Brazil, US and 20 other countries carry out military exercise in the Amazon

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Military units from 20 countries, including Peru and Colombia, as well as the US, Germany and Japan, participated last month in military exercises dubbed Amazonlog 2017.

Coordinated by the Brazilian military command, they marked the first such international war games in Brazil's strategically sensitive Amazon region. The exercise was centered in the city of Tabatinga, in the state of Amazonas, on the triple border that separates northwestern Brazil from Peru and Colombia.

According to Gen. Guilherme Theophilo, the Brazilian military commander of the Amazon region between 2014 and 2016, who was responsible for the military exercise, Amazonlog's purpose was to create a multinational logistical support base to work on humanitarian aid and prepare for responding to airplane crashes and natural disasters, such as extreme drought, floods and earthquakes.

Participating in the exercise were 2,000 troops, including 1,550 Brazilians, 150 Colombians and 120 Peruvians. The US deployed 30 soldiers and a C-130 military cargo plane.

In an interview with TV Bandeirantes, General Theophilo said that "the initial idea of the operation came from an experience that the officers of the Brazilian army's logistical command had when they went to Europe and participated in multinational NATO logistical bases to deal with refugees from Africa and the Middle East."

The experience that General Theophilo referred to was the NATO military exercise Capable Logistician 2015, held two years ago in Hungary. Brazil participated as an observer. While Capable Logistician 2015 resulted in the creation of a NATO military base in Hungary, General Theophilo denied that any such intention was involved in Amazonlog 2017.

Also, according to General Theophilo, the military exercise included the presentation of "dual employment material, both for peace and for war." Beginning with the Amazonlog 2017, he hopes that the humanitarian actions of the Organization of American States (OAS) will be carried out with the prior contribution of every nation of the continent.

According to a report published on the UOL website on November 2, titled "Brazil drills to create a military base with the US, Colombia and Peru in Amazon," "members of the armed forces say that the great concentration of troops will also have an impact on combating of arms and drugs in the region."

The silence of the Brazilian corporate media—as well as that of the pseudo-left—on Amazonlog 2017 was broken only a few times in order to echo the words of General Theophilo, who classified as a "conspiracy theory" any suggestion that the presence of US troops in the Amazon constituted a threat to Brazil's national sovereignty. According to him, "The US has very great expertise in humanitarian aid. Only from hurricanes, the United States had this year four and quickly the country rebuilt itself."

As the coverage of the WSWS has made all too clear, particularly in terms of the criminal neglect of disaster victims in Puerto Rico, what the general said is sheer nonsense.

Under the pretext of carrying out "humanitarian actions" and prosecuting the "war on drugs," the South American versions of the "human rights" crusades and "war on terrorism" employed elsewhere, the Amazonlog 2017 military exercise marks a new stage in US imperialism's offensive in the region.

Washington's "pivot to Asia" has its counterpart on the American continent, with its "pivot to Latin America" and a resort to increasing militarism in the region both to compensate for China's growing influence and to secure Washington's own strategic interests.

According to a secret document from the US State Department published in 2010 by Wikileaks, Brazil's niobium mines—a chemical element employed in the aeronautics industry of which Brazil controls 98 percent of global reserves—are considered strategic and essential by the United States.

The Amazon has 21 percent of Brazilian niobium reserves, along with tantalum—employed in the electronics industry—of which Brazil also has the largest reserves in the world—copper, gold, iron, oil and gas and other mineral resources that are in large part concentrated on indigenous lands and whose exploitation is still very limited. In addition, the Amazon Rainforest, 60 percent of which is in Brazil, is also one of the most important environments on planet Earth, with one-third of its rain forests, the largest biological diversity and the largest freshwater basin in the world.

In addition to American interests in Amazonian mineral resources, Amazonlog 2017 took place amid a US military buildup around the world, with a program to expand its military bases that includes Latin America, a region US imperialism has long regarded as its "backyard." Brazil is surrounded by more than a dozen US bases in neighboring countries, mainly in Peru and Colombia, Brazil's main partners in the military exercise. While Latin America's largest nation, Brazil is one of the only countries in the region that does not have an American military base, and Amazonlog 2017 could pave the way its first one. At the time, a proposal is also under evaluation to allow the US to start using the Brazilian satellite launching base of Alcântara, Maranhão, one of the world's best because of its proximity to the equator.

The Amazonlog operation also took place amid tensions between the US and Venezuela, which have only escalated since last August, when President Donald Trump declared that "we have many options for Venezuela, including the military one."

Since 2016, Brazil has received more than 30,000 Venezuelan immigrants, who have entered the country through the northern state of Roraima. According to the Ministry of Justice, in the first half of 2017, the number of requests for asylum from Venezuelans has almost doubled compared to 2016, reaching 7,600 by June 2017. If the US decides to resort to its "military option" against Venezuela, the flow of refugees will increase dramatically, and Amazonlog 2017 is a way for Brazil and neighboring countries to prepare for it.

