

# PEPE ESCOBAR: US and Iran Stuck on Negotiation Ground Zero

Donald Trump says he's 'okay either way', whether there's war with Iran and Tehran seems to be okay with that too, warns Pepe Escobar.

By [Pepe Escobar](#)  
in Paris

*Special to Consortium News*



All bets are off in the geopolitical insanity stakes when we have the President of the United States (POTUS) glibly [announcing](#) he could launch a nuclear first strike to end the war in Afghanistan and wipe it “off the face of the earth” in one week. But he'd rather not, so he doesn't have to kill 10 million people.

Apart from the fact that not even a nuclear strike would subdue the legendary fighting spirit of Afghan Pashtuns, the same warped logic – ordering a nuclear first strike as one orders a cheeseburger – could apply to Iran instead of Afghanistan.

Trump once again flip-flopped by declaring that the prospect of a potential war in the Persian Gulf “could go either way, and I'm OK either way it goes,” much to the delight of Beltway-related psychopaths who peddle the notion that Iran is [begging to be bombed](#).

No wonder the whole Global South – not to mention the Russia-China strategic partnership – simply cannot trust anything coming from Trump's mouth or tweets, a non-stop

firefight deployed as intimidation tactics.

At least Trump's impotence facing such a determined adversary as Iran is now clear: "It's getting harder for me to want to make a deal with Iran." What remains are empty clichés, such as Iran "behaving very badly" and "the number one state of terror in the world" – the marching order mantra emanating from Tel Aviv.

Even the – illegal – all-out economic war and total blockade against Tehran seems not to be enough. Trump has announced extra sanctions on China because Beijing is "accepting crude oil" from Iran. Chinese companies will simply ignore them.

### **Okay With 'OK Either Way'**

"OK either way" is exactly the kind of response expected by the leadership in Tehran. Prof. Mohammad Marandi of the University of Tehran confirmed to me that Tehran did not offer Trump a "renegotiation" of the JCPOA, or Iran nuclear deal, in exchange for the end of sanctions: "It's not a renegotiation. Iran offered to move forward ratification of additional protocols if Congress removes all sanctions. That would be a big win for Iran. But the US will never accept it."

Marandi also confirmed "there is nothing big going on" between Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif and tentative Trump administration negotiator Sen. Rand Paul: "Bolton and Pompeo remain in charge."

The crucial fact is that Tehran rejects a new negotiation with the White House "under any circumstances," as expressed by Hossein Dehghan, the top military adviser to Supreme

Leader Ayatollah Khamenei.

Dehghan once again made it very clear that in case of any sort of military adventure, every single base of the U.S. Empire of Bases across Southwest Asia will be targeted.

This neatly ties in with Iran's by now consolidated new rules of engagement, duly detailed by correspondent Elijah Magnier. We are well into "an-eye-for-an-eye" territory.

And that brings us to the alarming expansion of the sanctions dementia, represented by two Iranian ships loaded with corn stranded off the coast of southern Brazil because energy giant Petrobras, afraid of U.S. sanctions, refuses to refuel them.

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, a fervent Trump groupie, has turned the country into a tropical U.S. neo-colony in less than seven months. On U.S. sanctions, Bolsonaro said, "We are aligned to their policies. So we do what we have to." Tehran for its part has threatened to cut its imports of corn, soybeans and meat from Brazil – \$2 billion worth of trade a year – unless the refueling is allowed.

This is an extremely serious development. Food is not supposed to be – illegally – sanctioned by the Trump administration. Iran now has to use mostly barter to obtain food – as Tehran cannot remit through the CHIPS-SWIFT banking clearinghouse. If food supplies are also blocked that means that sooner rather than later the Strait of Hormuz may be blocked as well.

Beltway sources confirmed that the highest level of the U.S. government gave the order for Brasilia to stop this food

shipment.

Tehran knows it well – as this is part of the “maximum pressure” campaign, whose goal is ultimately to starve the Iranian population to death in a harrowing game of chicken.

How this may end is described by an ominous quote I already used in some of my previous columns, from a Goldman Sachs derivatives specialist: “If the Strait of Hormuz is closed, the price of oil will rise to a thousand dollars a barrel representing over 45 percent of global GDP, crashing the \$2.5 quadrillion derivatives market and creating a world depression of unprecedented proportions.”

At least the Pentagon seems to understand that a war on Iran will collapse the world economy.

### **And Now for Something Completely Different**

But then, last but not least, there’s the tanker war.

