

Trump imposes massive tariffs on Brazil over trial of ex-president Bolsonaro for fascist coup attempt

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In an extraordinary act of imperialist intimidation, President Donald Trump announced on Wednesday the imposition of 50 percent tariffs on all products exported by Brazil to the United States. He directly linked the trade war measure to the ongoing trial of former President Jair Bolsonaro for the January 8, 2023 fascist coup attempt, denouncing the proceedings as a “witch hunt.”

The official letter sent to Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Workers Party – PT) announced in its first paragraph:

The way that Brazil has treated former President Bolsonaro, a Highly Respected Leader throughout the World during his Term, including by the United States, is an international disgrace. This Trial should not be taking place. It is a Witch Hunt that should end IMMEDIATELY!

In addition, the US president took issue with Brazil’s Supreme Court (STF) over its amending of the country’s Internet Bill of Rights, expanding the liability of digital platforms for illegal content posted by users, even without a court order. This decision clashes with a presidential decree issued in late January by Trump, who came to power in close alliance with the oligarchs owning the main social media networks.

The letter attributed the imposition of tariffs, to start on August 1, “in part to Brazil’s insidious attacks on Free Elections, and the fundamental Free Speech Rights of Americans.”

The first accusation—which implies the characterization of the Brazilian regime as a dictatorship—is apparently a reference to the denial of Bolsonaro’s right to run in the 2026 presidential elections. He was declared ineligible by the Brazilian Electoral Court in 2023 for his attempts to undermine the democratic electoral process.

The reference to “insidious attacks” on the “free speech rights of Americans” refers to decisions by the Brazilian Supreme Court (STF) demanding the removal of content and accounts from sites such as Rumble and Twitter, which Trump called “secret and unlawful censorship orders to U.S. social media platforms.”

The letter also justified the trade war measures based on the claim of a “longstanding, and very unfair trade relationship” with Brazil. It absurdly claimed that trade relations with Brazil generate “unsustainable Trade Deficits against the United States” and that the “50% number is far less than what is needed to have the Level Playing Field.” In reality, the United States maintains a consistent trade

surplus with Brazil, with US exports exceeding imports by US\$ 7.4 billion in 2024.

The tariffs, which come into effect in 20 days, will have a profound impact on the Brazilian economy, with the US ranking as the country’s second-largest export market, trailing only China.

Representatives of Brazilian agribusiness, which massively exports products such as orange juice, coffee and beef to the US, were deeply alarmed by Trump’s measures. The same is true for Brazil’s steel industry, whose large exports to the US had already been hit by an increase in tariffs to 25 percent in March and later to 50 percent in June.

Assessing the implications of Trump’s announcement, the president of Brazil Steel Institute, Marco Polo Lopes, told *Estado de São Paulo*: “Everything was moving towards an agreement. Now, it’s unpredictable.” Calling on Brazilian authorities to keep up their negotiation efforts, he concluded: “This is not good for either side.”

The measures announced by Trump defy any attempts to present them from the logical standpoint of “negotiations.” Their purpose is to bend the Brazilian government to Washington’s will and impose a relationship of naked imperialist domination based on force.

They follow the same logic as the tariffs announced in January this year against Colombia, after President Gustavo Petro refused to accept flights carrying immigrants deported from the US under degrading conditions. Trump responded by announcing 25 percent tariffs on Colombian products, and Petro backed down.

The political logic behind these measures was analyzed by the Socialist Equality Group (GSI) in the International May Day rally: “Trump’s return to the White House marks a realignment of US imperialist foreign policy toward domination of the Western Hemisphere, seen as a necessary step in its offensive against China.”

The statement quoted Admiral Alvin Holsey, head of SOUTHCOM, who declared in a speech to the US Congress in February: “The [Latin America and the Caribbean] region is on the front lines of a decisive and urgent contest to define the future of our world. China is assailing US interests from all directions, in all domains.” Washington “must meet presence with presence,” Holsey concluded.

Significantly, Trump’s announcement follows the BRICS summit, which was hosted in Rio de Janeiro last weekend. Initially formed by Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, the group added half a dozen more countries last year.

In a confrontation with the Trump administration, the BRICS summit’s final statement called for a comprehensive reform of the UN; advocated that each country establish its own regulatory

framework for large technology companies; criticized protectionism, condemned tariffs and barriers that harm international trade; and repudiated recent attacks on Russia and Iran, one of the countries that joined BRICS last year.

Nevertheless, the summit—and Lula’s leadership in particular—did everything not to upset Washington and never named the US as the perpetrator of the criminal bombardment of Iran.

