

Amid US provocation at Venezuelan border

Brazilian media promotes generals against Bolsonaro

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25 February 2019

The buildup to the US-led provocation at the Venezuelan border has been accompanied in Brazil by a concerted media campaign, joined by the official opposition in the Workers Party (PT) and its pseudo-left satellites, to portray the Brazilian military as offering a political alternative to the “madness” and “incompetence” of the fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro.

The central argument has hinged on the military’s supposed “restraint” and “independence” from the US-aligned policies proposed by Bolsonaro, above all regarding the country’s northern neighbor, Venezuela, with the military supposedly opposing US imperialism’s operations against the government of President Nicolas Maduro.

While General Hamilton Mourão, the Brazilian vice-president, has repeatedly declared that Maduro “must realize he has to go,” and the Brazilian military is maneuvering with dissident elements in the Venezuelan military to bring him down, the corporate media and the self-styled “left” pundits who claim to oppose the government have promoted the narrative that the Brazilian military opposes the US regime-change operation.

The corporate media, the Workers Party (PT) and its pseudo-left apologists are aping, step by step, the campaign by the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the Democratic Party in the US over the “unfitness” of Donald Trump, using the widespread opposition to the right-wing policies of Brazil’s elected president to push for increasing control of the state by the more “rational” and “reliable” military chiefs.

This campaign is remarkably unanimous across the editorial and opinion pages of the country’s largest and most influential papers and weeklies—*Veja*, *O Globo*, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, *Folha de S. Paulo* and *El País*—as well as the pro-PT “alternative media”—*Brasil247*, *Carta Capital*, *Revista Fórum* and *GGN*. Their central argument is that Bolsonaro’s administration is an aberration produced by the stupidity of Brazilian voters poisoned by “fake news,” and it

must be taken over by the “adults in the room”—the vice-president, General Mourão, and other members of the military brass named by Bolsonaro to his cabinet.

In each and every case, lifelong careers in the corrupt, murderous and pro-imperialist Brazilian security forces are taken by the media as the guarantee of their reliability and strength.

The escalation of this reactionary campaign could be seen in the unanimous reaction of the media and the opposition over the past two weeks to a cabinet crisis caused by a report by *Folha* on February 10 that Bolsonaro’s presidential secretary-general—a senior cabinet post in Brazil—Gustavo Bebianno, may have authored a scheme to run fake candidates in order to funnel public electoral funds to members of Bolsonaro’s Social Liberal Party (PSL).

Among the evidence presented in the report was that the candidates who received the funds won few votes compared to their campaign expenditures. This is highly dubious and consistent with the campaign spearheaded by *Folha* during the elections claiming that voters were decisively influenced by fake news promoting Bolsonaro via Whatsapp. The Whatsapp “fake news” story was seized upon in the most reactionary way by the PT’s main pseudo-left backer, the Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL), to request that the Brazilian Electoral Court forbid the use of the popular social media app throughout the country in the run-up to the election.

The *Folha* story on Bebianno, published while Bolsonaro was recovering from a surgery related to the attempt on his life during the campaign, offered a remarkable glimpse into the inner workings of dominant Brazilian ruling circles and their building up of the military as the only legitimate and able political force in the country.

While the story initially sparked a media furor demanding Bebianno’s ouster, it was followed by an attack on Bebianno by Bolsonaro’s son, Carlos Bolsonaro, a Rio de Janeiro councilman. He charged that Bebianno was working

to bring his father down by claiming that the president shared the blame for the scheme. As a result, the sympathy of the media and the PT-PSOL opposition immediately swung over to Bebianno.

The lightning speed of this shift was based entirely on a tip from the military ministers visited by Bebianno after Carlos Bolsonaro's attack. *Folha* and other outlets reported on February 14 that General Augusto Heleno (chief of intelligence) and General Fernando Azevedo (defense minister) had intervened with Bolsonaro to spare Bebianno. The next day, the country's oldest daily, *O Estado de S. Paulo* published an editorial titled "Filhocracia" ("Sonocracy"), complaining that Bolsonaro was acting under the influence of his "unelected" sons and not heeding the generals in his cabinet—the supposed standard-bearers of Brazilian democracy.

