

After visiting China, Lula hosts Russian foreign minister in Brazil

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Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Workers Party - PT) concluded a four-day trip to China on April 15. Two days later, his government hosted Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Brasilia.

The context of both diplomatic encounters could not have been more explosive, coming in the midst of the escalating NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and the intensifying US provocations against China over Taiwan, threatening the world with a nuclear catastrophe. At the same time, Washington has come to see Latin America as one of the front lines in US imperialism's confrontation with China, which since 2009 has overtaken the US to become the top trading partner of the region's largest economies, including Brazil.

The China trip was chosen for the launching of the Brazilian government's "reconstruction of bilateral relations". It was carried out under the slogan that Lula stressed upon his 100th day in office: "Brazil is back" on the international stage after four years of "isolation" under former President Jair Bolsonaro. The fascistic Bolsonaro, echoing his political ally, Donald Trump, issued a series of provocative anti-Chinese statements that had soured relations between Beijing and Brasilia.

The PT government's stated goals were to make the trip to China a milestone in the recovery of the "active foreign policy" of the previous PT governments (2003-2013), to strengthen "South-South international cooperation" and to "build a more multipolar world," in the words of the Brazilian presidency's special advisor, Celso Amorim.

To this end, the PT spoke of strengthening the main trade blocs to which Brazil belongs, MERCOSUL (Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay) and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). After Lula's return to power, Brazil has rejoined the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUL), both inaugurated under the bourgeois nationalist regimes of the Latin American "Pink Tide" of the 2000s. Chinese President Xi Jinping also declared his plans to strengthen Beijing's cooperation with both CELAC and MERCOSUL.

Dozens of government officials and members of the Brazilian political establishment, as well as more than a hundred businessmen, mainly from the agribusiness sector, travelled along with Lula to China. A total of 35 cooperation and trade agreements were signed between the Brazilian federal state and companies and their Chinese counterparts in numerous areas, such as communications, aerospace, infrastructure, research and innovation, industry, fighting hunger, renewable energy and climate change, agriculture and livestock, ports, and mining.

These agreements are expected to generate Chinese investment of US\$ 50 billion in Brazil, further strengthening the economic ties between the two countries.

The Lula government also took advantage of the trip to China to advance its intentions to "re-industrialize" Brazil on new technological and environmental bases with Chinese investments. The possibility of Chinese company BYD, the world leader in electric cars, opening a plant in the state of Bahia, possibly utilizing the sites of a recently shut Ford

plant, was discussed. This year, the Chinese company Cherry announced the construction of an electric car factory in Argentina, and Chinese companies are investing in lithium extraction projects in Bolivia and Chile, which has sounded alarm bells among US and European leaders.

Another issue discussed on Lula's trip that has put China on a collision course with the US is the possibility of financing projects in local currency. This, in turn, has advanced since the beginning of the year with agreements made between the central banks of China and Brazil and the adhesion of the Sino-Brazilian bank Bocom BBM to CIPS, the Chinese payment system that competes with SWIFT.

Speaking in Shanghai at the inauguration of former Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff, also of the PT, as head of the New Development Bank set up by BRICS, Lula declared: "Why can't we do trade based on our own currencies? Who was it that decided that the dollar was the currency after the disappearance of the gold standard?"

US Ambassador to Brazil Thomas Shannon issued a starkly undiplomatic response to Lula's statements, telling the Brazilian media that he was "repeating China's narrative, without necessarily achieving anything important to Brazil's interests."

Washington's concerns go beyond the loss of the dollar's global position. It fears that this could circumvent the economic sanctions that the US uses to ensure its global hegemony and counter alleged threats to its national security.

Lula visited one of the US-sanctioned companies, Chinese technology giant Huawei, which is behind 40 percent of Brazil's telecommunications infrastructure, and started offering 5G technology in Brazil last year in defiance of strong US pressure.

Key geopolitical issues were also discussed between the Brazilian government and Chinese officials. Aiming to "promote the democratization of international relations and multilateralism," according to the joint statement, China and Brazil advocated the "need to reform the United Nations and its Security Council," including with a permanent seat for Brazil. Brazil "reiterated that it firmly adheres to the one-China principle," i.e., "Taiwan is an inseparable part of Chinese territory."

Brazil and China endorsed each others peace proposals for the war in Ukraine – China's 12 point plan and the "Peace Club" initiative that Lula presented to US President Joe Biden and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

Before and after the trip to China, Lula issued statements on the Ukraine war that conflicted with the US-NATO narrative to which he had bowed on several recent occasions. On April 6, he suggested in a press conference that a peace agreement could be reached by avoiding the demand that Russia give up Crimea. At the end of his China visit, Lula declared that "it is necessary, above all, to convince the countries [Europe and the US] that are supplying weapons and encouraging the war to stop," and that "the decision for war was made by two countries," holding Ukraine as well as Russia responsible for the conflict.

Immediately after the trip to China, Lula received Russian Foreign

Minister Sergei Lavrov. In addition to Brazil, Lavrov visited Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba, three Latin American countries that are subjected to US sanction regimes.

