

Bolsonaro and Brazil's "National Security Ideology": Order and Progress Was Never a Civilian Slogan

The order of the new southern star

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The apparent victory of Jair Bolsonaro in the 2018 Brazilian presidential elections has been analysed as the return of some kind of fascism to Brazil: electing dictators where they previously had to enter office in tanks. However, Brazilians, unlike Portuguese, did not remove their dictators from power. The Brazilian military gave way to its civilian counterparts. A governing structure was created in 1986, which permitted the discrete withdrawal of uniformed personnel from public offices and public liability for the consequences of their acts. However, it did not end the role of the military in ruling Brazil. For both historical and ideological reasons this was not necessary.

The military-technocratic tradition in Brazil is as old as the founding of the republic.¹ That was one reason why the Brazilian military so readily accepted the same "national security ideology" that the US propagated in its cadre institutions like the National Defence College/University, the curriculum of which was largely imitated by the Superior War College in Brazil. The "military" in Brazil is best understood as the elite managers of the republic's military - industrial - technological complex, one of the products to survive the dictatorship.

Although certainly not an accident, the anointment of Bolsonaro as a saviour in Brazil's time of troubles, is incidental. His appearance and election (unless something utterly unexpected happens on 28 October) should be understood within Brazil's ancient domestic political culture and the subordination of the Brazilian military in the widest sense of the term to the hemispheric national security ideology that has prevailed since its formulation in the late 1940s.

Comparisons with Trump are distractions, like the attacks on Trump. They draw attention away from the actual power issues involved and who actually wields power.

Bolsonaro's election cannot be fully understood without an international perspective. Brazil, although a very large country with an enormous economy, is a very closely held property dominated by a tiny elite with more loyalty to the North American elite than to its own national interests. It has always been a subordinate country in the hemisphere although the mechanisms of subordination have changed over time. Unlike in the US, Brazilian elections *are* actively manipulated by foreign governments. Brazilian media are even more concentrated than in the US, with Globo occupying virtual monopoly control over every media outlet in Brazil not controlled by a US conglomerate.

Yet there has always been a tension between pro-US and nationalistic factions in Brazil's elite. The only mass political base ever established in Brazil — prior to the PT — was the Vargas regime, which was vigorously opposed by those in Brazil who hate anything

resembling democracy, nationalism or mass-based politics. The PT emerged despite repression to become Brazil's first mass democratic party. When it was allowed to govern after the long-forgotten corruption of the Collor de Melo presidency, it was because it had attained this broad democratic base capable of winning elections.

Winning elections was considered in the early period after the collapse of the Soviet Union to be the *sine qua non* of the "victory" of capitalism. The PT then started to create its own political base in the Brazilian context- a combination of local clientelism and organised labour, but including sectors that had previously been excluded from this formula. In Brazil's federal system it was necessary to establish a serious social budget at federal level to compensate for the intransigence at state level. To do this the PT needed a public budget to finance that expenditure. And here is where international banking- a historical force in suppressing Brazilian national development- applied the brakes. The PT had to commit itself to servicing the extortion *aka* foreign debt. Like in every other country held down by "debt", Brazil could not fulfill any but the most superficial social promises and pay the extortion to banks.

So what happened was surely this: the PT political engineers decided to covertly subsidise their political consolidation and some of the social budget by siphoning funds from the parastatal oil company, Petrobras. This had to be done covertly to prevent the extortion ring (international banking and monetary agencies) from manipulating the Brazilian credit ratings and exchange rate to prevent it. So a lot of people got on the gravy train to keep this scheme working. Of course, the drain of paying all those whose cooperation was necessary to maintain this finance mechanism became parasitical so that more money was reaching the facilitators than the intended beneficiaries of the policy.

The idea of draining funds from a corporation through covert means is not new. (Enron was essentially a banking-led investor scheme for laundering money and exporting it to off shore banks. It would have continued had it not been for some personnel problems and a few accidents- biggest of which that it threatened to implicate POTUS G W Bush.) It is entirely excusable as greed when the funds are transferred to the wealthy. However, it becomes a horrible crime if the money benefits masses of ordinary people. The multilateral (US) debt enforcers have always upheld the claims against sovereign states by those who made official loans to corrupt dictators where the money was transferred to private Swiss accounts.

Hence, given the number of people on the Petrobras gravy train, this policy might have continued with relative impunity were it not for two very important international issues where the US regime has a direct interest: BRICS and Venezuela.

It is worth viewing a small segment in the late Allan Frankovich's 1980 documentary [On Company Business](#). There is an interview with a labour organizer from the US who is recruited by the AIFLD to go to Brazil and organise "anti-communist unions". He explains what he thought he was doing and what he found to be his actual mission. But his most striking realisation was that he had been sent to Brazil for this work in 1962- a full two years before the "crisis" that officially led to the Brazilian military coup removing João Goulart.

Bolsonaro is discussed as a product of the "anti-corruption" crusade. "Anti-corruption" has merely replaced "anti-communism" since the latter is deemed extinct. In fact, the case for disrupting Brazil's BRICS policy and isolating it from the Venezuela - Cuba "axis", was given

almost immediately after Lula's first election. However, it would have taken some time to place everyone and everything in the best position to depose the PT. This was certainly ready by the time Lula's second term expired. The death of Chavez and recently the death of Castro (at least of natural causes) have made it imperative to close the Brazil-Venezuelan border in every sense. The escalating war against Russia and China had already made it imperative to take the "B" out of BRICS.

