Bolsonaro backs Trump in war on Iran, while Workers' Party appeals to Brazilian military

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Pushing the lie propagated by Donald Trump that the assassination of Iranian General Qassem Suleimani was aimed at combating terrorism, the government of Brazil's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro was one of the first to defend Washington's war crime. Just one day after the attack, Itamaraty—the Brazilian Foreign Ministry—issued a note stating that "the Brazilian government expresses its support for the fight against the scourge of terrorism."

In an interview on a TV news program hosted by the reactionary José Luiz Datena, who has promoted himself as a potential candidate for mayor of São Paulo, Bolsonaro personally reaffirmed this position. He claimed, in relation to Suleimani, considered the second most important figure in the Iranian government, that "his previous life was largely focused on terrorism." He held him personally responsible for a 1994 attack on the Jewish Community Center in Buenos Aires, known as AMIA, despite the lack of any probative evidence of Iranian involvement.

Bolsonaro went so far as to post a video on Twitter denouncing the relationship established by the Workers Party government of President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva with that of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, then-president of Iran. Bolsonaro falsely charged that Lula had defended the production of Iranian nuclear weapons and accused him of promoting international terrorism.

The Brazilian president's son, Congressman Eduardo Bolsonaro, took on the task of exalting Trump's militarism on social media. Sharing Trump's aggressive campaign speech boasting of having "executed" Suleimani and denouncing the Democrats, Eduardo commented: "Trump is too much! The worst thing is that it's all true!"

The anti-terrorist propaganda, in addition to justifying Bolsonaro's support for Washington, serves to advance his fascistic government's domestic counterrevolutionary agenda. Itamaraty's statement declared: "Terrorism cannot be considered a problem restricted to the Middle East and developed countries, and Brazil cannot remain indifferent to this threat, which even affects South America."

The significance of this warning is made clear by the joint efforts of the president and Brazil's bourgeois parties to cast any form of social protest as "terrorism." An article published last Friday in the major Brazilian daily *Folha de São Paulo* reported that the Congress is considering a record number—at least 70—proposals aimed at criminalizing social protests.

Among the projects are proposals to: criminalize the act of blocking streets, prohibit the wearing of masks, allow the monitoring of people without judicial authorization, and assume that evidence provided by undercover police officers has been gathered in good faith. Among the biggest threats are the attempts to broaden the scope of the Terrorism Law, passed under the PT government of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016, to cover any "attempt to subvert the constitutional order and cause democratic instability" and the "invasion of property to pressure the government."

These proposals directly echo statements made by Bolsonaro, who has justified the domestic use of military forces based on the possibility that the Brazilian working class will engage in the kind of "terrorist protests" that recently brought millions into the streets in Chile. Both his son, Eduardo, and his right-hand man in the government, Minister of Economy Paulo Guedes, have raised the need for a new AI-5—the repressive legislation that provided unrestricted power to the former military dictatorship—paving the way for the assassination, torture, imprisonment and exile of hundreds of thousands.

While there is a general consensus within the Brazilian bourgeoisie on the need to arm itself against the threat of an uprising by the working class, this same ruling class is riven by sharp divisions over foreign policy. Bolsonaro's alignment with US military aggression in the Suleimani episode has served to further illuminate these conflicts. Different segments of the bourgeoisie have criticized his unconditional backing for Washington, including elements within the government itself. The Workers Party, which intends to resume its position at the head of the Brazilian state, has eagerly sought to exploit these divisions in order to win the support of reactionary bourgeois political forces by advancing a chauvinistic policy.

The center of the PT's criticism of Bolsonaro's public praise for the US war crime is that it was against national interests and turned the president into what the party has described as a "US bootlicker." This sentiment is evidently shared by elements of the military high command, which found thinly veiled expression in statements by Bolsonaro's vice president, the retired army general Hamilton Mourão. In an interview praised by *Brazil247* —a media mouthpiece of the PT—Mourão defended the need for a "sovereign and independent foreign policy." Paraphrasing a doctrine made famous by the likes of Henry Kissinger and Winston Churchill, he declared, "In international relations, there are no eternal friendships or perpetual enemies, only our interests."

