

Brazil's Lula comes to White House, whitewashing Trump's imperialist crimes

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On Thursday, May 7, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the Workers Party (PT) met with Donald Trump at the White House in Washington. The three-hour session—described by both leaders as “very good”—included a closed-door bilateral meeting, an expanded session with ministerial delegations and a working lunch. No formal agreements were signed. The tariffs imposed by the Trump administration against Brazil remain in place.

What the encounter *did* produce was a nauseating political performance by a bankrupt bourgeois nationalist leader, Lula's latest installment in his long-running role as US imperialism's auxiliary in Latin America.

Emerging from the White House, Lula told the press: “I leave here with the idea that we have taken an important step in consolidating the democratic, historical relationship that Brazil has with the United States.” He gushed about Trump's smile—“a photo of Trump laughing is better than one with a scowl, and I made sure to make him laugh a little”—and described their relationship as “love at first sight,” a matter of “chemistry.” He pronounced himself “very, very satisfied.”

This performance must be understood for what it is. Just three weeks earlier, at the so-called “Global Progressive Mobilization” in Barcelona, Lula was pronouncing Trump a bellicose unilateralist: “We cannot permit the world to revolve around the behavior of a president who thinks that by email or Twitter he can tax products, punish countries, and make war.” On April 16 he declared bluntly to *El País*: “Trump does not have the right to wake up in the morning and think he can threaten a country.”

The swing from those statements to Thursday's love-bombing was not driven by any change in Trump's conduct. Lula's shift in attitude corresponded, in fact, to an acute crisis of US imperialism prompted by the military debacle it has suffered in Iran.

Lula agreed to be used to provide international legitimacy to Trump's fascist administration precisely at the moment when it needed it most. The Brazilian president's posturing as a “left-wing” opponent of war collapsed with a single phone call from Trump—who reportedly signed off with “I love you”—inviting him to the White House.

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When asked about Iran, Venezuela and Cuba, Lula dismissed them as being not, properly speaking, “Brazilian matters.” They were questions of Trump's personal “opinion,” and he would not allow them to get in the way. “I'm not going to fight with him because of his views on the war,” he said of the invasion of Iran.

The US invasion of Venezuela—carried out just four months ago, with President Nicolás Maduro still illegally detained on US soil—was treated as a settled question. Asked about the subject, he declared:

He [Trump] thinks everything in Venezuela is resolved. I hope it is, because I've been dealing with Venezuela since 2002. ... And God willing, Delcy will be able to fulfill her mandate as president.

This extraordinary statement implies a legitimizing of Washington's crimes against Venezuela and its people and the neocolonial political arrangement being imposed by US imperialism to Latin America as a whole.

This legitimization did not begin on May 7. As we reported in February, Lula had already effectively sanctioned the abduction of Maduro by treating his return to Venezuela as “not the main concern.” From his partnership with the Biden administration in challenging the Venezuelan elections in 2023 through his friendly meeting with Trump on the eve of Washington's invasion of the South American country, Lula has acted as imperialism's prosecutor in Latin America. This preparatory work made Lula a direct accomplice in the aggression consummated on January 3.

Lula's policy on Cuba deepens this role. On Thursday, he propagated the White House's cynical claim that Trump “has no intention of invading Cuba.” Whitewashing the criminal strangulation imposed on 11 million Cubans by Washington's total blockade, Lula placed himself entirely at the disposal of the US government:

I told [Trump] that if he needs help discussing the situation in Cuba, I am entirely at his disposal.... [He] said he has no intention of invading Cuba. And I think that is a great sign, especially because Cuba wants to engage in dialogue and find a solution.

Lula's offer to "help" imperialism deal with Cuba indicts him as a junior partner in the operation aimed at reversing the 1959 Cuban Revolution and turning the island back into a colonial protectorate of the United States.

On the Iran war, Lula's treacherous reversal is the most brazen.