The success of the "anti-corruption" strategy in legitimating the overthrow of heads of state had been proven along with the capabilities to generate synthetic social support for such exercises as elections and street demonstrations. Anti-corruption campaigns are directed against public officials and civil servants but not against the military (although the corruption of the arms trade is endemic and apparently incurable) or corporations who initiate the corrupt acts and/or benefit from them. There is a conspicuous reluctance to attack fundamentally anti-democratic institutions: Business and the military. "Anti-corruption" is really a euphemism for a broad attack on all democratic institutions since 1989-90.

It is one of the failures of the Left and *faux gauche* to grasp these fundamental issues. This is in part because they share the same "moral language" and progressive technocratic ideas about how the State should be constituted and operated. There has been a distinct inability or reluctance to retool, to defend fiscal independence, to recognise and call foreign debt (or in many countries all public borrowing) what it, in fact, is: a deliberate conversion of community resources into private cash streams for the ruling class compulsory debt financing of public expenditure by private banks. This is the main reason why the central banking system adopted by the US regime in 1913 and internationalised at Bretton Woods and in the EU, impoverishes all attempts at socialism. It is impossible to remedy the corrupt system of public finance and government operations without a radical change in the anti-democratic control over money. As long as economics is treated as a science when it is, in fact, a theology, every Left government will have its Luthers praising the slaughter of revolting peasants, while claiming the privileges of their own particular liberties.

The PT attempted to evade this criminal constraint on the democratic government by using a parastatal for social purposes- this was a capital crime and will be punished as such. It makes little difference that Petrobras could never have funded all the activities that the PT government would have implemented were it not constrained by compulsory "debt" service. The scandal effect of a rather thinly disguised evasive tactic by a slightly socialist government was a necessary catalyst to break the electoral majority that had delivered the PT solid election results.

The strategies of Langley have also matured with the years. In 1964 there was no hesitation to use direct military force to seize control. But now this is unnecessary and undesirable. No amount of protest prevented Temer exercising the office of President, despite massive corruption charges pending against him. No one can defend notorious criminal acts if they are made notorious even before trial has established whether a crime was committed. In the 60s and 70s no one in the Western hemisphere or Africa could be "for" a government notorious as socialist/communist, even if it was neither; in fact, (Goulart was no communist but there are people from Brazil who still say that he was. There are also people in Portugal who think that the 1974 revolution was directed from Moscow, although it was clearly the director of the counter-revolution, Frank Carlucci, who died this year.)

Another innovation has gone largely without comment: that is the refinement of the Phoenix

programme. The so-called “war on drugs” and its various theatres provide cover throughout Central and South America for counter-insurgency or political warfare against the poor. When Temer ordered the military into Rio the attention was given to the extreme criminality and danger to normal inhabitants, which the military was needed to suppress. Aside from the fact that the military and police in all countries are integral components of the trade in drugs and other contraband, law enforcement militarisation is a classic cover for death squads and similar terror instruments. Placing the poor under martial law is something the Brazilian military actively practiced together with US Forces while deployed in Haiti under UN cover. No serious commentator on Haiti doubts that the “crime” in Haiti is any kind of base organisation against the owners of the neo-slave state.

Bolsonaro’s election result has to be seen, together with the combined operations to demobilise those sectors of the Brazilian electorate that provided the support and legitimacy for the PT, leaving only the historically unreliable and proportionately insignificant middle class to be disaffected (not unlike the anti-Chavista middle in Venezuela) to vote for the mythical “clean broom”. Here we return to the fact that the military never really left the stage. The military can be better grasped in a “cultural” sense — all those people in the elite and supporting classes who think with the military whether members of the armed forces or not. This includes the technocratic strata and those who naively believe in “military rationality” as a pure and national virtue. But one thing should be remembered about modern politics and “independent” candidates. Bolsonaro is expendable. He can be seen as a placeholder for the wider institutional force that combines actively to frustrate any democratisation of Brazil, most importantly by preventing any meaningful self-confident lower class political organisation and obstructing anything but the most meagre attempt to remedy Brazil’s grotesque economic inequalities.

The resistance to political and economic equity, let alone equality, is a centuries-old tradition in the two largest slaveholder republics of the Western hemisphere. This commitment to enrichment by forced labour and plunder has always been the driving force in the US and in Brazil. It makes little difference that chattel slavery was abolished in the 19th century. Democratic allocation of a country’s resources by whatever formula violates the very essence of the economic system slavery made possible. Facing that deep corruption in the Brazilian and US regimes will help in the appraisal of measures and movements to create genuine democracy and maybe even socialism in the majority of countries of the Americas, which have had neither.

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Note

1. Ordem e Progresso (order and progress), the Brazilian national motto is a slogan from the 19th

century Positivist Church. The leading figures of the Brazilian military, e.g. Benjamin Constant, who overthrew the monarchy to establish the republic were members. The Positive Church was based on the teachings of Auguste Comte, credited as the founder of positivism and sociology. It was conceived as a “religion of humanity”, emphasising science and progress. This coincided with the development of modern militaries in Latin America based on science and engineering as the foundations of military education. The military’s “modernising” role and its supposed rational objectivity originate in this tradition.

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