Dutch analyst Maarten van Mourik has noted significant discrepancies involving the UK piracy episode in Gibraltar – the origin of the tanker war. The Grace 1 tanker “was pirated by the Royal Marines in international waters. Gibraltar Straits is an international passage, like the Strait of Hormuz. There is only 3 nautical miles of territorial water around Gibraltar, and even that is disputed.”

Mourik adds, “The size of the Grace 1 ship is 300,000 MT of crude oil, it has a maximum draught of about 22.2 meters and the latest draught via AIS indicated that she was at 22.1 meters, or fully laden. Now, the port of Banyas in Syria, which is where the offshore oil port is, has a maximum draft

of 15 meters. So, in no way could the Grace 1 go there, without first having to offload elsewhere. Probably a very large quantity to get within max draught limitations.”

That ties in with Foreign Minister Javad Zarif refusing on the record to say where Grace 1 was actually heading to, while not confirming the destination was Syria.

The tit-for-tat Iranian response, with the seizure of the Stena Impero navigating under the British flag, is now evolving into Britain calling for a “European-led maritime protection mission” in the Persian Gulf, purportedly to protect ships from Iranian “state piracy.”

Observers may be excused for mistaking it for a Monty Python sketch. Here we have the Ministry of Silly Seizures, which is exiting the EU, begging the EU to embark on a “mission” that is not the same mission of the U.S. “maximum pressure” campaign. And on top of it the mission should not undermine Britain’s commitment to keep the JCPOA in place.

As European nations never recede on a chance to flaunt their dwindling “power” across the Global South, Britain, Germany and France now seem bent on their “mission” to “observe maritime security in the Gulf,” in the words of French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian. At least this won’t be a deployment of joint naval forces – as London insisted. Brussels diplomats confirmed the initial muscular request came from London, but then it was diluted: the EU, NATO and the U.S. should not be involved – at least not directly.

Now compare this with the phone call last week between Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and French President Emmanuel Macron, with Tehran expressing the determination to

“keep all doors open” for the JCPOA. Well, certainly not open to the Monty Python sketch.

That was duly confirmed by Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who said Iran will “not allow disturbance in shipping in this sensitive area,” while Iranian vice-president Eshaq Jahangiri rejected the notion of a “joint European task force” protecting international shipping: “These kinds of coalitions and the presence of foreigners in the region by itself creates insecurity.”

Iran has always been perfectly capable, historically, of protecting that Pentagonese Holy Grail – “freedom of navigation” – in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. Tehran certainly doesn’t need former colonial powers to enforce it. It’s so easy to lose the plot; the current, alarming escalation is only taking place because of the “art of the deal” obsession on imposing an illegal, total economic war on Iran.

**Pepe Escobar, a veteran Brazilian journalist, is the correspondent-at-large for Hong Kong-based [Asia Times](#). His latest book is [“2030.”](#) Follow him on [Facebook](#).**

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PEPE ESCOBAR: Brazilgate is Turning into Russiagate 2.0

*The Intercept's* bombshell about Brazilian corruption is being ludicrously spun by the country's media and military as a "Russian conspiracy," writes Pepe Escobar

By **Pepe Escobar**

in Paris

*Special to Consortium News*



**I**t was a leak, not a hack. Yes: Brazilgate, unleashed by a series of **game-changing bombshells** published by *The Intercept*, may be turning into a tropical Russiagate.

*The Intercept's* Deep Throat – an anonymous source – has finally revealed in detail what anyone with half a brain in Brazil already knew: that the judicial/lawfare machinery of the one-sided Car Wash anti-corruption investigation was in fact a massive farce and criminal racket bent on accomplishing four objectives.

- Create the conditions for the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and the subsequent ascension of her VP, elite-manipulated puppet, Michel Temer.
- Justify the imprisonment of former president Lula in 2018 – just as he was set to win the latest presidential election in a landslide.
- Facilitate the ascension of the Brazilian extreme-right via Steve Bannon asset (he calls him "Captain") Jair Bolsonaro.
- Install former judge Sergio Moro as a justice minister on steroids capable of enacting a sort of Brazilian Patriot Act – heavy on espionage and light on civil liberties.

Moro, side by side with prosecutor Deltan Dallagnol, who was leading the Public Ministry's 13-strong task force, are the vigilante stars of the lawfare racket. Over the past four years, hyper-concentrated Brazilian mainstream media, floundering in a swamp of fake news, duly glorified these two as Captain Marvel-worthy national heroes. Hubris finally caught up with the swamp.

