

Peronists vote unanimously to invite US troops into Argentina

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1 February 2020

On Wednesday, the Argentine Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of Congress, voted 214–2 to allow the “entry of foreign troops” and the participation of Argentine troops in exercises abroad.

Several of the military exercises listed in the bill are being organized and financed by the Pentagon. Most prominently, it includes three “Unitas” exercises organized by the US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) and the Brazilian regime of the fascist former captain President Jair Bolsonaro, and the “Gringo Gaucho” exercise, which involves receiving a US aircraft carrier with thousands of troops and sailors.

The bill was introduced by the previous right-wing government of Mauricio Macri, which left office last December. However, the unanimous support by the Peronist ruling coalition Frente de Todos of President Alberto Fernández and vice-president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner provides undeniable evidence of the subordination by all factions of the Argentinian ruling class to US imperialism.

•Serving as a “left” front for the ruling coalition, all of the Peronist trade union leaders voted in favor, including Hugo Yasky, Facundo Moyano, Vanesa Siley and Walter Correa. The affirmative list also includes the Frente Patria Grande, a party created by Juan Grabois, a “popular economy” leader. Also serving this role within the ruling coalition, Juan Carlos Alderete and Verónica Caliva of the Maoist Revolutionary Communist Party (PCR) voted “yes” to welcoming US troops.

The vote is far from an “isolated” case. While Alderete and Caliva were “absent” for a second vote the same day, their supposedly left allies, who frequently denounced the Macri administration for “selling out the Fatherland,” voted in favor of a bill declaring the “sustainability” of the foreign debt of the government a “priority” and allowing for unrestricted debt emissions. This constitutes a transparent backing to continuing the enrichment of Wall Street vultures through ruthless social austerity.

Moreover, these forces have remained silent in the face of

other alignments of Fernández’s foreign policy with US imperialism. Last week, the president’s first official trip was to Israel during the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp, an obvious gesture to the Trump administration. Buenos Aires also extended the designation and financial sanctions against “the terrorist organization Hezbollah,” a ruling party in Lebanon and close ally of the Iranian government.

Foreign Minister Felipe Solá also threatened the Nicolás Maduro government in Venezuela with “international isolation” after the blocking of Juan Guaidó, a US-sponsored puppet openly seeking a military coup against Maduro, from entering the National Assembly.

Some commentators have pointed to Argentina’s granting asylum to Evo Morales, who was overthrown in a US-backed military coup last November, as an “exception” to the pro-US line. However, Morales and his Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) have played an essential role in suppressing opposition to and legitimizing the coup and the elections being organized by the far-right regime installed by Washington and its Bolivian military allies. Morales himself acknowledged that Washington offered to airlift him out of Bolivia after the coup.

The only two legislators who voted against the two bills on Wednesday belong to the Left Workers Front-Unity (FIT-U). However, this posturing is as hypocritical and frail as that of the “left” Peronists. Their front includes forces, like Izquierda Socialista, which backed the US imperialist interventions in Syria and Libya, while the FIT-U’s international partners in the New Anti-Capitalist Party have expressed support for a US war against Iran. Similarly to its role in chaining workers to the Peronist trade unions, the FIT-U’s “anti-imperialism” is aimed at keeping workers from making the necessary political break from all nationalist and pro-capitalist forces.

Recent Peronist governments were able to posture as independent of US imperialism thanks to the boom in commodities prices fueled by greater Chinese investment and trade. The Argentine ruling class used this leverage

against US and European capital to achieve greater participation in the profits reaped from the exploitation of Argentine workers, while affording limited increases in social spending. This was reflected politically in the so-called “pink-tide” governments across Latin America.

The fall of oil, mineral and other commodity prices in 2014, however, ended these special circumstances, leading the Argentine bourgeoisie and the upper middle class, which became very wealthy during this period, to shift to the right and increasingly orient back to US imperialism.

Trade with China quintupled between 2000 and 2007. Fueled by the sale of soybeans and copper exports, China replaced the United States as Argentina’s main trade partner, after Brazil. Since 2016, however, the United States again became the second main buyer of Argentine exports.

In terms of credit, Argentina received 10 major loans from China amounting to \$19 billion between 2005 and 2015, according to the Inter-American Dialogue, at below market interest rates and mainly for infrastructure projects. Macri sought to cut back the scale of these projects seeking to reassure US investors, but, amid a deepening economic crisis, his administration’s credit line with China grew to \$18.7 billion, even as it received the largest IMF loan in history of \$57 billion. Last year, China approved another \$7.9 billion to the Macri government for building a nuclear plant.

The US Southern Command built a military base in Neuquén, a project approved since 2012 and temporarily halted in 2018 due to local protests. The southern province of Neuquén has the vast Vaca Muerta oil and gas deposits being exploited in a partnership between the Argentine state and major US corporations like ExxonMobil, Chevron and other firms.

The 1976–1983 military dictatorship backed by the United States—until Washington aided the UK in its imperialist war to retake the Malvinas Islands in 1982—resulted in mass popular opposition to the military, forcing the successor governments to implement defense, national security and intelligence acts limiting military involvement in internal affairs. Ever since, and especially after the social upheavals during the 2001–2002 economic crisis in Argentina, the United States has sought to gradually erode these changes.

Under the administrations of the late Néstor Kirchner (2003–2007) and his wife Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007–2015), Gringo-Gaicho military exercises with US aircraft carriers took place in 2004, 2008 and 2010. Preserving this route around Argentina is crucial for US carriers since they are too large to cross the Panama Canal.

In February 2011, a US military cargo plane was retained temporarily by Argentina presumably for “administrative” reasons; however, it was exploited by the Kirchnerists to

varnish the government’s “anti-imperialist” image. The plane and materiel were soon returned, and Kirchner expressed her approval for future Gringo-Gaicho operations, but no other joint exercises were carried out during her term.

Nonetheless, Fernández de Kirchner continued to increase military collaboration, agreeing to a new US-built military base in the Chaco region, signing into law “anti-terrorist” legislation demanded by Washington and hosting a special US military training program for Ministry of Defense officials. A scathing report by investigative journalist Horacio Verbitsky found that the E-IMET program employed in the training aimed at “bringing down the barriers that often exist between the Armed Forces, civil officials and legislators.” Recognizing that military operations “could be seen as a return to the ‘bad old times,’” the official document cynically claims to oppose the military “usurping power.”

During Macri’s term, Argentina vowed to carry out more “anti-drug” and “anti-terrorist” operations with US agencies and allowed the Pentagon to build another base near the country’s strategic northern border with Paraguay and Brazil and another at the southernmost city of Ushuaia.

When US forces arrived in May 2018 for a military exercise, Peronist legislators protested that Congress had not been consulted—a fraudulent ploy exposed by the recent vote.

At the same time, a space station built by China in Neuquén and used in the lunar landing in January 2019 has been denounced by the US Southern Command head, Maj. Gen. Craig S. Faller, who told the US Congress last year that it could be used to monitor and aim at “US, allied or partner targets in space activities.”

Preceding this increased collaboration, the Obama administration agreed to declassify tens of thousands of documents revealing US training at its School of the Americas and the arming of death squads under the Argentine military dictatorship that kidnapped, tortured and murdered tens of thousands of radicalized workers and youth. The Argentine officials then became key advisers in setting up death squads that served the US-backed regimes in Central America until the 1990s.



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