

Documents expose Brazilian dictatorship's plot to overthrow Allende in Chile

Tomas Castanheira**15 April 2021**

This past March 31 marked the 57th anniversary of the US-backed military coup in Brazil that overthrew elected President João Goulart and inaugurated 21 years of brutal police-state rule against the Brazilian working class.

The date was marked by Brazil's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro with an unprecedented dismissal of his defense minister and the entire command of the armed forces, with the stated goal of fully subordinating the military apparatus to his government's reactionary political agenda. The first act of newly sworn-in Defense Minister General Walter Braga Netto was to issue an order of the day, read aloud on the morning of March 31 in barracks all over Brazil, that for the first time openly called for the "celebration" of the 1964 coup.

Apropos of the occasion, the US National Security Archive (NSA) has published a series of 12 declassified documents from the US, Brazilian and Chilean governments "on Brazilian Regime's Effort to Subvert Democracy and Support Dictatorship in Chile." The documents were used and in part referred to by Brazilian journalist Roberto Simon in his book *Brazil Against Democracy*, published in February by Companhia das Letras in Brazil.

The material is extremely revealing in relation to the international character of the crimes of the Brazilian military dictatorship. Besides serving as a model, it was, alongside US imperialism, an active agent in promoting coups and sustaining dictatorial regimes that unleashed an unprecedented wave of terror throughout the South American continent.

Long before the coup led by Gen. Augusto Pinochet against the Popular Unity President Salvador Allende on September 11, 1973 in Chile, the Brazilian military government was already systematically planning the violent overthrow of the country's elected president.

The first document in the series published by the NSA, dated September 22, 1970, is a detailed report from the Brazilian foreign ministry to then-President Gen. Emílio Médici about a discussion between the Brazilian ambassador, Câmara Canto, and his American counterpart, Edward Korry, in the Chilean capital, Santiago, soon after Allende's election.

According to the document, the Brazilians interpreted the request for the meeting by the American ambassador as part of an "indirect pressure to prevent the inauguration of Allende," under conditions in which efforts by President Richard Nixon and the CIA "to prevent the Marxist victory from being consummated" were being hindered by other factions of the state stuck to "the 'liberal' position of recognizing the electoral result." Korry informed the Brazilians "that his country does not intend to encourage any military uprising but would support it on condition that 'soon after' new elections are held."

The Brazilian document then refers to difficulties in convincing the top commanders of the Chilean military that it was immediately necessary to abandon "their legalistic conceptions" and carry out a coup. "Unfortunately the mere enunciation of the harm that will come from Allende's inauguration does not have sufficient force to provoke this reaction. The hopes are therefore summed up in the occurrence of a new fact."

The "new fact" animating hopes of the Brazilian military was a "rally of the anti-communist movement 'Patria y Libertad' scheduled for September 24" that could trigger "street clashes with the left and thus force the military leaderships to act."

The Brazilian dictators' support for a strategy of a coup in Chile driven by small fascist groups capable of unleashing a civil war did not end with this episode.

In *Brazil against Democracy*, Simon refers to an interview he recently conducted with Roberto Thieme, one of the main leaders of Patria y Libertad, who reported the existence of close links between his fascist group and Brazilian intelligence. "In the final phase of the Popular Unity government, part of the leadership of the group was allegedly sheltered in Brazil, where it maintained contact with the SNI [Brazilian National Intelligence Service], and some of its leaders allegedly returned to Chile with the help of Brazilian agents," the book states.

Describing the plans nurtured during those years, Thieme declared: "We and the Brazilians imagined it would be something like the Spanish Civil War, with nationalism coming from the south and Marxism from the north. That was the scenario the Brazilians saw, and they were willing to support the rebel army going against Santiago."

This sordid international policy of the Brazilian military regime is also revealed in a document—the third in the NSA's series—originally issued in March of 1971 by the Chilean embassy in Brazil. In it, Chilean diplomats reported to the Allende government that different sources had informed them of the existence of advanced preparations among the Brazilian military for a fascist coup in Chile.

One of the informants, a Chilean armed forces officer, reported to the embassy that he had been contacted by a Brazilian general offering help "to organize in Chile a movement of armed resistance against our government, which, structured in the form of guerrillas, will seek to combat what he called the 'red danger'."

A second source, with access to the Brazilian military, described the existence at the headquarters of the Army Ministry in Rio de Janeiro of "scale models" of the Andes Mountains, around which "numerous Army officers gathered, who dedicated themselves to a detailed study of this geographic region, trying to determine which zones would be

suitable to develop a guerrilla struggle.” These plans were aimed at “the use of civilian elements, expressly excluding the participation of military elements.”