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According to João Roberto Martins Filho, professor at the Federal University of São Carlos, who spoke to BBC Brazil for a May 4 report titled "US Army will participate in an unprecedented military exercise in the Amazon at the invitation of Brazil," the rapprochement between Brazil and the US represented by Amazonlog 2017 is "a break from what has been happening since 1989, marked by a distancing from the US by the Brazilian armed forces." This distancing coincided with the launching of a massive American military offensive in the Middle East, which initiated the last 25 years of uninterrupted US wars.

One milestone in the military distancing between the United States and Brazil was the creation of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUL) and its South American Defense Council in 2008 at the height of the bourgeois nationalist regimes in the subcontinent identified with the so-called "Pink Tide." That same year, the US Fourth Fleet was resurrected in Florida to increase the reach of US imperialism at a time when China was poised to become Brazil's and other Latin American countries' main trading partner. From then until 2014, the US tripled its deployment of special operations troops in Latin America.

It was also this distancing that led the Brazilian government to enter military agreements with European countries. In 2011, Brazil signed a US$10 billion agreement with the French government for the construction of five submarines with the transfer of technology, including for a nuclear one. And in 2013, it bought 36 Gripen fighters from Sweden for US$4.5 billion.

But in the midst of the collapse of the bourgeois nationalist regimes in the region—in Argentina with the defeat of Peronism by Macri, in Brazil after the impeachment of Workers Party's (PT) Dilma Rousseff, in Venezuela with the enormous crisis of the Maduro regime—the regional integration proposed by UNASUL in various areas, including in terms of the military, is weakening and leading to a rapprochement with the United States.

Martins Filho also said that if this rapprochement continues, it would lead to a greater alignment of Brazil's defense policy with that of the OAS and the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB), the latter created in 1942 by the United States during the Second World War. During the Amazonlog 2017 exercises, General Theophilo confirmed that the ministry of defense is creating a multinational logistics control center with the support and participation of these two entities.

Besides that, according to the May 4 BBC Brazil report, in March the US Army inaugurated a technology center in São Paulo to "develop partnerships with Brazil in research projects focused on innovation," which was followed by the signing of the Master Information Exchange Agreement between the two countries.

Hector Luis Saint Pierre, professor of international relations of the State University of São Paulo (UNESP), also interviewed by BBC Brazil, said that there is also a rapprochement with the US "motivated by economic interests… I have noticed officers defending the thesis that we do not need technological autonomy in the Armed Forces if we can count on partnerships like with the US." He continued saying that this is a "liberal perspective on the military that is gaining momentum," as opposed to the nationalist stance that the PT governments defended, which led, for example, to the construction of the nuclear submarine.

This "liberal stance," which tends to increase the dependence of Brazil's armed forces on the US, is driven in large measure by the enormous economic crisis affecting the country, with the military budget reduced by 44 percent from 2012 to 2017. Considering that other military exercises like the Amazonlog 2017 are expected to happen every two years, it is likely that they will take place with greater coordination and participation of the American military.

Samuel Alves Pereira, also a professor of international relations at UNESP, was quoted in the November 2 UOL report as saying that Brazil's military alignment with the OAS and the Inter-American Defense Board tends to change the country's defense strategy. According to him, "these bodies address the issue of defending a multidimensional perspective, in which the armed forces of Latin American countries are more encouraged to work on internal security," while the United States would take action against possible external invasions of those countries.

After Amazonlog 2017, Defense Minister Raul Jungmann traveled to the United States, where he met with the under secretary of state for political affairs, Thomas A. Shannon Jr., ambassador to Brazil from 2011 to 2013, and discussed the possibility of a South American Security Authority to combat organized crime, which tends to further diminish the power of the UNASUL's South American Security Council.

Jungmann, on November 17, also participated in a conference at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), where he "asked for the two main democracies in the Hemisphere to discuss and adopt a true long term State agenda," reported the Defense Ministry web page. Michael Matera, director of the CSIS America's Program, opened Jungmann's conference saying that "Brazil and the US are at a time when our national interests and the views of our two presidents coincide more closely than has been the case in many years on issues as varied as Venezuela, regional threats to security as well as the serious global threat represented by North Korea."

On the same day, Jungmann held a meeting with the United Nations (UN) Department of Peacekeeping Operations, where he told Empresa Brasileira de Comunicação he would like to see the country assume the military command of the UN's "stabilization" mission in the Central African Republic, where Brazil is supposed to send 1,000 troops next year, and that Brazil was invited to take over the military command of the mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. These preparations are taking place after Brazil's 13-year military command in Haiti, which ended in October.

At a time when Africa is being disputed by China, European—and particularly French—imperialism and by the US, a Brazilian military presence would certainly factor into the plans of American imperialism on the continent.

The rapprochement of Brazil's armed forces with that of the US and the realignment of Brazil's defense strategy to US imperialism are clear warnings to the working class of Brazil and Latin America as a whole, a region that has witnessed dozens of US-backed coups and right-wing military dictatorships over the last 50 years.

These developments urgently pose the need for an independent working class movement against war in Brazil and throughout Latin America. In a region marked by the promotion on the part revisionist movements of various substitutes for such a movement, from Castroist guerrillas to the "democratic socialism" of the Workers Party in Brazil and Chavismo in Venezuela, the urgent task facing the Brazilian and Latin American working class is the struggle against imperialism through the construction of an internationalist and socialist movement, that is, the construction of the national sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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