## **The Brazilian Goodfellas**

*The Intercept* has promised to release all the files in its possession; chats, audio, videos and pics, a treasure trove allegedly larger than Snowden's. What has been published so far reveals Moro/Dallagnol as a strategic duo in synch, with Moro as a *capo di tutti i capi*, judge, jury and executioner rolled into one – replete with serial fabrications of evidence. This, in itself, is enough to nullify all the Car Wash cases in which he was involved – including Lula's prosecution and successive convictions based on "evidence" that would never hold up in a serious court.

In conjunction with a wealth of gory details, the Twin Peaks principle – the owls are not what they seem – fully applies to Brazilgate. Because the genesis of Car Wash involves none other than the United States government (USG). And not only the Department of Justice (DoJ) – as Lula has been stressing for years in every one of his interviews. The op was Deep State at its lowest.

*WikiLeaks* had already revealed it from the start, when the NSA started spying on energy giant Petrobras and even Rousseff's smart phone. In parallel, countless nations and individuals have learned how the DoJ's self-attributed



extraterritoriality allows it to go after anyone, anyhow, anywhere.

It has never been about anti-corruption. Instead this is American “justice” interfering in the full geopolitical and geo-economic spheres. The most glaring, recent case, is Huawei’s.

Yet Mafiosi Moro/Dallagnol’s “malign behavior” (to invoke Pentagonese) reached a perverse new level in destroying the national economy of a powerful emerging nation, a BRICS member and acknowledged leader across the Global South.

Car Wash ravaged the chain of energy production in Brazil, which in turn generated the sale – below market prizes – of plenty of valuable pre-salt oil reserves, the biggest oil discovery of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Car Wash destroyed Brazilian national champions in engineering and civil construction as well as aeronautics (as in Boeing buying Embraer). And Car Wash fatally compromised important national security projects such as the construction of nuclear submarines,

essential for the protection of the “Blue Amazon”.

For the Council of Americas – which Bolsonaro visited back in 2017 – as well as the Council on Foreign Relations–not to mention the “foreign investors”–to have neoliberal Chicago boy Paulo Guedes installed as finance minister was a wet dream. Guedes promised on the record to virtually put all of Brazil for sale. So far, his stint has been an unmitigated failure.

**How to Wag the Dog**

Mafiosi Moro/Dallagnol were “only a pawn in their game,” to quote Bob Dylan— a game both were oblivious to.

Lula has repeatedly stressed that the key question – for Brazil and the Global South – is sovereignty. Under Bolsonaro, Brazil has been reduced to the status of a banana neo-colony – with plenty of bananas. Leonardo Attuch, editor of the leading portal Brasil247, says “the plan was to destroy Lula, but what was destroyed was the nation.”

As it stands, the BRICS – a very dirty word in the Beltway – have lost their “B”. As much as they may treasure Brazil in Beijing and Moscow, what is delivering for the moment is the “RC” strategic partnership, although Putin and Xi are also doing their best to revive “RIC”, trying to show India’s Modi that Eurasian integration is the way to go, not playing a supporting role in Washington’s fuzzy Indo-Pacific strategy.

And that brings us to the heart of the Brazilgate matter: how Brazil is the coveted prize in the master strategic narrative that conditions everything happening in the geopolitical chessboard for the foreseeable future—the no-holds-barred confrontation between the U.S. and Russia-China.

Already in the Obama era, the U.S. Deep State had identified that to cripple BRICS from the inside, the “weak” strategic node was Brazil. And yes; once again it’s the oil, stupid.

Brazil’s pre-salt oil reserves may be worth as much as a staggering \$30 trillion. The point is not only that the USG wants a piece of the action; the point is how controlling most of Brazil’s oil ties up with interfering with powerful

agribusiness interests. For the Deep State, control of Brazil's oil flow to agribusiness equals containment/leverage against China.

The U.S., Brazil and Argentina, together, produce 82 percent of the world's soybeans – and counting. China craves soybeans. These won't come from Russia or Iran – which on the other hand may supply China with enough oil and natural gas (see, for instance, Power of Siberia I and II). Iran, after all, is one of the pillars of Eurasian integration. Russia may eventually become a soybean export power, but that may take as long as ten years.

The Brazilian military knows that close relations with China – their top trade partner, ahead of the U.S. – are essential, whatever Steve Bannon may rant about. But Russia is a completely different story. Vice-President Hamilton Mourao, in his recent visit to Beijing, where he met with Xi Jinping, sounded like he was reading from a Pentagon press release, telling Brazilian media that Russia is a “malign actor” deploying “hybrid war around the world.”