Before announcing the tariffs on products exported from Brazil, Trump had already threatened earlier in the week that any country that aligns itself with the “anti-American” policies of the BRICS will be subject to an extra 10 percent tariff.

In an emblematic statement, Lula’s Minister of Economy, Fernando Haddad, declared after the summit that “Brazil has relations with the whole world” and “cannot become an appendage of an economic bloc [i.e., BRICS].” Showing off his spinelessness and blindness, Haddad sought to tranquilize public opinion, declaring: “President Lula has a team sitting at the table with the US government discussing our bilateral agreement.”

Trump’s letter provoked panicked moves in the Brazilian government. After an emergency meeting at the Planalto Palace, Lula declared on social media: “Brazil is a sovereign country with independent institutions that will not accept being dictated to by anyone.” The government also announced it would impose reciprocal tariffs against the US.

In a reference to Bolsonaro, who led a coup attempt in early 2023 in Brazil that mirrored Trump’s January 6, 2021 coup, Lula said, “The legal proceedings against those who planned the coup are the sole responsibility of the Brazilian justice system and are therefore not subject to any kind of interference or threat that undermines the independence of national institutions.”

In an interview with *Jornal da Record* on Thursday, Lula expressed his astonishment at the letter and reaffirmed his desperate interest in reestablishing the basis for negotiations with the US. He said:

Look, I thought President Trump’s letter was apocryphal ... Brazil is a country that, if President Trump knew a little bit about, he would have more respect for. ... Brazil has had a 200-year relationship with the United States. A diplomatic relationship, a virtuous relationship, a relationship that benefits both sides. I got along well with all the presidents, I got along well with Clinton, I got along well with Bush, I got along well with Obama, I got along well with Biden.

At the same time, the PT and its pseudo-left allies reinforced their reactionary nationalist campaign, accusing Bolsonaro and his allies of “anti-patriotism” and hailing the common interests of the Brazilian bourgeoisie they represent.

The Brazilian corporate media also reacted nervously to Trump’s announcement. The main bourgeois newspapers published editorials harshly criticizing Trump’s tariffs and praising Lula for the measures taken so far. *Estado* wrote that “this is the work of mafiosos,” and condemned Bolsonaro and his allies, the most important of them, the governor of São Paulo, Tarcísio de Freitas.

Freitas blamed Trump’s tariffs on Lula himself, claiming that the president “put his ideology above the economy, and this is the result. They had time to honor dictatorships, defend censorship, and attack the largest direct investor in Brazil. ... There is no point in hiding

behind Bolsonaro.”

In an emblematic statement, the president of the Chamber of Deputies’ Foreign Relations Committee, Filipe Barros of Bolsonaro’s PL party, declared that “Lula is repeatedly provoking the US government ... aligning himself with the countries of the so-called ‘axis of evil.’”

At the same time, the media is promoting tremendous complacency. “Donald Trump’s history of announcing decisions that are never implemented casts doubt on the implementation of these additional tariffs,” stated *Folha de São Paulo*’s editorial.

Estado, for its part, stated: “[The] family and allies of the former president [Bolsonaro] celebrated as if they had won the lottery. And they believe that until the day of the Supreme Court ruling, there will be new demonstrations. ... It is unlikely that they will save Bolsonaro from almost certain conviction and imprisonment. And even more unlikely is that, with the exception of his fanatical supporters, a single Brazilian will be moved by Donald Trump’s words.”

The idea that Trump is just bluffing, or that his measures are inconsequential, is false and dangerous. For Brazil, which lived under a bloody US-backed dictatorship between 1964 and 1985, the escalation of the imperialist offensive marked by Trump’s statement has profound consequences.

Bolsonaro and his fascist military leadership have responded to the legal proceedings against the coup they conspired to carry out between 2022 and 2023 with a political offensive. On different occasions, Bolsonaro and his closest allies have presented the United States as the center of coordination for this political response.

Bolsonaro’s son, Eduardo, has been in the US since February, in intense meetings with Republican lawmakers to get the Trump administration to implement measures against the STF and the Lula government in response to the trial his father is facing in Brazil. The recent measure announced by Trump marks a turning point in this offensive, which will have explosive effects on Brazil.

Speaking to CNN before Trump’s announced tariffs, Eduardo Bolsonaro claimed to expect US sanctions against STF judge Alexandre de Moraes, saying: “This is what I have always sought here in the US, since there are no tools available in Brazil.”



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