In March, at the CELAC summit in Bogotá, Lula had compared the invasion of Iran to the lies that justified the Iraq war:

Now they've invaded Iran on the pretext that Iran was building a nuclear bomb. Where are Saddam Hussein's chemical weapons?... We cannot go on living in a world of lies, where people construct the enemy, construct a negative image of the enemy to justify destruction.

In Barcelona in April, he declared: "Trump invades Iran and raises the price of beans in Brazil. Raises the price of corn in Mexico. Raises gasoline in another country. It is the poor who will pay for the irresponsibility of wars that nobody wants."

But three weeks later, when asked by journalists whether he stood by his assessment that Trump is a "warmonger," Lula reframed his criticisms as a gentlemanly disagreement: "I believe much more in dialogue than in war. I think the invasion of Iran will cause more damage than he [Trump] imagines."

Lula reported having spoken to Trump "with the utmost calm" about "reforming the UN Security Council" and collaborating with this agent of peace on finding solutions to "the wars taking place around the world," inviting the fox to redesign the henhouse. What tremendous hypocrisy!

Having dispensed with Trump's international criminality as not a "Brazilian matter," Lula arrived at what he had actually come to Washington to discuss: the US aim of reasserting its imperialist hegemony over Latin America and confronting China's influence.

With disarming frankness, Lula acknowledged that "the United States began losing hegemony from 2008 onwards," with "Brazil beginning to have in China its main commercial partner."

"I told President Trump that it's important that the United States once again take an interest in Brazil's things," he concluded.

At the center of imperialism's predatory aims in Brazil are the country's extraordinary reserves of critical minerals and rare earths—the second largest in the world. These materials "are very important, especially when it comes to countries' military capabilities," and "Brazil has an obligation to share with anyone who wishes to partner with us," Lula declared.

In a crystal-clear demonstration of the bankrupt perspectives of bourgeois nationalism, Lula declared: "We have no preference. What we want is to partner with American, Chinese, German, Japanese, and French companies, whoever wants to help us do the mining, to do the separation, and to produce the wealth these rare earths offer us."

This is the program of a comprador bourgeoisie auctioning off its nation's resources to the highest imperialist bidder—with Lula's government as broker. His objections to US imperialism lie entirely in the realm of *methods*, not objectives. "Dialogue is cheaper than war," he tells Trump, arguing from the standpoint of

disruptions of capitalist profits.

The so-called "fight against organized crime" was a central issue in Thursday's meeting. Lula spoke with enthusiasm on a proposal that Latin American countries "build a group" with Washington to coordinate a hemispheric crackdown. "I think we can make a great partnership with the United States," he declared.

The fraudulent banner of fighting "narco-terrorism" has served as the main pretext for US imperialism's military and political scramble for Latin America under Trump. It has been used to justify launching the ongoing massacre of fishermen in the Caribbean and served as the fig leaf for the invasion of Venezuela itself.

Lula is not unaware of this. But, unable to mount any real resistance to this crude conspiracy—which would inevitably instigate mass popular opposition in Brazil and more broadly—the Brazilian "left" president seeks a leading role within it.

"Trump likes Brazil," he then told journalists, aiming the remark at the Brazilian people. He assured it, with studied confidence, that the US fascist president "will not exert any influence on the Brazilian elections." This is not only naïve but a complete lie that consciously covers for the active US imperialist intervention in Brazilian politics.

As the WSWS wrote after the Malaysia meeting, "Lula's conscious efforts to disarm the working class in the face of the growing threat of fascism and imperialist aggression" express "the dead end to which the bourgeois nationalist program defended by the Workers Party in Brazil and the Pink Tide governments across Latin America has led." Thursday's degrading spectacle only confirms it.

A nationalist program, that is, one that accepts the legitimacy of the imperialist capitalist order, has no answer to the eruption of war, fascism and neocolonial aggression. What the working class of Latin America requires is the construction of its own revolutionary party, fighting for the international socialist revolution—building the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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