

Study exposes Brazilian dictatorship's spying across Latin America

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The recent publication of a study on secret archives of Brazil's 1964-1985 military dictatorship has shed light on this fascist terror regime's forging of a counter-revolutionary network throughout Latin America subordinated to US imperialism.

The study led by researchers from the Getúlio Vargas Foundation (FGV), the University of São Paulo (USP) carried out the first systematic analysis of 8,000 documents in the archive of the military dictatorship's Foreign Intelligence Center (CIEX), "the regime's clandestine foreign intelligence agency tasked with monitoring opponents worldwide between 1966 and 1986."

A year-long effort with the collaboration of more than 20 researchers and undergraduate students gave rise to a database they have named the Latin American Transnational Surveillance Dataset. It established that more than 17,000 individuals were under the surveillance of Itamaraty, Brazil's Foreign Ministry, over the 20 years of the CIEX's operation. Of these, only 30 percent were Brazilian citizens.

Through clandestine methods of espionage and collaboration with the repressive agencies of local regimes, the Brazilian dictatorship used its embassies and consulates around the world as centers for the political persecution of oppositionists. This transnational surveillance system was instrumental in the imprisonment and extrajudicial execution, or "disappearance," of an incalculable number of individuals from Brazil and other countries.

One of the study's important conclusions is that CIEX's activities "sequentially targeted opposition activity in Uruguay (1966-1970), Chile (1970-1973), Argentina (1973-1975) and Portugal (1976) onwards." In other words, its actions were concentrated in countries under nominally democratic regimes, which served, at different times, as hubs for Brazilian political exiles. Participating in these criminal operations were not only Brazilian diplomats and consular officials, but also local police and military forces with whom they held extra-official collaboration.

Reflecting on the significance of their findings, the researchers state:

The finding that TS targeted a smaller proportion of nationals compared to non-nationals has serious theoretical implications. On the one hand, it challenges conventional notions of who counts as a victim of transnational state repression by highlighting the degree to which non-nationals too can suffer the extraterritorial arm of foreign autocracies. On the other, it prompts us to reevaluate the impact of autocratic state repression against dissent on international relations writ large, including how transnational political violence may affect civil liberties in an interconnected world.

As revealing as these documents are in themselves, they are likely only a limited part of the Brazilian dictatorial diplomacy's secret archive.

Those files were preserved in the basements of Itamaraty despite an order by the National Intelligence Service (SNI) during the final days of the regime to destroy the archive.

The very existence of CIEX was kept secret until 2007, more than two decades after the end of the dictatorship, when it was brought to light by a series of reports in *Correio Braziliense*, which had first-hand access to the archive that was transferred to Brazil's State Archive.

"Knowledge of this hidden chapter of the dictatorship puts back diplomacy alongside the military in the dock at the trial of history," wrote Claudio Dantas Sequeira, the author of the award-winning journalistic series.

The CIEX was founded in 1966, according to former members of the department who spoke to *Correio*, by a "top secret ordinance" that remains "inaccessible, confined in an immense safe located in the basement of Itamaraty."

The creator of CIEX was diplomat Manoel Pio Corrêa, who headed the Political Department of Itamaraty from 1959 until the end of Juscelino Kubitschek's government in 1961. In the words of Sequeira, "As the executor of Brazil's foreign policy," a post to which Corrêa was elevated by the military regime, "he launched a crusade against communism, convinced that it was an evil to be extirpated from society. His efficiency earned him admiration and respect in the barracks, and the nickname 'reactionary troglodyte' from Brazilian political asylums."

A fact that holds a critical political lesson is that this agenda of transnational persecution began to be articulated by Corrêa well before the 1964 coup.

In a memoir, he claims to have received "a precious gift" from his predecessor in the post, Odette de Carvalho e Souza, when taking over the Political Department of Itamaraty: an archive with files on Brazilian and foreign citizens involved in "subversive" activities during the previous decades. "When I left the department at the end of the Kubitschek government, suspecting, quite rightly as we saw later, what was to come under the next government," Corrêa wrote, "I left this archive, considerably enlarged, entrusted to an officer friend, who liaised with the then Information and Counter-Information Service (SFICI) with Itamaraty."

Working in the meantime as the Brazilian ambassador to Mexico, once the military regime was established, Corrêa was sent to the embassy in Uruguay, where the ousted president, João Goulart of the Brazilian Labor Party (PTB), lived in exile. Working to neutralize opposition activity against the coup regime in Brazil, Corrêa forged an extensive network of contacts with politicians, military officers, police delegates and judges in the nominally democratic neighboring country. "I found in the departmental police excellent sources of information and occasionally some kind of active, unofficial cooperation," he wrote.

Appointed Brazil's Secretary General for Foreign Affairs afterwards, a post he held throughout the military regime, Corrêa universalized these criminal methods in the creation of CIEX.

Corrêa's consistent role as an agent of counter-revolution across Latin America, both at the head of CIEX and in his long career before that, is closely linked to the operations of US imperialism, which sponsored the 1964 military coup in Brazil.

In his memoirs published in 1976, CIA agent Philip Agee, who was in Montevideo in 1964, testified that the decision to send Pio Corrêa to Uruguay was taken by the CIA base in Rio de Janeiro, which was "determined to carry out operations against the [Brazilian] exiles." The CIA considered Corrêa to be "the right man" since he had "demonstrated great efficiency in operational tasks for the [CIA] base in Mexico City," during his time as ambassador.

It is a well-established fact that the Brazilian military dictatorship acted in coordination with Washington to overthrow democratic regimes and drown in blood the wave of revolutionary uprisings that swept Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s.

