

# In advance of White House meeting, Brazil's Lula sanctions US abduction of Maduro

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Over the past two weeks, Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Workers Party – PT) has expressed his intention to work closely with President Donald Trump and far-right leaders in South America allied with the would-be US dictator.

On January 26, Lula and Trump held a 50-minute telephone conversation. The Brazilian president welcomed on X “the good relationship built in recent months” with the US government. It was the fourth time the two presidents have spoken since last October, when Lula began referring to Trump more and more frequently as his “friend.”

According to Lula, these talks resulted in “the lifting of a significant portion of the tariffs imposed on Brazilian products,” which were taxed at 50 percent last July to further Trump’s openly political aim of reversing the imminent conviction of the former fascist president and Trump ally, Jair Bolsonaro, for his attempted coup of January 8, 2023.

As part of an effort to partially or fully reverse the tariffs imposed on even more products and deepen relations with the Trump administration, including the possibility of American investments in Brazil, Lula announced in his post on X that he will travel to Washington in March to meet the US president.

With this trip, Lula is following in the footsteps of Colombian President Gustavo Petro, who met with Trump at the White House last week. By attempting to negotiate with Trump, the two leading representatives of the second wave of bourgeois nationalist governments associated with the Pink Tide are covering up US imperialism’s drive to dominate the entire Western Hemisphere by force as it prepares for war against China.

However, as if the announcement of the visit had not exposed Lula sufficiently, the content of the cooperation that Lula wants to pursue with Trump is even more revealing.

Lula wrote on X that he reiterated to Trump the “proposal, sent to the [US] State Department in December, to strengthen cooperation in the fight against organized crime.” According to him, it “was well received by the US president.”

Such a proposal must be analyzed in the context of the Trump administration’s offensive against Latin America to purge the influence of China, Russia, and, to a lesser extent, Iran from the region. It gained a qualitative leap after the publication of the National Security Strategy in December and the National Defense Strategy last month, which presented the “Trump corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine and reaffirmed the dominance of US imperialism in the Western Hemisphere.

In this framework, Washington’s fight against organized crime and so-called “narco-terrorism” has been used as a pretext to pressure Latin American governments to align themselves with US strategic

goals. Over the past few months, this dynamic has given rise to the Trump administration’s offensive against Venezuela. This campaign, which has seen the US military murder 130 civilians in small boats off Venezuela’s coasts, culminated on January 3 in the invasion of the country and the kidnapping of President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores.

Trump’s trade war and Washington’s offensive against Latin America coincided with the electoral defeat of several governments associated with the Pink Tide, including those of Luis Arce in Bolivia and Gabriel Boric in Chile. In last year’s presidential elections, their candidates were repudiated at the polls for pursuing policies of austerity and repression that paved the way for far-right leaders to come to power.

This process has sounded alarm bells for the PT and Lula, who will be the PT’s candidate in this year’s presidential election in Brazil. At the same time, the Brazilian president is trying to present himself as a regional leader whom Trump and his Latin American allies can trust, thereby preventing the US government from interfering in the Brazilian election, as happened last year in Argentina and Honduras.

To this end, Lula has appropriated issues historically associated with the far right centered upon growing urban violence in Brazil, a growing concern for the population of the most unequal region in the world. Since last year, one of his government’s main priorities has been to pass the Constitutional Amendment Proposal on Public Security in the Brazilian Congress, which will strengthen the police apparatus in Brazil and the logic of military warfare against drugs.

Lula has sought cooperation on organized crime and drug trafficking not only with the Trump administration, but also with far-right leaders in the region, many of whom have defended and implemented the “Bukele model” of repression, named after the fascist president of El Salvador. Last August, shortly after Washington imposed 50 percent tariffs on Brazil, Lula met with Ecuadorian President Daniel Noboa, who has implemented successive states of emergency that have given the military broad powers to supposedly combat organized crime and drug trafficking in close cooperation with the US.

After talking with Trump, Lula met with Chile’s president-elect, the fascist José Kast, on January 27, and Bolivia’s right-wing president, Rodrigo Paz, on January 28, during the International Economic Forum of Latin America and the Caribbean in Panama. Justifying these meetings, Lula declared at the Forum: “Guided by pragmatism, we can overcome ideological differences and build solid and positive partnerships within and outside the region.” The electoral victories of Paz and Kast last year were welcomed by Trump.

After taking office in November, Paz allowed the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to return to Bolivian territory,

after it was banned from the country in 2008 by then-President Evo Morales (Movement Toward Socialism – MAS). On January 24, *Folha de São Paulo* reported that Morales may face the same fate as Maduro, writing, “The fear is that the [Bolivian] police, with the support of the DEA, will try to arrest him and involve him in drug trafficking proceedings.”