At a press conference after meeting with Brazilian Chancellor Mauro Vieira and before meeting with Lula, Lavrov said that both countries have an interest “in ending the Ukrainian conflict,” and consider “illegitimate the unilateral sanctions imposed [against Russia by the US and European Union] without the approval of the UN Security Council.” He further praised Brazil’s support for the Nord Stream 2 pipeline attack investigation and its refusal to sign Biden’s Democracy Summit statement, which called for Russia’s unconditional withdrawal from Ukraine.

Elaborating on his visit to the region, Lavrov had written on April 13 in *Folha de S. Paulo* that Latin American countries have a central role in a new “democratic and polycentric multipolar world order,” which would include the BRICS, CELAC, UNASUL, and MERCOSUL, and therefore occupy a “priority position” in Russian foreign policy. According to him, what is at stake in the Russian “special military operation” in Ukraine is the struggle between this “new multipolar order” and a “neocolonial unipolar world order” dominated by the US.

Russia and Brazil have strong economic ties. Last year, the supply of Russian fertilizer, oil products, and wheat to Brazil and the region increased, with trade between Brazil and Russia reaching a record US\$9.8 billion. Brazil imports from Russia about a quarter of the fertilizer used in agribusiness. During Lavrov’s trip to Brazil, the two countries also discussed partnerships in the nuclear area, particularly in relation to a Brazilian nuclear submarine that is being developed with France.

Washington’s reaction was again harsh, and was repeated and amplified by Brazil’s corporate media. White House National Security spokesman John Kirby charged Lula with “parroting Russian and Chinese propaganda” for suggesting that Washington and its NATO allies “share responsibility for the war.”

Perhaps most ominous was an editorial published by *O Globo*, Brazil’s largest circulation daily and formerly a staunch supporter of the US-backed military coup of 1964, titled “Lula’s ‘neutrality’ reveals tacit support for Russia”. Accusing Lula of “openly flirting with Russia,” *O Globo* warned, “The danger of provoking the Americans and Europeans is obvious: Lula risks taking a fall.”

Faced with these condemnations and threats, Lula backed down, reiterating that Brazil “condemns the violation of Ukraine’s territorial integrity.” Lula had already expressed this position in his meeting with Biden and in the UN vote on the first anniversary of the war in Ukraine, making Brazil the only BRICS country to condemn the Russian invasion.

The Lula government’s previous oscillations over the war in Ukraine included its refusal to supply ammunition for German tanks deployed to Ukraine at the end of January. This was followed by Foreign Minister Vieira’s suggestion at the end of March that Putin could be arrested if he stepped on Brazilian soil after his indictment by the International Criminal Court.

Far from representing merely the politics of the PT or some personal characteristic of Lula, this “zigzag” reflects a historic impasse confronting the Brazilian bourgeoisie amid the geopolitical maelstrom of US imperialism’s growing military escalations against both Russia and China.

In recent decades, elements within the Brazilian bourgeoisie have argued that their “national interests” can best be secured through supposed “neutrality” and diplomatic “independence.” Lula’s increasingly difficult attempt, in the context of the Ukraine war, to balance between China and Russia on the one hand and US and European imperialism on the other other are aimed at securing the profits of Brazil’s banks and corporations.

But the conception that slogans like “Brazil is back” and diplomatic maneuvers will lead to a renewed flowering of Brazilian capitalism as part

of “multipolar world” are bankrupt and reactionary.

Lula’s appeals for a “Peace Club” will hardly overcome the accumulating pressures of a world capitalist crisis that is driving imperialism to the brink of nuclear war. The Workers Party president’s diplomatic balancing act will do nothing to convince US imperialism to cede “multipolar” influence to China and Russia nor to halt its brutal and ever-escalating drive to employ military power to defend its waning global hegemony.

Nor, for that matter, will the illusions being promoted in some new multipolar utopia do anything to resolve the ever-deepening social inequality within Brazil itself, nor halt the escalating assaults on living standards that are leading to an eruption of class struggle.

And, as demonstrated in the reaction to Lula’s recent diplomatic initiatives, the quest of the Workers Party government for a place in the multipolar sun is only intensifying the terminal crisis of Brazil’s short-lived bourgeois democracy, which already produced the January 8 fascist assault in Brasilia and threatens to trigger another military coup.

This crisis has also exposed the organizations of the pseudo-left that function as cynical petty-bourgeois defenders of the reactionary and decomposing Brazilian capitalist system, claiming that there can be a common interest between a section of the bourgeoisie and the workers. Lula’s delegation to China included leaders of the largest Brazilian trade union confederations, including the PT-controlled CUT, and the Landless Workers Movement (MST), who serve as a critical tool in the PT government’s bid to subordinate the Brazilian working class to its capitalist exploiters.

The only genuine opposition to this perspective lies in the mobilization of the international working class against the national capitalist governments and their supporters in the pseudo-left. This means building sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Brazil and throughout Latin America and fighting to build an international mass movement of workers and youth against war and for socialism.



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