

# Bolton visits Bolsonaro: a US meeting of the minds with Brazil's fascistic president-elect

Bill Van Auken  
30 November 2018

Brazil's fascistic president-elect, former army captain Jair Bolsonaro, hosted a meeting Thursday at his home in Barra de Tijuca, the wealthy beachside neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro, with President Donald Trump's right-wing national security adviser John Bolton.

The hour-long discussion reportedly touched on Venezuela, Cuba, Chinese influence in Latin America and Bolsonaro's proposal to ape Trump by moving Brazil's embassy in Israel to Jerusalem.

Bolton staged the brief stop in Rio and breakfast meeting with Bolsonaro on his way to the G20 summit in Buenos Aires, where the main question posed is the US trade war against China.

Bolton gave no statement to the press following the meeting, but tweeted: "We enjoyed a broad and productive discussion with the president-elect of Brazil and his security team."

Similarly, Bolsonaro, who takes office on January 1, used his Twitter account to describe the encounter as "a very productive and pleasant meeting with the National Security Adviser of the United States."

Accompanying Bolsonaro in the meeting was a group of incoming cabinet members who are representative of the most right-wing and military-dominated government to take office since the end of the two-decade-long US-backed military dictatorship in 1985.

These included his future defense minister Fernando Azevedo e Silva and head of the Institutional Security Cabinet Augusto Heleno Ribeiro, who are both retired generals. Also present was his foreign minister, Ernesto Araújo, who has described climate change as a plot by "cultural Marxists" to undermine Western economies and boost China, and declared that his mission will be to liberate Brazil from anti-Christian "globalists."

Bolton's visit follows his bellicose speech earlier this month in Miami in which he laid out an agenda of

regime change against the governments of Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua. He labeled them a "troika of tyranny," an obvious mimicking of George W. Bush's "axis of evil" theme, rolled out in advance of the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In the same speech, Bolton described Bolsonaro—who has praised the country's former US-backed military dictatorship and threatened opponents with jail or exile—as a "likeminded leader" and his election as one of the "positive signs for the future of the region."

Last Tuesday, Bolton echoed this theme, declaring that Bolsonaro's election presented a "historic opportunity for Brazil and the United States to work together in a number of areas, such as economy, security and others."

Bolsonaro indicated his alignment with Washington against Venezuela. "Venezuela is a longstanding question, we have to find solutions," he said following the meeting with Bolton. "Measures need to be taken." Until now, Brazil has not followed Washington's example in imposing sanctions against Caracas.

Similarly, the incoming Brazilian president has staked out a hard line against Cuba, forcing the exit of some 8,300 Cuban doctors. They were working in remote and poor areas of Brazil under a program known as "Mais Médicos" (More Doctors), initiated under the former Workers Party (PT) government of impeached President Dilma Rousseff. Bolsonaro has threatened to cut off diplomatic relations with Havana.

No doubt, for the Trump administration, the most attractive feature of the incoming far-right Brazilian president is his anti-China stance, which he promoted during the election campaign, repeating the slogan that China was "not buying in Brazil, but buying Brazil." Bolsonaro also staged a trip to Taiwan last February, a provocative affront to Beijing.

For Washington, the principal strategic question in Latin America is countering the growth of Chinese trade and investment, which is challenging its hegemony in a region that US imperialism long regarded as its “own backyard.”

Anti-Chinese campaign demagoguery is cheap, but shifting Brazil’s economic relations is a more complicated matter.

China has supplanted the US as Brazil’s number one trading partner. Between 2003 and June of this year, Chinese firms have poured almost \$US54 billion in investments into around 100 projects in Brazil, according to figures from Brazil’s planning ministry.

Bolsonaro’s incoming vice president, another former general, Hamilton Mourão, recently described Bolsonaro’s anti-Chinese statements as “campaign rhetoric.” Mourão cautioned that, while Brasilia would seek closer relations with Washington, “we can’t neglect the other great actors on the international arena, we can’t neglect the relationship with China.”

Brazil has been a direct beneficiary of the escalating trade war with China, with its export of agricultural products, principally soybeans, increasing dramatically as a result of rising US-China tariffs.

Similar pragmatic profit interests arise in relation to Bolsonaro’s pledge to shift the Brazilian embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, an imitation of Trump with the same domestic political aim: currying favor with a powerful evangelical Christian political bloc.

After Egypt canceled a scheduled diplomatic meeting in apparent response to the proposal, Bolsonaro declared that the move had not yet been decided. The Arab countries together constitute the second largest buyer of Brazilian animal protein exports, which amount to some \$13.5 billion.

The reaction of the Workers Party and its pseudo-left satellites to Bolton’s visit has been to intensify a campaign to appeal to Brazilian nationalism and to the Brazilian bourgeoisie on the grounds that the president-elect’s policies threaten “national interests,” i.e., the profit interests of Brazilian banks and corporations.

These elements unleashed a cry of outrage over media reports that the ex-army captain greeted Bolton with a military salute, which they charged was a humiliating gesture of Brazilian subservience to US imperialism. Pseudo-left leader Guilherme Boulos of the Homeless Workers Movement (MTST) described

the gesture as “shameful, an unacceptable subservience,” while demanding to know what happened of Bolsonaro’s campaign slogan: “Brazil above all.”

The most sinister aspect of this campaign is an increasing attempt to portray the military figures that have been brought into the incoming government as the “adults in the room” who will curtail Bolsonaro’s right-wing excesses. The PT-aligned website 24/7 featured a flattering interview with ex-general Mourão, the incoming vice president, expressing his “pragmatic” approach to Brazil’s international relations.

On Thursday, following the Bolton-Bolsonaro meeting, the same website published the results of a “poll” conducted of its readers claiming that 90 percent agreed that the “military group that surrounds Bolsonaro” should stop him from subordinating Brazil to the foreign policy of Washington.

This appeal to “nationalist” military officers to save Brazil from Bolsonaro has the most reactionary implications, opening the door to a military coup to save the nation. It is, at the same time, symptomatic of the upper middle class social layer that composes the principal constituency of the Workers Party, which is hostile and opposed to any struggle to mobilize the Brazilian working class against Bolsonaro and to unite it with the workers of the United States and the entire hemisphere in the struggle for socialism.



To contact the WSWWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**