

Brazilian president cancels White House visit over NSA spying

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President Dilma Rousseff canceled a state visit to the Obama White House Monday in protest over a series of revelations concerning the National Security Agency's massive spying on Brazil's government, corporations, and people.

The cancellation of the trip, the first invitation to a foreign head of state to make a state visit to Washington since the beginning of President Barack Obama's second term and the only one scheduled this year, was virtually unprecedented. It signaled the crisis triggered by the NSA revelations, which have provoked popular outrage as well as concerns within Brazil's ruling corporate and financial establishment.

The Brazilian president's decision to cancel the visit came despite a 20-minute phone call Monday night from Obama, who attempted to placate Rousseff over the NSA spying revelations. The only diplomatic concession made by the Brazilian government was to agree to state that calling off the visit was a mutual decision and that it represented a "postponement" without any alternate date, rather than a cancellation.

The spying revelations were first reported September 1 by the TV Globo program "Fantastico," based on secret documents provided by former NSA contractor Edward Snowden to Rio de Janeiro-based *Guardian* journalist Glen Greenwald. They included evidence that the US agency was intercepting phone calls, text messages, emails, and Internet searches made by the Brazilian president and her aides.

During the G20 summit in Saint Petersburg later that week, Rousseff demanded that Obama provide a full explanation of US spying on Brazil as well as a formal apology. Neither have been forthcoming. The Brazilian government sent Foreign Minister Luiz Alberto Figueiredo Machado to Washington earlier this week for talks with Obama's national security advisor, Susan Rice, who publicly allowed only that the reports on the NSA

spying raised "legitimate questions."

In the meantime, a subsequent "Fantastico" broadcast revealed that the NSA, in addition to its spying on Rousseff's administration and its wholesale mining of electronic data from the Brazilian public, also targeted the computer network of the state-owned oil company Petrobras, the country's largest enterprise and the fourth-largest energy conglomerate in the world.

The Brazilian revelations have exposed as a lie claims made by US intelligence officials that they were not involved in economic espionage and debunked the pretense that the NSA's massive domestic and international electronic dragnet is dedicated to countering some ubiquitous terrorist threat. Rather, in this case, the spying is aimed at strengthening the position of US imperialism against a rising rival for strategic influence in Latin America and, no doubt, furthering the interests of such big oil companies as Exxon and Chevron.

The exposure of the espionage against Petrobras comes little more than a month before a scheduled auction of exploitation rights in the Libra pre-salt oil field. This parcel, located deep beneath the seabed in waters of Brazil's southeast coast, holds an estimated 8 to 12 billion barrels of recoverable crude. The pre-salt deposits represent the greatest discovery of untapped reserves in decades.

Critics of the shared production deals being cut by the government in the exploitation of the pre-salt fields have pointed to the NSA spying to say that the auction will be tainted by the possibility of US companies having inside information.

More fundamentally, however, the NSA's targeting of Petrobras raises the specter of US imperialism's global drive to dominate the oil-rich regions of the world, from the Persian Gulf to Central Asia, waging wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and now Syria to that end. It is not a stretch of the imagination to see Brazil's reserves

similarly targeted in the future.

A statement issued by the Brazilian presidency Tuesday in announcing the cancelation of the state visit affirmed: “The illegal practices of intercepting the communications of citizens, businesses and members of the Brazilian government constitute a grave threat to national sovereignty and individual rights and are incompatible with the democratic coexistence between friendly countries.”

Meanwhile, a White House statement allowed that Obama “understands and regrets the concerns disclosures of alleged US intelligence activities have generated in Brazil” and that his administration would pursue “diplomatic channels to move beyond this issue as a source of tension in our bilateral relationship.” In other words, Washington does not even admit to the NSA spying, much less say that it will stop.

The statement went on to say that “a broad review of US intelligence posture” would “take several months to complete.”

While there was speculation that some Brazilian business interests would oppose Rousseff’s decision to cancel the visit because of concern over US-Brazilian trade, the reality is that no major agreements were slated for approval during the largely ceremonial state visit. Moreover, the evidence of economic espionage has doubtless raised the ire of at least some business sectors. Significantly, Rousseff’s move was backed not only by her own ruling Workers Party (PT), but also by opposition parties.

In reality, the cancelation of the visit was a carefully calibrated response, allowing Rousseff, who faces re-election next year, to posture as a defender of Brazilian sovereignty without taking measures that would provoke any real conflict with Washington, such as expelling US diplomats.

Despite the left and even socialist pretensions that accompanied its founding, in its more than a decade in power, the PT has emerged as the premier party of the Brazilian capitalist establishment, upholding profit interests while implementing minimal social assistance programs aimed at preventing the country’s intense social inequality from igniting revolutionary upheavals. Under both Dilma and her predecessor Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, PT governments have sought to accommodate themselves to Washington.

The NSA spying revelations, however, have underscored the contradictions within this relationship, as Brazil, a country of 200 million people with the world’s

seventh largest economy, has replaced the US with China as its largest trading partner, while emerging as a growing economic power in neighboring Latin American countries that were previously dominated by US interests.

While the Rousseff government has used the NSA revelations to posture as the champion of democratic rights and national sovereignty, in reality it has carried out its own domestic spying, particularly during the mass popular demonstrations that swept the country last June. Intelligence agencies mounted a major effort to track the use of social media to attempt to discern who was involved in the huge protests.

And in the midst of the NSA revelations, the daily newspaper *Folha de Sao Paulo* published its own exposé of CIA operations in Brazil, which are facilitated by the Brazilian government.

The newspaper describes how CIA agents meet at least once a week with agents of the Brazilian Federal Police’s Antiterrorism Division (DAT) at its headquarters in Brasilia. It points out that the CIA paid for the building housing the headquarters as well as its computers and other equipment and effectively directs the DAT’s investigations. DAT officers are sent to the US for training.

Citing Brazilian police, military and intelligence sources, the newspaper stated: “The Americans are spread out across the country [going] after information about residents of Brazil, Brazilians or not. They give the line in the investigations and point to who should be the target of the Federal Police.”

CIA agents are stationed at consulates across the country under diplomatic cover. They also operate at Federal Police “anti-terrorism” bases that have been set up in Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Iguacu in the south on the Paraguayan and Argentine borders and Sao Gabriel da Cachoeira in the northwest Amazonas region, near the borders with Colombia and Venezuela.



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