

Militarization of the Brazilian state escalates under Lula

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With the announcement in early November that it would send troops into customs and ports under the pretext of fighting drug trafficking, the Workers Party (PT) government of President Lula da Silva has taken a decisive step in the further militarization of the Brazilian state, which has accelerated since his first two terms, in 2002-2010.

The government announced the measure, formally called a “Guarantee of Law and Order” (GLO) operation, after adamantly denying it would resort to it for over 10 months, since taking office on January 1. According to the Justice Ministry, the operation is focused on ports and airports serving the country’s two largest cities, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, as well as the southwestern “triple borders” with Uruguay, Argentina, and Paraguay. The GLO allows for the three military branches to take charge of the operations of the federal customs agency, the federal police and associated security branches. The ostensible goal is to “choke” drug trafficking routes entering the country across the western land borders and leaving for European and US cities through eastern ports.

The immediate pretext for the decree was a series of attacks on transport infrastructure on Rio de Janeiro’s impoverished western sector, controlled by mafias formed by off-duty and retired policemen, known as *Milícias*. On the afternoon of October 23, a Monday, unidentified men started torching buses in the sector’s main thoroughfares, bringing the city to a halt, with classes cancelled and shops closed for the next two days. The action was reportedly a retaliation for the assassination of a *Milícia* boss by the police.

The violent episode in Rio de Janeiro immediately sparked a political offensive from the far-right opposition linked to former fascistic president Jair Bolsonaro, which accused the PT government of being “soft” on crime. Barely a week later, the government announced the hasty beginning of the GLO under cries of law-and-order. “It is

a necessary action to confront and stifle the financing of organized crime, which has grown due to the lack of serious action by those who have governed the country in recent years,” said PT party president Gleisi Hoffman.

The decision to launch the GLO operation has sparked significant media commentary, given the PT’s campaign promises in the 2022 elections that it would work for the reversion of the military power grab intensified under former fascistic president Jair Bolsonaro. Bolsonaro named thousands of military officers to every level of the federal government, including his cabinet, which culminated in the military supporting his claims of election fraud and playing a significant role in the planning and execution of the January 8 fascist assault on Brasilia.

Amid the critical events of the January 8 coup attempt, Lula explicitly rejected the suggestions from the military command and his Defense minister that he should decree a GLO operation to seal the capital. He later explained that once the operation was begun “Lula ceases to be the government so that some general can take over the government.”

Only a week before the decree of the ongoing military operation over ports and borders, Lula had stated that “as long as I’m president, there will be no GLO.” Seeking to justify the government’s sudden shift, Justice Minister Flávio Dino, a former member of the Maoist Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB), defensively declared that the measure does not transfer any power to the military, as no state or city-level authority would be taken over as previously done in other GLO operations.

But however desperately the PT administration attempts to conceal it, the fact is that this is another major concession to the coup-plotting military that can only lead in the direction pointed to by Lula in January: the increasing encroachment on political power by the Armed Forces.

The use of GLOs had so far been resisted by the government due to their popular association with state-sponsored violence and repression against the country's working class, especially the impoverished sectors living in Brazil's impoverished *favelas*, or shantytowns. GLOs have been increasingly used by successive presidents since the fall of the US-backed military dictatorship in 1985, gaining special attention after the first election of Lula and the PT in 2002. In his second term, from 2006 to 2010, Lula intensified the use of GLOs in densely populated *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro.

The hosting of international sporting events in Rio de Janeiro, such as the 2007 Pan-American games, the 2014 FIFA World Cup final and the 2016 Summer Olympics, was a pretext for the PT sending troops in combat gear to replace the police in the *favelas*. Bloodied in the criminal UN-sponsored intervention in Haiti, the military failed to choke drug cartels, but did inflict widespread abuse against the population.

In 2014, former PT president Dilma Rousseff used a GLO to seal Rio's port area and shut down demonstrations by oil workers opposing the privatization of oil fields. After Dilma's impeachment in 2016, interim president Michel Temer enacted two GLOs that, under the same pretenses of "choking crime," put Rio de Janeiro state's security in military hands for almost a year.

Each of these high-profile military actions resulted in long-lasting violence against the working class and produced leading agents of the fascist conspiracy in Brazil. Bolsonaro's Defense Minister and later running-mate, Gen. Walter Braga Netto, for instance, was the head of the federal intervention in Rio under Temer.

Lula's decision to decree a new GLO operation is even more significant in the face of the recent explosion of infighting between the country's top civilian security agencies, the Federal Police (PF) and the Brazilian Intelligence Agency (Abin).

On October 20, Federal Police agents raided Abin headquarters and arrested two of its agents accused of coordinating the illegal use of spy software to monitor over 33,000 individuals. Among them are Supreme Court Justices, opposition politicians and journalists. The same operation raided the Brazilian headquarters of Cognyte, the Israeli-based company selling the spy software, uncovering data about its secret acquisition by the Army under the federal intervention in Rio headed by Gen. Braga Netto. Initial reports also recount the discovery of a scheme for the mass hacking of computers and cell phones.

Abin representatives complained off the record that the PF had exceeded its authority in raiding the agency's offices, and that it wanted to stage a spectacle amid fierce disputes over who should be in charge of presidential security after the PT government transferred it from the Abin to the PF.

The open clashes between different branches of Brazil's repressive apparatus express their growing grip on the state. Under the new PT administration, the Brazilian ruling class is attempting to solve its disputes behind the backs of the population and with ever increasing use of authoritarian measures—most notably through the classified investigation of Bolsonaro's coup plans led by Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes.

The GLO decree by Lula once more gives the lie to all previous promises about returning the military strictly to their role in "national defense." Military units and commanders assigned to police the ports and borders will have authority over other independent federal law enforcement agencies, including the PF, hailed by Lula as a "neutral" agency, free from Bolsonaro's influence.

These developments follow an inexorable, objective logic. As the *World Socialist Web Site* has warned, the central concern of the new PT administration, especially in its relations with the military, has been to avoid the mass opposition to Bolsonaro and his authoritarian drive being transformed into an opposition to Brazilian capitalism as a whole. Incapable of making any social appeal to the working class, the Lula government instead turns ever more openly for support to the right-wing and the security apparatus, above all the military.



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