So the U.S. Deep State may be accomplishing at least part of the ultimate goal: to use Brazil in its *Divide et Impera* strategy of splitting the Russia-China strategic partnership.

It gets much spicier. Car Wash reconditioned as Leak Wash could also be decoded as a massive shadow play; a wag the dog, with the tail composed of two American assets.

Moro was a certified FBI, CIA, DoJ, Deep State asset. His uber-boss would ultimately be Robert Mueller (thus Russiagate). Yet for Team Trump, he would be easily

expendable – even if he’s Captain Justice working under the real asset, Bannon boy Bolsonaro. If he falls, Moro would be assured the requisite golden parachute – complete with U.S. residency and talks in American universities.

*The Intercept’s* Greenwald is now celebrated by all strands of the Left as a sort of American/Brazilian Simon Bolivar on steroids – with and in many cases without any irony. Yet there’s a huge problem. *The Intercept* is owned by hardcore information-war practitioner Pierre Omidyar.

### **Whose Hybrid War?**

The crucial question ahead is what the Brazilian military are really up to in this epic swamp – and how deep they are subordinated to Washington’s *Divide et Impera*.

It revolves around the all-powerful Cabinet of Institutional Security, known in Brazil by its acronym GSI. GSI stalwarts are all Washington consensus. After the “communist” Lula/Dilma years, these guys are now consolidating a Brazilian Deep State overseeing full spectrum political control, just like in the U.S..

GSI already controls the whole intel apparatus, as well as Foreign Policy and Defense, via a decree surreptitiously released in early June, only a few days before *The Intercept’s* bombshell. Even Captain Marvel Moro is subjected to the GSI; they must approve, for instance, everything Moro discusses with the DoJ and the U.S. Deep State.

As I’ve discussed with some of my top informed Brazilian interlocutors, crack anthropologist Piero Leirner, who knows in detail how the military think, and Swiss-based

international lawyer and UN adviser Romulus Maya, the U.S. Deep State seems to be positioning itself as the spawning mechanism for the direct ascension of the Brazilian military to power, as well as their guarantors. As in, if you don't follow our script to the letter – basic trade relations only with China; and isolation of Russia – we can swing the pendulum anytime.

After all, the only practical role the USG would see for the Brazilian military – in fact for all Latin America military – is as “war on drugs” shock troops.

There is no smoking gun – yet. But the scenario of Leak Wash as part of an extremely sophisticated, full spectrum dominance psyops, an advanced stage of Hybrid War, must be seriously considered.

For instance, the extreme-right, as well as powerful military sectors and the *Globo* media empire suddenly started spinning that *The Intercept* bombshell is a “Russian conspiracy.”

When one follows the premier military think tank [website](#)—featuring loads of stuff virtually copy and pasted straight from the U.S. Naval War College – it's easy to be startled at how they fervently believe in a Russia-China Hybrid War against Brazil, where the beachhead is provided by “anti-national elements” such as the Left as a whole, Venezuelan Bolivarians, FARC, Hezbollah, LGBT, indigenous peoples, you name it.

After Leak Wash, a concerted fake news blitzkrieg blamed the Telegram app (“they are evil Russians!”) for hacking Moro and Dallagnol's phones. Telegram officially debunked it in

no time.

Then it surfaced that former president Dilma Rousseff and the current Workers' Party president Gleisi Hoffmann paid a ["secret"](#) visit to Moscow only five days before the Leak Wash bombshell. I confirmed the visit with the Duma, as well as the fact that for the Kremlin, Brazil, at least for the moment, is not a priority. Eurasian integration is. That in itself debunks what the extreme-right in Brazil would spin as Dilma asking for Putin's help, who then released his evil hackers.

Leak Wash – Car Wash's season two – may be following the Netflix and HBO pattern. Remember that season three of [True Detective](#) was an absolute smash. We need Mahershala Ali-worthy trackers to sniff out patches of evidence suggesting the Brazilian military – with the full support of the U.S. Deep State – might be instrumentalizing a mix of Leak Wash and "the Russians" Hybrid War to criminalize the Left for good and orchestrate a silent coup to get rid of the Bolsonaro clan and their sub-zoology collective IQ. They want total control – no clownish intermediaries. Will they be biting more bananas than they can chew?

