

Lula kisses Trump's ring as US prepares war on Latin America

Tomas Castanheira
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On Sunday, the first in-person meeting took place between presidents Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil and Donald Trump of the United States. The closed-door meeting occurred in Malaysia, where both were participating as guests in the 47th Summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Lula described his meeting with Trump as a "very happy day" in a post featuring his photo smiling and shaking hands with the American president. Trump, in turn, told the press: "We had a very good meeting.... He's a very vigorous guy, I was very impressed."

At a press conference the following day, the Workers Party (PT) leader—a hero of the international pseudo-left—praised Trump repeatedly and obscenely described his "good chemistry" with the White House's aspiring Führer.

Lula stated:

You have to feel, you have to hold hands, you have to talk, you have to look, you have to see the person's procedure, behavior, the person's reaction, you know? And I think, honestly, there was a lot of sincerity in our relationship. I have no problem saying that it's quite possible you'll be surprised by the affinity between the American state and the Brazilian state.

The meeting between the two leaders, which had as its pretext negotiating the excruciating 50 percent tariffs against Brazil decreed by Trump in August, occurred in the context of a historic escalation of US imperialist violence against Latin America.

While Lula kissed Trump's ring in Malaysia, off the coast of Venezuela—which shares extensive borders with Brazil—the US was mobilizing a naval armada on a scale unprecedented in the region since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.

Last Friday, "Secretary of War" Pete Hegseth announced the deployment of the world's largest aircraft carrier, the USS Gerald R. Ford, to the Caribbean Sea. This military escalation, in preparation for open war against Venezuela, followed Trump's statements affirming he had authorized CIA operations to overthrow Nicolás Maduro's regime and threatening a land invasion of the country.

At the same time, the US military has been carrying out a campaign of illegal assassinations in Latin American waters, having already bombed a dozen small civilian vessels, killing nearly 60 people.

The most recent and deadliest of these attacks occurred on Monday. Four vessels were sunk and 14 people killed in three waves of missile fire. Following the macabre ritual adopted by Trump's fascist administration from the beginning, the deaths—which amount to extrajudicial executions—were trumpeted by Hegseth on social media.

The US imperialist military incursion against Venezuela is already provoking a profound political destabilization of Latin America and

threatens to drag the entire region into war.

A week before meeting with Lula, Trump launched a brutal offensive against Colombia's government. He accused President Gustavo Petro of being an "illegal drug leader," repeating, with exactly the same purpose, the monstrous lie fabricated to justify military and political intervention against Venezuela.

For the president of South America's largest country, the mere holding of a friendly diplomatic meeting with Trump under these conditions would represent tacit capitulation to imperialism. But Lula went much further.

During his press conference, the Brazilian president reported that he himself raised the subject of Venezuela in the discussion with Trump; with the objective not of confronting, but rather collaborating with American imperialism.

"What I told President Trump is that Brazil has expertise, because we've done this once before in Venezuela," Lula told reporters. Referring to the unstable political situation in Venezuela following the failed US-backed coup attempt against President Hugo Chávez in 2002, Lula continued:

I had only been in office for 15 days in 2003 when we created the group of friends to resolve the democratic problem in Venezuela.

We chose to participate in the group of friends, Colin Powell, who was US Secretary of State, and we included Spain, which was the first country to recognize the coup plotter who took office in place of Chávez.

I remember it like it was today. Fidel [Castro] kept saying, "but you're handing Venezuela over to imperialism." I said... "I'm creating a group of friends of Venezuelan democracy, it's not a group of friends of Chávez. And, to... strengthen democracy, you need to have people who have the opposition's respect."

I think it's possible to find a solution in Venezuela, if there's willingness to negotiate.

The idea that the US intervention in Venezuela had anything to do with "democracy" was a sordid lie 20 years ago. Today, only Lula maintains this pretense, while the US government crudely declares its predatory imperialist objectives.

Lula's attachment to the democratic and legal façade of the imperialist order in crisis is highly revealing of the rotten and reactionary kind of bourgeois nationalist politics he defends.

He is fully aware that US imperialism seeks control of Latin America's strategic resources—in Venezuela's case, oil—and is fighting to regain its regional hegemony in direct confrontation with China. Lula has no perspective for opposing these aims and seeks only the best

accommodation of Brazilian capitalism's interests to them. As Lula himself unscrupulously put it:

Any subject you want to discuss and put on the table, we'll discuss. Whether it's trade relations, relations with China, relations with Venezuela, there's no forbidden topic with me. If you want to discuss critical minerals, rare earths; if you want to discuss ethanol, sugar, no problem.

