venezuela and its state-owned oil company PDVSA.

Washington, along with its allies in Brasilia and Bogotá, is clearly banking on the economic strangulation of Venezuela triggering a military coup backed by the country's capitalists overturning the government. The Maduro administration, however, has introduced policies aimed at currying favor with the country's capitalist ruling elite, scrapping price controls and handing back nationalized enterprises to private owners, while effectively dollarizing the economy.

The result has been a dramatic widening of social polarization, as the government has imposed austerity measures against the working class, which is the primary victim of the

increasing US economic blockade of the country. The impact of these measures and the right-wing policies of the so-called Bolivarian socialist government may instead trigger an explosion of mass protest and class struggle.

The one concrete result of Bolsonaro's trip was a pact signed on Sunday at the headquarters of the US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) that streamlines the process for Brazil's arms industry to sell its products to the Pentagon. At the signing ceremony, attended by Bolsonaro and the chief of the Brazilian Armed Forces Joint Staff, Air Force Gen. Raul Botelho, SOUTHCOM commander Adm. Craig Faller praised the deal as "historic," claiming that it would help confront "threats" in the region, including Venezuela.

Faller invoked "our longstanding partnership with Brazil's armed forces," a bloody history that includes the Pentagon's backing for the 1964 military coup that brought to power a military dictatorship that murdered, imprisoned, tortured and exiled hundreds of thousands of workers, students and other opponents of the regime.

Bolsonaro, a former army captain whose political career was nurtured as a parliamentary ally of the Workers Party (PT), embraces this history unconditionally.

Bolsonaro gave the frankest exposition of his fascist views in a speech Monday before a group of Florida businessmen in Miami. Acknowledging his discussions with Trump on the campaign of aggression against Venezuela, he said, "We must do everything possible for normality to be re-established in Venezuela, which is not easy, given the degree of moral and political degradation which exists in that country."

One must ask, is the "normality" that Bolsonaro seeks to restore in Venezuela the equivalent of what now prevails in Brazil? The country is ruled by a government that is increasingly dominated by military commanders and extreme-right ideologues. It has been plunged into a constitutional crisis over Bolsonaro's demand for unconditional control over the budget passed by the country's congress and his open support for protests against the legislature, scheduled for next Sunday on the slogan "the generals are waiting for the orders of the people," an implicit call for a military coup. Military Police have mutinied in the northeastern state of Ceará, terrorizing the local population, with the tacit support of Bolsonaro and his followers.

He continued with his rabidly right-wing address, stating that Brazilian-US relations had improved because his was a government that "values the Armed Forces and a government that believes in God. This is the great antidote to the left which seeks at every moment only the struggle for power, to enslave the population." He boasted that he had fought "strongly" against the left, not giving it any "truce or opportunity."

This fascistic and anti-communist ideology endears Bolsonaro to Trump, who has repeatedly called for a crusade against socialism. The two also bonded over their reaction to the worldwide coronavirus pandemic, which Bolsonaro

described as a "fantasy" propagated by the "big media."

Despite this ideological affinity, the interests of Brazil and the US are far from identical. On the one hand, Trump continued to threaten Brazil with tariffs on steel and aluminum, while, on the other, the US president's attempt to pressure Bolsonaro to reject the bid by the Chinese company Huawei to develop the 5G network in Brazil appeared to have had little effect.

China has been Brazil's largest trading partner since 2009, and Huawei already has a significant presence in the development of the country's infrastructure. A politically motivated rejection of Huawei would not only force the country to resort to less technologically advanced and more expensive alternatives, but also risk Chinese retaliation against key export industries, including agribusiness. Whatever the final outcome, Brazil will remain a battleground in the increasingly bitter geo-strategic struggle between the US and China.

While Bolsonaro was in the US, the Brazilian economy was shaken by the global oil price war, which contributed to a 12 percent fall in the country's Ibovespa stock market—the biggest one-day drop since the 1998 Russian crisis—and a 30 percent collapse in the share values of the state-run oil giant Petrobras.

Economy Minister Paulo Guedes responded to the crisis by urging "serenity" and declaring that "Brazilian democracy will react by transforming this crisis into advancing reforms," by which he means further attacks on the social conditions of the Brazilian working class.

The response of the Workers Party to Bolsonaro's alliance with Washington has been an appeal for policies of "national development" and a "multilateral" policy in relation to world imperialism. Celso Amorim, former foreign minister and defense minister in the governments of PT presidents Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff, told *Brasil de Facto* that these governments had obtained favorable military relations not only with Washington, but also with France, which helped the Brazilian military obtain a nuclear submarine, and other countries.

The PT, which is pitching its appeal to the military command and sections of big business, will rapidly close ranks with Bolsonaro against any eruption of the class struggle in Brazil.

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