

“The Globalization of Regime Change”. Over 100 Cases of Covert Regime Change Operations and Destabilization

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*A significant and sensitive issue that needs careful understanding is that of **covert regime change and destabilization operations**. According to research conducted by Lindsay A. O'Rourke, Professor of Political Science of Boston University, USA, there were 64 covert interventions for regime change by the USA during 1947-89. If the same trends continued in the later period, there would be over 100 such attempts by now, during the post-World War 2 period. At times some close allies of the USA have collaborated in such operations to a lesser or greater extent.*

Of course there have been similar efforts by other countries too, particularly other big powers, but after the collapse of the Soviet Union their capacity as well as the inclination for this has decreased considerably. However in the case of the USA both the capacity and the inclination have been maintained right up to this day.

Some regime change attempts of the last decade that have attracted more attention have been in the context of such important countries as Ukraine (2014), Pakistan (2022) and Bangladesh (2024), the first mentioned being the most harmful historically. My estimate is that the chain of tragic events initiated by the Ukraine regime change has, directly as well as by indirect impacts, already led to over a million deaths.

Of course not all regime change covert operations are successful. Among the covert operations examined in the research of Lindsay O'Rourke 39 out of 64 efforts (over 60%) failed in securing regime change. The USA officially supported authoritarian forces in 44 out of these 64 cases while democracy was promoted only to the extent it benefited US interests.

What can be asserted confidently is that whether the regime change objective was achieved in any country or not, the country and its people were definitely harmed, often in very serious ways, and democracy was definitely harmed too, as covert operations certainly violate the basic spirit of democracy.

In addition often it is left or left of center forces/governments as well as working classes which are harmed the most in such covert operations (although sometimes covert regime change operations are also directed against right-wing nationalist regimes which insist on following independent policies in some important respects, including their foreign policy).

Left and democratic as well as working class forces in world suffered a big setback with the impeachment of Brazil's **President Dilma Rousseff** in 2016, the imprisonment of front-line Presidential candidate Lula da Silva in 2018 and the loss of PT (Workers Party) in 2018

elections.



Dilma Rousseff receiving the presidential sash from Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, 1 January 2011. (Licensed under CC BY 3.0 br)

A recent study has confirmed widespread allegations appearing time and again in Brazil and elsewhere that the USA played an important part in these events through its highly opportunistic use of anti-corruption movement, involving also illegal actions directed against these leaders and their political party.

This study is titled 'Anti- Corruption and Imperialist Blind Spots—the Role of the US in Brazil's Long Coup' and is authored by Brian Mier, Bryan Pitts, Sean T. Mitchell, Rafael R. Ioris and Kathy Swart. This has been published in Latin American Perspectives.

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Anticorruption and Imperialist Blind Spots: The Role of the United States in Brazil's Long Coup

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This study says—

A comprehensive examination of the evidence available, contained in US government statements, English language media accounts and hacked telegram chats among Brazilian prosecutors indicates that the US was widely involved in the 'long coup' that removed the left from power in Brazil in 2016 and secured the elections for the far right in 2018.

The leading role in this was played by an anti-corruption movement called Lava Jato or Operation Car Wash. This movement was preceded by big gatherings which educated and trained potential participants in those kinds of 'anti-corruption' activities which could target public sector companies and political leaders and could secure international cooperation, particularly US cooperation.

Brazil had discovered new big oil deposits and this may have instigated foreign attempts to harm its public sector oil and petroleum interests, to pave the way for higher private sector role. President Rousseff's efforts to cut private bank profits may have been another reason for targeting her. A bigger reason may have been the strong role played by the governments of Lula and later Rousseff in protecting trade interests of developing countries, as well as their refusal to toe the US line in developing relations with countries like Iran, China and Russia. The independent stand taken on Palestine may also have irked the USA. Obama's personal dislike for Lula may have been an aggravating factor too, as also the general hostility to any left government.

As the study by Brian Mier et al tells us, in June 2019, the evidence on US interference via Lava Jato was already so strong that the PT leader in Congress, Paulo Pimenta was able to provide a dossier full of information. It included names of US prosecutors, public statements by government officials, proof of parallel meetings and events, official schedules, proof of informal violation in collaboration of national sovereignty laws and US officials in Brazil getting unrestricted knowledge of government authorities.

In 2020 Intercept journalists published Telegram communications which revealed that the Lava Jato team had repeated secret meetings with 17 (US) FBI agents bypassing national laws and regulations.

On the day that leading Presidential candidate Lula was arrested in 2018, a prominent leader of Lava Jato was heard commenting—this is a gift from the CIA.

While leading US media kept quiet about the US role in all this, the leaders of Lava Jato were given very good coverage to boost their image and present them as great heroes.

Adding up all the evidence, this study concluded,

“Over the past one decade, continuing evidence has emerged that clearly demonstrates that the US government, particularly the Department of Justice, under both Obama and Trump, played a key role in supporting Lava Jato's politically motivated witch-hunt against the PT.”

Further this study states,

“The US has long used invasions, insurgencies and economic blockades to advance its interests in Latin America. Today it has added the tool of anticorruption to its arsenal.”

All this is deeply disturbing. Firstly, this shows that the US has not lost any of its willingness to illegally oust those democratically elected governments which have been much appreciated for their role in reducing poverty and injustice.

The PT government had big contributions in reducing poverty and inequalities, but these gains were rapidly rolled back within a few years of their ouster (now of course PT and Lula are back), with the income share going to the bottom 50% diminishing significantly and the income share going to the top 1% getting boosted in a big way. What should serve as a lesson to other developing countries is how the USA operatives (using local collaborators) could achieve a government change and the imprisonment of highly popular leaders of the ruling party even in a leading country. The legal and other aspects of anti-corruption international agreements were used to strengthen this capacity and this study quotes documents regarding use of anti-corruption movements to destabilize US competitors and enemies.

Another very disturbing aspect is how a very opportunistic use was made of the anti-corruption rhetoric in a way that good leaders were turned into targets for corrupt practices while racketeers got celebrated as heroes. Thus while opposing corruption in sincere and honest ways must be a very important aspect of any democracy, caution should be exercised clearly regarding opportunistic use of any anti-corruption movements.

Jeffrey D. Sachs, University Professor and Director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University has written recently,

“Covert regime change operations are blatantly illegal under international law (notably the Doctrine of Non-Intervention, as expressed for example in the UN General Assembly Resolution 2025, 1970), and constitute perhaps the greatest threat to world peace, as they profoundly destabilize nations, and often lead to wars and other civil disorders.”

Professor Sachs has written this in an article published in Common Dreams (and elsewhere) in mid- August 2024, titled ‘Accusations of US regime-change operations in Pakistan and Bangladesh warrant UN attention’. In this article he has written that there is very strong evidence of US role in toppling of the government of Imran Khan in Pakistan in 2022 and the likelihood of something very similar in the overthrow of the government of Bangladesh led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina more recently in 2024. The two main leaders have themselves alleged such involvement of US role. Prof. Sachs writes,

“Their grave accusations against the US, as reported in the world media, should be investigated by the UN, since if true, the US actions would constitute a fundamental threat to world peace and regional stability in South Asia.”

Keeping in view all these happenings in the region, it would be advisable for other countries of the region, particularly India, to be more cautious in the coming days.

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