Trump designates Brazilian gangs as “terrorist organizations” in new imperialist intervention in Latin America

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On Thursday, May 28, the US State Department announced the designation of the Brazilian criminal gangs Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) and Comando Vermelho (CV) as Foreign Terrorist Organizations and Specially Designated Global Terrorists. The decision, announced by Secretary of State Marco Rubio, marks an ominous escalation of the Trump administration’s imperialist intervention in Brazilian politics, with direct and immediate implications for the country’s presidential election in October.

In his official communiqué, Rubio described PCC and CV as “two of Brazil’s most violent criminal organizations” whose “influence and illicit networks extend well beyond Brazil’s borders, throughout our region and into our country.” On social media, he added: “The Trump administration will continue using all available tools to protect our national security interests and deny funding and resources to narcoterrorists.”

Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau echoed this framing, declaring that the two organizations represent “a grave threat to security” not only for the Brazilian people but “for all peoples of the Western Hemisphere, including Americans.”

The announcement came two days after Brazilian senator and pre-presidential candidate Flávio Bolsonaro met Trump at the Oval Office, and one day after he met separately with Rubio and Vice President JD Vance, and was received at the State Department by Landau and Senior Advisor for Brazil Policy Darren Beattie.

The White House’s decision to announce the designation following the meetings with the Brazilian fascist candidate—son of the former President Jair Bolsonaro, sentenced to 27 years in jail for attempting a coup after he lost the 2022 elections—represents a deliberate act of political-diplomatic provocation. Trump is giving an unmistakable signal that the Brazilian elections should be conducted under the tutelage of Washington, with all methods of imperialist intervention legitimized: from sanctions and tariffs to the backing of a new fascist coup attempt or direct US military aggression.

Flávio Bolsonaro explicitly framed his political operation in Washington as countering President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva’s diplomatic visit to the White House three weeks earlier. At a press conference following his Oval Office meeting on May 26, he declared: “The central objective of my visit was to offer the United States an alternative to what Lula came here to do a few weeks ago. While Lula came to the White House to lobby for drug traffickers, I came to do exactly the opposite: I emphatically asked President Trump to designate PCC and Comando Vermelho as foreign terrorist organizations as soon as possible.”

Two days later, celebrating the announcement on social media, Flávio was even more ruthless: “While Lula went on his knees after Trump to try to lobby in favor of CV and PCC, I went to work so that they would be treated as terrorists, which is what they are.” He added: “A government that has no control over its own territory is because it is complicit with organized crime. I thank Trump and Rubio for quickly answering my request. Now it’s up to us, here in Brazil. And from 2027 we are going to liberate you.”

The reverberations of Washington’s designation in Brazil’s political environment were immediate and revealing.

The Foreign Relations Committee of the Chamber of Deputies—headed by Luiz Philippe de Orleans e Bragança of Bolsonaro’s Liberal Party—issued an official statement saluting the US decision and claiming it “demonstrates the assertiveness of the mission and objective dialogue promoted by the Brazilian parliamentarian in Washington.” It added that “while the Brazilian government relativizes and protects these organizations, we defend the adoption of measures like this one.” São Paulo Governor Tarcísio de Freitas—Flávio’s campaign coordinator in the state—congratulated “Senator Flávio Bolsonaro for his firm and necessary coordination” with the US government.

Romeu Zema and Ronaldo Caiado, the two other leading far-right candidates in the Brazilian elections, were equally effusive. Zema, former governor of Minas Gerais, wrote that “Flávio was capable of doing what Lula should have done long ago.” Caiado, former governor of Goiás, declared that his “only frustration” was not having reached the presidency himself to take the initiative.

Lula’s response to Washington’s newest act of intervention exposes the desperate position of his bourgeois government and the bankruptcy of its policy of maneuvering with imperialism and the reactionary Brazilian bourgeois establishment.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Itamaraty) issued an official note rejecting “any form of external interference in Brazil’s internal affairs.” Its appeal is unmistakably oriented to right-wing nationalism. The note directly targets the “members of the Bolsonaro family,” condemning them as “false patriots.” Such a formulation serves a double purpose: while it adopts a reactionary framing of the dispute as one between true and false patriots, it denies the responsibility of US imperialism for its own criminal acts, blaming instead Washington’s “bad advisors” from the Bolsonaro clan.

At the same time, the PT’s response to Washington was marked by a huge capitulation to the cynical imperialist/fascist “anti-crime” agenda. The Itamaraty note described PCC, CV and other gangs as organizations that “practice terrorism in the territories where millions of families live,” and presenting their suppression as the “priority of the Brazilian state.”

This capitulatory line was further developed by Lula in a May 29 speech, during a visit to the state-owned fertilizer factory Fafen, in the state of Sergipe. “Today I am very sad,” he said. “I was saddened by the news that the secretary of the USA, a certain Marco Rubio, said that our criminals are terrorists and that the Americans could intervene.”

