

Latin America: The target of Trump's neocolonial offensive

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Reposted from *Links*



During its first nine months, the Trump administration has deployed warships and military infrastructure to the Caribbean, blown up small boats accused of drug trafficking, imposed 50% tariffs on Brazilian products — in opposition to the outcome of the democratic trial against former President Jair Bolsonaro and other coup plotters — and exerted extreme pressure on the Mexican government to force it to reduce the flow of Latin American migrants across the border and combat local drug cartels.

These are just a few elements of the brewing storm, whose explanation cannot be reduced to the strident and unstable personality of the neo-fascist president in the United States. The heinous televised murder of those on the small boats in Caribbean waters violates every international convention, statute and protocol on the tracking down, capture and prosecution of criminals. (No one has proven that those killed by US missiles were not simple fisherpeople, as they were never given the right to a defence.) The attacks are the greatest evidence yet that under Donald Trump, US imperialism is radically shifting its treatment of the macro-region, which it continues to consider its domain.¹

Amid the substantive changes occurring in post-World War II global power relations, the authoritarian US president is attempting to impose the rule that “the United States runs the planet.” Given this, Latin America was always going to be affected. But why are Mexico, Brazil and Venezuela the most immediate targets? While important, the argument that all three governments are, in the eyes of Trump's neo-fascist hawks, “leftist” is insufficient. In Trumpist terms, this just means any government it views as opposed to it on the political-ideological spectrum, or not a direct and subservient defender of US capital's interests, regardless of significant differences among them.

Mexico: So far from God, so close to Trump

The pressure exerted on the Mexican government is almost self-explanatory, considering the long border it shares with the US, its level of economic dependence (more than 80% of Mexican exports go north), and the power and violence of Mexico's drug cartels. The aggressive and extortionist rhetoric against Mexico began during Trump's first days in the White House. He demanded Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum hold back the multitudes of Latin Americans that have historically tried to enter the US by crossing the Rio Grande, or face 25% tariffs if she did not comply with her supposed obligation.

Sheinbaum responded by sending 10,000 troops to the border.² Pressure to take tougher measures against the powerful domestic drug cartels — now designated as “terrorists” by the US — was exerted through Secretary of State Marco Rubio’s constant threats of direct US military intervention in Mexico. During her term, Sheinbaum has already deported 26 people to the US accused of belonging to high-ranking drug trafficking groups and arrested more than 30,000 people suspected of being part of criminal organisations (compared to just over 12,000 jailed during the six years of her predecessor). In September, she signed an agreement with the US to suppress arms trafficking from the US into Mexico.

Still unsatisfied, the Trump administration has threatened higher tariffs if Mexico does not stop importing from China, which it does primarily to supplement its production of automobiles that are largely exported to the US. The Trump administration has not yet ruled out its campaign plans to heavily tax remittances sent by Mexican citizens back home — currently worth about \$60 billion or almost 4% of Mexico’s GDP — and carry out drone strikes against drug labs in Mexico. These are just some of the cards Trump has used as key tools for blackmail and threats.

So far, Sheinbaum has managed to prevent direct intervention in her country, albeit at a high political cost. According to the New York Times, the people around the president, apparently exasperated by the situation, complain that no matter how many concessions they make they can never rest, as the US seems to have no limits on its demands. Sheinbaum and her Morena colleagues, for their part, seem to have forgotten (or never realised) that this is how imperialism operates — even more so the aggressive neocolonialist imperialism of their “partner”, Trump.

Brazil: An attack that backfired

Trump’s attacks against Brazil have involved direct interference in the South American country’s internal politics and judicial system. The 50% tariffs on Brazilian exports (only matched by those imposed on India) have no economic justification, even under the crazed protectionist logic of the MAGA hawks: Brazil has a trade deficit with the US and the US market is in dire need of basic “Made in Brazil” goods, such as coffee, oranges and semi-finished steel.