Lula adopted a very similar position. He declared in an interview with *Diário do Centro do Mundo* that Brazil's response to Washington's criminal attack should be "not to get into it." Lula defended Brazil's diplomatic tradition of "neutrality," going so far as to praise the tradition established by the military dictator General Ernesto Geisel, whose regime was the first in the world to recognize Angola's independence in 1975, even as it continued the murder and torture of left-wing opponents. This fostering of illusions in the supposed geostrategic independence of the US-backed military dictatorship is as false as it is reactionary, and represents a transparent attempt to curry favor with the Brazilian generals who backed Bolsonaro.

Lula blamed Bolsonaro's alignment with Washington on his supposed lack of necessary foreign policy skills. "Brazil can be a partner of Iran and a partner of the United States," he concluded, advancing a cowardly "neutrality" in the face of the US war drive in the Middle East.

The PT's criticism of Bolsonaro's position is meant to appeal not only to the military, but also to the agribusiness sector, one of the most powerful—and reactionary—capitalist interests in the country. Iran is one of the largest importers of Brazilian agricultural products, with transactions totaling more than $2 billion annually. The interests of this sector have been persistently defended by Paulo Pimenta, the leader of the PT caucus in the Brazilian congress. Since the beginning of 2019, Pimenta has denounced Bolsonaro's alignment of Brazilian foreign policy with that of Washington as a threat to agribusiness profits. "We need to protect the *ruralistas* (landowners) from the Jair Bolsonaro government," he said. This is also the starting point of his recent article "11 reasons for Brazil to say no to Trump's war against Iran." Far from voicing any principled opposition to imperialism, Pimenta suggests alternatives for Washington to achieve its predatory goals, "which include dialog and other measures, such as economic sanctions."

The PT's promotion of "great Brazil" chauvinism cannot hide the fact that the unfinished trade war between the United States and China is an inescapable challenge to Brazilian capitalism. Washington is exerting increasing pressure on Brazil to accept the reimposition of a historical US domination that has been shaken by the entry of Chinese capital in recent decades. Between 2003 and 2009, trade between Brazil and China soared from US$6.7 billion to US$36 billion, surpassing for the first time the volume of trade with the United States. In the following decade, trade relations continued to expand and, in 2018, reached the record of $99 billion—almost double that between Brazil and the United States, about $58 billion. China accounts for 26 percent of Brazilian exports, compared to little more than 12 percent going to the US.

Despite seeking ideological alignment with Donald Trump on central issues of foreign policy, Bolsonaro was forced to retreat during his first year in office from the aggressive position he took during the 2018 election campaign against Chinese capital. The slogan he adopted as a candidate, "The Chinese are not buying in Brazil. They are buying Brazil," was replaced by direct appeals to President Xi Jinping to buy at least a share of Brazilian oil in the last Petrobras auction. Bolsonaro met personally with the president of Huawei—the Chinese company most targeted for US attacks—which is considered the likely winner of the concession to implement the 5G network in Brazil.

Whatever "independence" achieved by Bolsonaro, however, is as momentary as the truce in the US trade war with China. A little over a month ago, Trump again threatened to tax the Brazilian steel and aluminum industries, which have, respectively, more than 30 percent and 40 percent of their total production exported to the US. In a speech to an audience of industrialists in the state of São Paulo, General Mourão directly attributed Trump's intimidation to Brazil's trade relations with China.

The supposed "leftism" of the PT stands exposed as a farce. Aside from the reactionary character of its appeal to bourgeois national interests, its suggestion that Brazil pursue an "independent" course in relation to international politics is bankrupt. What Lula means by "independence" is in reality a more active engagement with China, which would in turn provoke redoubled US pressure and, in the final analysis, even the threat of military conflict.

The Brazilian economy, in a prolonged crisis for almost a decade and unable to rise from its lowest point, is facing still more violent shocks, caused by the fundamental contradictions of its global economic and political position. This is an insoluble conflict for the Brazilian bourgeoisie as it confronts a mounting crisis of rule and the threat of the kind of mass upheavals that have erupted from Chile to Ecuador, Bolivia and Colombia.

This situation poses with ever greater urgency the necessity for the Brazilian working class to mobilize its independent political strength in opposition to the capitalist state and all of the bourgeois parties, including the PT and is pseudo-left satellites. Only the fight for a socialist and internationalist program offers a progressive way out of the capitalist crisis and the twin threats of world war and dictatorship.