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Lula continued:

> [CV and PCC] are terrorists for Brazilian communities, for Brazilian society, for the people of the urban outskirts of this country.… They disturb families, they disturb the neighborhood, they disturb the city, they steal everything the people have a right to. So, they are terrorists and we are going to combat them right here."

This is the first time that any figure in the PT administration has presented such criminal organizations as "terrorists" —a political vocabulary that belongs entirely to the fascistic right and its demagogic exploitation of the effects of social misery to promote an escalation of militarized repression and capitalist dictatorship.

The escalating US imperialist campaign against Brazil and Latin America

The designation of the PCC and CV as terrorist organizations by Washington is the latest link in a chain of escalating imperialist interventions.

In July 2025, Trump imposed 50 percent tariffs on Brazil, explicitly aimed at blocking the trial of Bolsonaro and his fascist-military co-conspirators. In August, he declared a "national emergency" against Brazil and imposed Magnitsky Act sanctions against the justice presiding over the Bolsonaro case. Last November, the US government sent a formal letter to Rio de Janeiro's far-right state government, congratulating it for the barbaric massacre of 117 civilians committed with the justification of fighting "narcoterrorism." It was revealed that Rio's Governor Cláudio Castro—who was since been condemned to eight years of ineligibility to run for public office in an electoral fraud case—had traveled to Washington in May 2025 to formally request the and designation of CV and PCC as terrorists.

Before the US government action, Argentina and Paraguay—both ruled by far-right administrations functioning as instruments of Trump's regional agenda—had already designated the CV and PCC as terrorist organizations. This decision is entirely in the framework of Trump's "Shield of the Americas" regional fascistic coalition, formally established in March 2026 as the "Americas Counter Cartel Coalition." Its aim is the full subordination of Latin America to US imperialism's geopolitical strategy.

The ruthless aims driving Washington's redesignation of Brazilian gangs were aptly presented by academic specialists recently interviewed by *Agência Brasil*.

Professor Paulo Borba Casella of the University of São Paulo's (USP) international relations faculty stated it plainly: "The classification as a terrorist organization… allows the US government to attack agents of such entities without the need for a declaration of war or authorization from the US Congress."

Professor Francisco Carlos Teixeira da Silva of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) described the broader doctrine: "The US establishes the fact that the countries of Latin America have sovereignty limited by American interests. And they can intervene whenever they find it necessary, according to American parameters." He cited Mexico as an immediate demonstration: following the designation of Mexican cartels as terrorist organizations, CIA agents operated inside its territory without government authorization. "The examples of recent months show that the classification does not come alone—it comes with consequences."

The precedent of the US invasion of Venezuela gives these observations their full weight. The fraudulent designation of the so-called "Cartel de los Soles" as a Foreign Terrorist Organization led to the declaration of a "non-international armed conflict" and finally to the bombing of Caracas and the abduction of President Nicolás Maduro on January 3, 2026.

A similar claim has been advanced as the pseudo-legal justification for the outright murder of fishermen in the Caribbean and the Eastern Pacific in US missile strikes, whose victims now number over 200.

The Bolsonaros are directly working under the "Shield of the Americas" framework to provoke a similar US intervention in Brazil. Flávio's characterization of Lula's government as complicit with terrorist organizations—"going on his knees to lobby for CV and PCC"—is the political script that preceded the bombing of Caracas.

He and his brother, Eduardo, have celebrated the extrajudicial executions against the occupants of small boats in the Caribbean and Pacific and demanded their expansion to Guanabara Bay in Rio de Janeiro. The full scope of what Flávio is offering Washington was made explicit at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), where he declared: "Brazil is going to be the battleground where the future of the hemisphere will be fought, because Brazil is America's solution to break dependence on China for critical minerals, especially rare earth elements."

The PT and the pseudo-left present their adaptation to imperialism and the fascist right as the only realistic response in face of what they claim is an "unfavorable balance of forces." This is a fraudulent inversion of the actual situation. The ruthless actions being taken by American imperialism and its regional puppets are not the actions of a ruling class in command of the situation. They are the desperate measures of a capitalist order in profound crisis, terrified by the scale of the social eruption that its own contradictions are provoking.

Reaction will continue to advance, however, for as long as the working class is denied an independent political voice. The necessary response to the imperialist offensive and the fascist threat is not a "broader front" with ever more right-wing sectors of the Brazilian bourgeoisie. It is a complete break with the entire orientation toward the capitalist establishment and a turn to the international working class, whose struggles against inequality, state violence and imperialist war, from the Americas to Europe to Asia, are inseparable from those of Brazilian workers and point toward the same revolutionary socialist solution.

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