Although such plans were not carried out, the Chilean fascist elements cultivated by the Brazilian dictatorship would dissolve their group with the ascension of Pinochet to power and join his murderous repressive apparatus, which tortured and “disappeared” tens of thousands of Chilean workers and youth.

The fourth document published by the NSA, also dating from before Pinochet’s seizure of power, exposes the scope of the Brazilian military government’s criminal activities throughout the continent and its alignment with the objectives of US imperialism. The December 9, 1971 memorandum of the American government—declassified and made public for the first time in 2008—recounts a closed-door discussion between Nixon and Médici during a state visit by the Brazilian dictator to the United States.

During the meeting held in the White House’s Oval Office, Médici described his efforts to finance the dictatorial regime of Gen. Hugo Banzer in Bolivia and to convince the Paraguayan dictator Gen. Alfredo Stroessner to also cooperate with the Bolivians, preventing the country from being taken by “far left extremists.”

The Brazilian dictator raised concerns about Argentina, saying that in his next meeting with its President Alejandro Lanusse, he would talk to him “not as President to President, but General to General.” His concerns were explicitly matched by the American president. It would take the Argentine military another five years to stage a coup and begin its “Process of National Reorganization” along the lines of the Brazilian coup, raising state violence against the working class to the murderous levels demanded by Médici and Nixon.

However, the main subject of the discussion at the Oval Office was Chile. Asked by Nixon about his opinion on the political situation in the country, Médici replied: “Allende would be overthrown for very much the same reasons that Goulart had been overthrown in Brazil.” Nixon then questioned if he “thought that the Chilean Armed forces were capable of overthrowing Allende. President Médici replied that he felt that they were, adding that Brazil was exchanging many officers with the Chileans, and made clear that Brazil was working towards this end. The [US] President said that it was very important that Brazil and the United States work closely in this field.”

In order to establish this cooperation, Nixon proposed the creation of an extraofficial communications channel with the Brazilian government, offered money or “any kind of help” to Brazil, and concluded the meeting by telling Médici that “there were many things that Brazil as a South American country could do that the US could not.”

By 1973, when the systematic betrayals of the Chilean working class by the Stalinist Communist Party and the popular front government of Salvador Allende had sufficiently opened the path to power for the military, the generals were completely prepared to launch a coup.

The sixth document published by the NSA demonstrates that the Chilean military carefully studied the lessons of the 1964 coup in Brazil right before they took power. According to a Brazilian intelligence report, senior Chilean military officials met at an air base in Santiago in August 1973, a month before the overthrow of Allende and examined the measures taken by their Brazilian counterparts in 1964 “in order to determine what in that experience could be useful in Chile.”

The degree of Brazilian collaboration in consolidating the military regime in Chile is exposed by the account of a poorly informed

Brazilian diplomat who reported, with surprise, about the presence of “approximately five policemen” walking around the National Stadium in Santiago, where thousands of people were detained right after Pinochet’s coup. The Brazilian dictatorship immediately provided support to the Chilean security forces in conducting interrogations and torturing political prisoners.

This partnership continued over the following years, as other documents published by the NSA make clear. Besides supplying weapons and promoting Chile’s diplomatic relations with neighboring countries, Brasilia provided intelligence training to the Chilean military, which later organized terrorist acts such as the bombing assassinations of the dissident General Carlos Prats in Argentina and Allende’s former defense minister Orlando Letelier in Washington.

The Brazilian dictatorship’s services to the continental counterrevolution would culminate in its adhesion to Operation Condor, conceived by Pinochet for the integration of the repressive forces of the South American dictatorships. The last document in the series published by NSA, a June 1976 “Weekly Situation Report on International Terrorism” by the US government, reports Brazil’s entry as a full member in the Operation and its commitment to supply it with an encrypted communication system, baptized Condortel.

The coverup of these heinous crimes against the working class—historically promoted by the Stalinist, Pabloite and Morenista leaderships—has allowed the reemergence of the same mortal dangers 57 years after the cycle of military dictatorships in Latin America was inaugurated with the 1964 coup in Brazil.

The popularization of these historical documents, that resonate immensely with the political situation confronting the working masses in Brazil and throughout the world, is therefore of extreme importance. The working class in every country must arm itself against the extreme ruthlessness with which the ruling class is prepared to respond to a danger from below, which is unequivocally exposed by these documents. For this very reason, their publication has faced a near total blackout by the Brazilian, US and international media.



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