Trump and Rubio’s explanation for the tariffs was explicit: discontent with the trial (and now sentencing) of their friend Bolsonaro and many of his former aides for an attempted coup in 2022–23, which the Yankees dub a “Witch Hunt.”³ Given their political nature (the tariffs were followed by individual sanctions against Supreme Court judges and their families, whose visas to the US were cancelled), the supposed trade dispute quickly became a major source of confrontation inside Brazil between, on the one hand, the government and democratic sectors, and, on the other, the far right.

The Bolsonaro family and their supporters seized on the imperialist attack to claim responsibility, took to the streets to demand amnesty for the coup plotters, and kept one of the former president’s sons in the US to lobby for further attacks. To achieve their goal, they leveraged a parliamentary alliance with the traditional oligarchic and pro-corporate right, to urgently pass an amnesty bill while voting for a proposed constitutional amendment (PEC) that would prevent trials and investigations of any kind against parliamentarians and party leaders.

They miscalculated, underestimating the opinion of the majority: their dual maneuver only fuelled mobilisations. On September 21, hundreds of thousands of Brazilians took to the streets to protest against the “PEC of Impunity” (or PEC of Banditry, as it became popularly referred to) and against any amnesty.⁴

The PEC was buried, and with it, the amnesty bill. In fact, the campaign against the tariffs, and its

openness to negotiation while affirming democracy as non-negotiable, has led to a surge in support for President Lula da Silva and his government. While it is an exaggeration to claim that genuine anti-imperialism has become the majority sentiment, it is true that opposition to Yankee interference and a sense of sovereignty was fundamental to this victory achieved through mobilisation.

Venezuela: The central target

While no nation in the region is exempt from potential threats to its territorial sovereignty, the Latin American and Caribbean country most under military threat right now is Venezuela. Venezuela and its Bolivarian revolution — buried by the authoritarianism and anti-worker/anti-people policies of the Maduro regime — have always been a huge thorn in US imperialism's side. Today, Trump's expansionist hawks seek to overthrow Maduro, taking advantage of his government's enormous internal weakness, and replace him with a far-right alternative subservient to Washington.⁵

But what explains the shift in the US' position, if until now the Maduro government has been negotiating with it since 2018, and just recently once again guaranteed Venezuela would be a reliable oil supplier? The explanation lies in the global realignment taking place, with its new distribution of spheres of influence and power relations under construction. The Trump administration wants a figure of the new international fascist far right — in this case, María Corina Machado — to lead the Venezuelan government. It does not want instability during this reorganisation process, but instead absolute submission under the new framework. Whether it can achieve this is another matter.⁶

The issue is that regime change in Venezuela seems impossible without some kind of direct intervention, which would generate a backlash in US public opinion, something that has to be factored into the equation. This makes the situation more complex. That is why they have resorted to talking up the need to militarily combat international drug trafficking: through this they seek to win domestic support for their interventionist policy.⁷ In any case, the manner in which the US military deployment off Venezuela's coast has been handled seems to suggest it is not a sustained counterintelligence activity, but rather a large-scale data-collecting operation, seeking to measure the impact of the deployment and future scenarios on the Venezuelan and regional population. This would represent a new phase in the use of advanced technology for war purposes.

The right-wing Venezuelan opposition, led by Machado — who for the first time addressed online the recent meeting of European libertarian patriots chaired by Italian President Giorgia Meloni — has called for sanctions against Venezuela in the recent past, without considering their effects on the poor. Today, she believes that US soldiers will remove Maduro and place her in power. To this end, she has offered up the nation's territory and its riches on a silver platter. Of course, Maduro is far from the best example of nationalism or patriotism, allowing US transnational corporations to extract oil under neocolonial conditions unprecedented in the country's history. But none of this justifies the call to desecrate Venezuelan soil.

For now, the US administration seems to want to weaken the Maduro government, and is banking on the emergence of internal fissures and Maduro's removal by local military officials. This would fracture the internal unity of the Maduro regime and open up the possibility of a Grenada scenario, revamped by current technological advances. The question is: what will they do if an internal rupture does not occur?