Jumping on the bandwagon, the PT's mouthpiece, *Brasil247*, posted a high-profile unsigned article—what passes for an editorial board statement on the website—making clear the PT's alignment with the corporate media. It claimed that "the conservative and progressive press have reached a consensus that the government of the Bolsonaro clan, where family is above state ministers, is untenable." It went on to quote PT-backing pundits aping the line of the military about Bolsonaro's "unpreparedness."

Later, as the PT, PSOL and PCdoB maneuvered with the right wing in Congress to have Bebianno testify before a committee, *Brasil247* editor Mauro Lopes penned an article portraying the military-backed Bebianno as a victim of "Bolsonarist neo-fascism," writing that Bolsonaro's supporters "initiated a campaign of defamation and threats just as bad as the ones directed by them against the PT."

Meanwhile, the PT's 2018 presidential candidate, Fernando Haddad, left no doubt that this alignment with the generals is being directed by the party's leadership. At a rally in the PT-ruled state of Ceará, whose governor, Camilo Santana, is campaigning in support of Bolsonaro's police-state proposals, including an extension of the definition of terrorism to encompass demonstrations, Haddad declared to the press, "The crisis with the secretary-general has worried everyone, the press, the military," adding, "The question is, who is the adult in the room." The choice of these words, echoing the description of the now-departed generals in Trump's White House, left no doubt as to Haddad and the PT's orientation to the military.

An article by PSOL's Cid Benjamin in *Revista Fórum* at the height of the crisis also revealed the extent to which his party is engaged in the operation. He wrote that "faced with the festival of stupidity of Bolsonaro's ministers every other day, [Vice President General] Mourão has built an image of reasonability." He went on to say that this image was due to

Mourão's "granting an audience to the CUT"—the largest trade union in the country, controlled by the PT—and "meeting the Palestinian Authority, slapping Bolsonaro in the face" due to Bolsonaro's pro-Israel policy. He concluded with an indication that PSOL is prepared to help build up the general's image. "The only thing missing was to invite him [PSOL's 2018 presidential candidate, Guilherme Boulos] for a coffee," he wrote.

In an attempted show of force, Bolsonaro moved last Monday to fire Bebianno, not without first being cornered by the military ministers, emboldened by the reactionary media campaign, who compelled him to name General Floriano Peixoto, Bebianno's deputy, as the new presidential secretary-general.

There is nothing progressive in PT's ganging-up with the discredited corporate media and the military against the fascistic Bolsonaro. It hands him the ability to portray himself as the victim of a conspiracy. He is attempting to strengthen his fascistic, personalist appeal, while—like Trump himself—involving his sons in government. This political tack is being discussed with powerful corporate backers and far-right leaders abroad, above all Steve Bannon, with whom another of Bolsonaro's sons, senator for the state of São Paulo, Flávio Bolsonaro, maintains close contact.

Significantly, in the wake of Bebianno's demise, Bolsonaro sought to strike a populist tone presenting himself as opposing the harshness of the pension reform proposed by his economic team. He also asked the Supreme Court to reject the allegation of former president Michel Temer's economy minister that last year's truckers strike "conspired against the public well-being," which is the central allegation of a lawsuit being heard by the court which may result in criminal charges against the truckers.

The aim of the PT is to cover up the issues involved in the sharp turn to the right taken by the Brazilian political system since the reelection of PT's Dilma Rousseff in 2014. This turn to the right—under both the PT and Bolsonaro—is aimed at imposing a massive restructuring of class relations, first and foremost through the so-called "pension reform"—a measure that Fernando Haddad himself spearheaded as São Paulo mayor in 2016—and a reorientation towards US imperialism and away from China.



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