I'm a walking metamorphosis at the negotiating table, you know?... That's how I learned to negotiate.... If it's interesting to you, put it on the table, convince me, because convincing me is easy.

Lula, the former trade union bureaucrat, also knows well that the most valuable service he has to offer, whether to imperialism or the national bourgeoisie, is helping to suppress the resistance and independent political organization of the working class.

His first act after meeting with Trump was to address the Brazilian population to assure them that the trade war and criminal political interventions launched against Brazil by Washington were nothing more than a terrible misunderstanding.

Lula declared:

When President Trump published on his portal the letter to Brazil, imposing taxes on Brazilian products, many people went into crisis thinking it was the end of the world. What did we say in the government? Calm down, because the decisions that were made against Brazil are unfounded because they were made with wrong information. And that was obvious.

He then concluded:

I'm convinced that in a few days we'll have a definitive solution between the United States and Brazil, so that life goes on good and happy.... That's how I'm returning to Brazil, satisfied and certain that everything will work out for the Brazilian people.

What cynicism! Trump's ruthless attack didn't stem from any "wrong information," and its nefarious political implications for Brazilian workers remain in full force.

Trump's official letter to Lula and presidential decree imposing the tariffs against Brazil abandoned the false pretext of "correcting injustices" in the trade balance with the US and assumed a predatory political character.

Trump openly presented the tariffs and sanctions against Brazilian authorities as an intervention against the prosecution of his ally, former president Jair Bolsonaro, who was sentenced to 27 years in prison for his attempted coup d'état. "This trial should not be happening. It is a witch hunt that must end IMMEDIATELY!" Trump wrote to Lula.

Neither the tariffs nor the imperialist provocations ceased with Lula's meeting with Trump on Sunday. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who is coordinating the negotiations, directly conditioned an agreement on "Brazil making us its preferred trade partner instead of China."

Last week, Senator Flávio Bolsonaro, the former president's son, responded to one of Hegseth's posts glorifying his illegal attacks in the Caribbean by demanding that US extend its military intervention to Brazil.

"I heard there are boats like this here in Rio de Janeiro," Flávio wrote. "Wouldn't you like to spend a few months here helping us fight these terrorist organizations?"

Lula's conscious efforts to disarm the working class in the face of the growing threat of fascism and imperialist aggression are laid bare by the abrupt shift in his discourse since the UN General Assembly debate at the end of September.

The Brazilian president opened the plenary session of the event with a speech claiming that Bolsonaro's conviction was "a message to all aspiring autocrats and those who support them" that "our democracy and our sovereignty are non-negotiable." The message was obviously addressed to Trump.

Lula proceeded to denounce the instigation of "growing polarization and instability" in Latin America and the Caribbean, stating that "the equation of criminality with terrorism" was "concerning," and condemning the use of "lethal force in situations that do not constitute armed conflicts" as equivalent to "executing people without trial."

It's quite true that Lula conveniently omitted naming the criminals responsible for war, political instability, extrajudicial executions and the growth of fascism in Latin America. But it doesn't make it any less striking that, after a month marked by the escalation of these imperialist crimes, Lula turned his assessment of reality upside down. Trump, finally named by Lula, is now presented as a partner for peace and democracy in Brazil and Latin America.

Furthermore, Lula—who recently stated that "if what Trump did at the Capitol" happened in Brazil, he would be "prosecuted like Bolsonaro... because he injured democracy and the Constitution"—now refers to himself and the American president as the "leaders of the two greatest democracies in the West." This amounts to a seal of approval for Trump's accelerated drive to establish a fascist dictatorship within the United States.

As the deep connections between the US Capitol coup attempt of January 6, 2021, and the coup attempt that culminated in the January 8, 2023 events in Brasília demonstrated, the destruction of democracy in the US impacts Brazil profoundly and immediately.

Lula's opportunism and pusillanimity are not merely personal political traits. They express the dead end to which the bourgeois nationalist program defended by the PT in Brazil and the Pink Tide governments across Latin America has led.

Far from fulfilling its promise of achieving a new type of "socialism" through the institutions of the bourgeois state and independence from US imperialism, the Pink Tide entered history as a mere episode in the infamous political trajectory of the Latin American bourgeoisie; an interval between the era of CIA-backed military regimes of the 1970s and the resumption of brutal dictatorial methods by local ruling classes and their imperialist sponsors.

To fight against the eruption of imperialist war and the bourgeoisie's plunge into fascism, the Brazilian and international working class urgently needs to break with nationalist and pro-capitalist parties and programs.

It is necessary to build the independent political leadership of the working class for the coming mass struggles based on the strategy of international socialist revolution, defended exclusively by the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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