A potential post-US military intervention scenario with a government headed by Machado and former presidential candidate Edmundo González, with their openly anti-worker policies, and confronted by the remnants of the Chavista opposition, would be largely ungovernable. Consequently, the US' real objective appears to be the imposition of a military dictatorship in

Venezuela with its direct assistance, including the establishment of military bases in the country. This would consolidate its regional objectives within the unfolding global reorganisation process.

The Maduro government is terribly mistaken when it appeals to supposed differences between Rubio and Trump and seeks to assume the role of friendly advisor to the occupant of the White House. What is happening in the Caribbean and with Venezuela is an imperial policy, and cannot be simply put down to a bad moment in US politics.

On the other hand, the social decomposition in Venezuela is so profound that the possibility of a foreign attack has not sparked the expected reaction from the population. The Maduro government has activated the militias and the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) political apparatus, but the extent of this mobilisation has been much smaller than claimed. The only way to awaken a broad national front in opposition to US intervention would be to reverse the package of measures that the government has implemented, especially since 2018. This would entail: significantly restructuring wages; restoring the electoral registration of left-wing parties to their legitimate leaders and activists; a general amnesty for political prisoners and those from the trade union and social movements; and the redirection of national wealth toward restoring social security and people's material well-being. Only by taking these five steps can the Maduro government bring about a change in the current catastrophic situation, but that would entail breaking with the program of the new capitalist class that emerged under the oil rentier regime of the past twenty years.

The Venezuelan people have been the worst affected by the Maduro government's past 15 years of retreat and acquiescence to the interests of capital. Millions of Venezuelans have had to flee their country to survive, while those that remained have faced the tragedy of losing social security and wages while fearing to speak out under threat of being arrested. The people have already suffered too much to have to face the consequences of a large-scale military operation. The bombs, for the most part, will fall on the poor. Any measure that averts this crisis should be welcomed.

1 "Trump Directs Military to Target Foreign Drug Cartels", *New York Times*, 08/08/2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/08/us/trump-military-drug-cartels.html>

2 "Mexico's President Struggles to Escape Trump's Growing Demands", *New York Times*, 30/08/2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/30/world/americas/mexico-us-trump-sheinbaum.html>

3 From Trump's letter to Lula, dated 9/7/2025, announcing the tariffs: "I knew and dealt with former President Jair Bolsonaro, and respected him greatly, as did most other Leaders of Countries. 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! Due in part to Brazil's insidious attacks on free elections, and the fundamental Free Speech Rights of Americans (as lately illustrated by the Brazilian Supreme Court, which has issued hundreds of SECRET and UNLAWFUL Censorship Orders to US Social Media platforms, threatening them with Millions of Dollars in Fines and Eviction from the Brazilian Social Media market), starting on August 1, 2025, we will charge Brazil a tariff of 50% on any and all Brazilian products sent into the United States, separate from all Sectoral Tariffs. Goods transshipped to evade this 50% tariff will be subject to that higher tariff."

4 "Protests against amnesty and PEC da Blindagem bring together crowds across Brazil," BBC Brasil, 9/22/2025, <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/articles/c20epdl1v26o>

5 In this regard, it is worth reading the analysis by Ian Bremmer of the Eurasia Group, *Is the US*

about to invade Venezuela?, in GZero,
3/09/2025. <https://www.gzeromedia.com/news/analysis/is-the-us-about-to-invade-venezuela>

6 "Will the US invade Venezuela? Trump makes the question not seem absurd", column by Sylvia Colombo in Folha de S.Paulo,
4/9/2025. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2025/09/eua-vao-invadir-a-venezuela-trump-faz-pergunta-nao-parecer-absurda.shtml>

7 "US prepares attack options against targets inside Venezuela, says TV", <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2025/09/eua-preparam-opcoes-de-ataques-contralvos-dentro-da-venezuela-diz-tv.shtml>