The CIEX archives shed light on how the fascist Latin American military, aided by the CIA, forged their secret networks for joint action, preparing coups d'état and persecuting, torturing and murdering hundreds of thousands of political opponents.

The operations promoted by CIEX beginning in 1966 led to and culminated in Operation Condor, established in 1975-76. Operation Condor formalized the collaboration of the repression agencies of the dictatorships of Uruguay, Paraguay, Brazil, Chile and Bolivia. Under the inspiration, funding and training of the CIA, it extended its clutches also to Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela, Colombia and, since the end of the 1970s, with increasing intensity to the countries of Central America.

The result of these criminal operations was the transformation of the continent into a "labyrinth of horror," in the words of Argentine author Stella Calloni. "A political exile could be kidnapped, taken as a hostage and taken across borders, tortured and disappeared, without any judicial authorization," Calloni wrote in *Operation Condor: Criminal Pact*.

The preserved secrets and renewed relevance of the military dictatorship's crimes

Almost 20 years have passed since Sequeira reported that the official order to create CIEX remained locked away in a secret archive in the basement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At the time, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, of the Workers Party (PT), was beginning his second term in office.

When directly confronted in 2007 by a *Correio Braziliense* reporter, the Foreign Ministry, headed by Celso Amorim, declared that it had "no comments to make on aspects of a past that fortunately no longer exists."

This response, coming from a government that proclaimed itself the representative of the "left" in Brazil, generated a wave of indignation against Lula and the PT.

The organization Torture Never Again, made up of victims of political persecution by the military regime, published a letter of repudiation against the government, stating: "It is disgusting and even revolting that these archives and many others are closed to the relatives affected by state terrorism and to the general public who have the right to know their history." Belisário dos Santos, a prominent lawyer for political prisoners during the dictatorship, said: "Our Chancellor Celso Amorim should be stunned by this, but he reacted as if he already knew."

Even though the PT spent another 12 years in power and Lula is now in his third term as president, the Brazilian state has never acknowledged the existence of CIEX, and documents such as its founding decree remain under lock and key.

On February 24 this year, *O Globo* reported that it had asked the current

PT government "why it never acknowledged the espionage activities," to which "Itamaraty gave an evasive answer." The newspaper wrote to have also asked "how many [Foreign Relations] officials were part of CIEX, its formal role in the government, the countries where it worked and we requested the full text of the ordinance responsible for its creation, which is still unknown." The government failed to reply.

O Globo interviewed Matias Spektor, the FGV researcher who led the recent study on the CIEX archive, who explained that one of the reasons for the Brazilian state to keep such secrets is the fact that "many of the officials who worked in the repression machine continued their careers as diplomats in Itamaraty after the dictatorship ended."

The present political relevance of this only partially uncovered "past" can hardly be overestimated.

Throughout Latin America, the military and political heirs to the terror regimes of the 1960s-1970s have once again been brought to the center of political developments.

In Brazil, two years ago, former president Jair Bolsonaro and the fascist clique that remains at the head of the Armed Forces attempted a coup d'état aimed at reestablishing a military dictatorial regime. The evidence of this fascistic conspiracy, which culminated in a mob laying siege to government buildings in Brasília on January 8, 2023, exposes the absolute perfidy of the PT. It continues to treat the crimes of the military dictatorship and its diplomatic operatives as a "past that fortunately no longer exists."

The PT and its pseudo-left satellites have never raised the issue, for example, that Col. Alexandre Castilho Bittencourt da Silva—one of the 23 military officers accused of participating in the coup conspiracy—was living in Santiago de Chile at the end of 2022, when he took part in the drafting of the "Letter to the Commander of the Army from Senior Officers of the Brazilian Army," considered a key piece of the coup attempt.

It is known that Bittencourt commanded the Army's 6th Police Battalion until February 2022 and left the post to pursue a post-graduate degree in Conducting Strategic Defense Policies at Chile's National Academy of Political and Strategic Studies (ANEPE). What political relationships did he establish during this critical period?

The existence of such relations between the Brazilian and Chilean militaries has the gravest implications. Their criminal historical ties go back to the joint plotting of the coup that overthrew Salvador Allende's government and massacred tens of thousands of Chilean workers. They subsequently led to collaboration in Operation Condor, headed by the bloodthirsty dictator Gen. Augusto Pinochet.

Parallel to the renewed ties between the Brazilian and Chilean armed forces, the extra-constitutional relations between US imperialism and Latin America's military forces are being rapidly revived in the context of Washington's drive to counter the growing influence of China and Russia in the region.

Washington's offensive to violently re-establish its hegemony over the Western Hemisphere has taken on an ever more feverish pace under the new Trump administration. These efforts are directly linked to the drive by Trump and his cabinet of fascist oligarchs to impose a dictatorship in the United States, taking direct inspiration from Latin America's bloody history.

Trump has enthusiastically announced his goal of deporting US citizens to prisons in countries like El Salvador, where the government of Nayib Bukele has erected a system of mass incarceration of the population, without due process and under conditions of torture and the most severe human rights violations.

Through his links with fascist political forces like Bukele, Bolsonaro and Javier Milei in Argentina, Trump's ambition is to rebuild the "labyrinth of horror" of the Condor years, this time deeply integrated with the political persecution of the working class and youth within the United

States itself.

These developments emphasize the urgent need for workers and youth in Latin America and the United States, who are entering a new period of mass struggles, to unite across borders and build a revolutionary leadership armed with an international strategy for the overthrow of the rotten capitalist system.



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