Kast, who will take office in March, has appointed two former lawyers of dictator Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990) to the ministries of Defense and Justice. He also chose former prosecutor María Trinidad Steinert Herrera for the Ministry of Public Security after she gained notoriety fighting international criminal organizations such as Tren de Aragua, which the Trump administration classified as a narco-terrorist organization supposedly linked to Maduro.

At the same time, Lula government has strengthened cooperation and integration with the US repressive apparatus. For decades, the Brazilian Federal Police has had close relations with the FBI, CIA, and DEA, which include the training of Brazilian agents and the financing of Federal Police programs and activities by US agencies. At the end of January, CIA Deputy Director Michael Ellis visited Federal Police Director General Andrei Rodrigues “to strengthen cooperation” and “the exchange of information, the fight against transnational threats, and Brazil’s strategic role in the Americas,” the Federal Police wrote on X.

#### **Maduro’s return to Venezuela “is not the main concern”**

Lula’s role in collaborating with Washington as it wages escalating aggression in Latin America was further exposed last Thursday in an interview he gave to the UOL website.

When asked about his relationship with Trump, Lula said that they have to “sit down at a table, look each other in the eye, see what problems afflict him, what problems afflict me,” adding: “And we will work together. We will establish agreements so that we can work together.”

Lula reinforced his nationalist response to Trump’s tariffs, saying that “the only thing I will not discuss [in his meeting with Trump] is the sovereignty of my country.” He continued: “But discussing industrial partnerships, partnerships in the exploration of minerals, critical minerals, rare earths, discussing investment, discussing increasing exports, all of that we are free to discuss.”

The defense of “national sovereignty” exposes the class character of the Lula government as a faithful representative of the Brazilian bourgeoisie, which has been hit by tariffs and wants to reverse them as quickly as possible. There is also concern among sections of the US ruling elite about the impact that tariffs on Brazil will have on the US itself, particularly their effects on US inflation and the trade rapprochement between Brazil and China, Brazil’s main trading partner.

Lula was also asked in the interview with UOL about Venezuela’s fate after Maduro’s kidnapping. Asked, “Is there anything that can be done to get Maduro and his wife back to Venezuela?” Lula replied: “That is not the main concern. The main concern is this: ... Are there conditions in place to ensure that democracy is effectively respected in Venezuela and that the people can actively participate?”

About to meet with Trump, Lula is effectively legitimizing Maduro’s kidnapping, trading collaboration with US imperialist

aggression for possible trade concessions. Lula is further promoting illusions that “democracy” can supposedly be restored in Venezuela after the US transforms the country into a semi-colonial protectorate subordinate to its geopolitical and economic interests and the profits of its major oil companies.

Lula’s statement on Maduro cannot be viewed in isolation, but rather as the result of a process in relation to Venezuela that began when he returned to power for his third term in 2023. At the end of that year, Lula, acting as a mediator for US imperialism in an attempt to defuse the political crisis in Venezuela, participated in the Barbados agreement between Maduro and the Venezuelan opposition that paved the way for the July 2024 presidential election.

After the election, Lula did not recognize Maduro’s victory, voicing the demand of the Venezuelan opposition and US imperialism that the electoral authorities in Venezuela disclose the tallies from all polling stations. When this did not happen, Lula began to advocate for new elections, stating at the time: “Venezuela is living under a very unpleasant regime. I don’t think it’s a dictatorship... It’s a government with an authoritarian bias.” At the end of 2024, the Lula administration was responsible for blocking Venezuela’s entry into BRICS, the economic bloc comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, and half a dozen other countries, including Iran.

Regardless of what Lula says, he and other representatives of the Pink Tide in Latin America are exposed as key players in US imperialism’s efforts to remove Maduro from power and legitimize Trump’s neocolonial offensive against Venezuela and the entire region. The anti-imperialist rhetoric that has marked many Pink Tide governments since the beginning of the century, seeking to advance Latin American integration to supposedly oppose US hegemony in the region, is ultimately nothing more than accommodation and capitulation to US imperialism.

The Latin American working class paid a high price in the second half of the century for its subordination by social democracy, Stalinism, and Pabloism to various forms of bourgeois nationalism, politically disarming the masses and paving the way for the implementation of brutal dictatorships throughout the region.

To prevent this from happening again at a time of deepening global capitalist crisis, the only way forward for Latin American workers is to unite across the hemisphere in an independent struggle for internationalist socialism. This requires the building of the International Committee of the Fourth International in every country in Latin America.



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