**Pepe Escobar, a veteran Brazilian journalist, is the correspondent-at-large for Hong Kong-based [Asia Times](#). His latest book is ["2030."](#) Follow him on [Facebook](#).**

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The Radicalization of US Policy on

# Venezuela

Not since the Cuban revolution, has the U.S. government played such an overtly activist role in Latin America, writes Steve Ellner.

**By Steve Ellner**

*Special to Consortium News*



Washington's recognition of the shadow government headed by Venezuelan National Assembly president Juan Guaidó is one more demonstration of how the Trump administration has radicalized foreign policy positions and in doing so violates international law, including the charter of the Organization of American States.

On this issue like others, the Obama administration laid the groundwork for Trump's radicalization, but it was usually more discrete. Obama issued an executive order calling Venezuela a threat to U.S. national security and created a list of Venezuelan officials who were sanctioned.

The Trump administration's escalation included financial sanctions against the Venezuelan government and measures against the nation's oil industry, prohibiting the Venezuelan majority-owned refinery, CITGO, from sending profits back to Venezuela. Until then the Venezuelan government had been receiving one billion dollars a year from CITGO.

The Trump administration is now threatening a total oil embargo on Venezuela and is leaving the "military option" open.

## **Throughout Region**

In addition, top administration officials have played an openly activist role by traveling throughout the continent to promote the campaign to isolate Venezuela.

The first signal that the pro-U.S. international community would recognize the Guaidó government came from Washington along with its most right-wing ally, the Jair Bolsonaro government of Brazil. As of last year, Great Britain had intended to not recognize President Nicolás Maduro after he took office for his second term on January 10, but it intended to maintain diplomatic relations. Washington pushed for a more radical position, that of not only not recognizing Maduro but establishing diplomatic relations with a shadow government.

The activist approach to diplomacy was put in evidence the day after the January 23 opposition protests, when U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo offered \$20 million of “humanitarian assistance” to the Venezuelan population. Many Venezuelans see this as humiliating and nothing short of a bribe designed to pressure the country into submission.

## **Further Polarization**

*Ellner spoke Friday morning about Venezuela on Democracy Now!*

Not since the Cuban revolution, has the U.S. government played such an overtly activist role throughout the continent in favor of the isolation of a government that is not to its liking. In the process it has further polarized Venezuela and the continent as a whole. The moderates in the



Venezuelan opposition, including two former presidential candidates of the two main traditional parties, Claudio Fermín and Eduardo Fernández, have favored electoral participation and recognition of the legitimacy of the Maduro government. Washington's actions pull the rug from under the moderates and strengthen the hands of the extremists in the opposition.

Opposition parties have contradicted themselves, first accepting in August 2017 a National Constituent Assembly's (ANC) call for gubernatorial elections in October of that year and then refusing to participate in the May 2018 presidential elections, also called by the Assembly, on the grounds that the Assembly itself was illegitimate. Hence most of those same parties refuse to recognize the Maduro government.

The Trump administration has promoted a similar radicalization throughout the hemisphere. Most of the countries that have recognized Guaidó are on the right (as opposed to the center). But previously, the rightist presidents of Chile (Sebastián Piñera), Argentina (Mauricio Macri) and Brazil (under then president Michel Temer) rejected the Sept. 2018 statement by OAS secretary general Luis Almagro that military intervention in Venezuela should be considered. Trump, Bolsonaro and recently elected Colombian president Iván Duque have pushed these rightist presidents to an even more extreme position on Venezuela.

But just as there are moderates in the Venezuelan opposition who support dialogue, which the mainstream media have pretty much ignored, there are moderates in the international community who are also in favor of dialogue. These figures

include Mexican president Andrés Manuel López Obrador, Pope Francis, UN secretary general Antonio Guterres, and the UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights and ex-president of Chile Michelle Bachelet. What they are proposing represents the best hope for this battered nation.

**Steve Ellner is associate managing editor of "Latin American Perspectives" and is the editor of "The Pink Tide Experiences: Breakthroughs and Shortcomings in Twenty-First Century Latin America" (2019).**

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## A Workers' Struggle in India to 'Make the Land Proud' as Global Unrest Spreads

This has been one of the largest general strikes in the world, writes Vijay Prasad from Kerala, as social unrest grows in Morocco, Sudan, Nigeria and Los Angeles.

## ***Workers Around the World Greet 2019 With Wave of Demonstrations***

By **Vijay Prasad**

*Tricontinental: Institute  
for Social Research*



**O**ver two days—Jan. 8 and 9—more than 160 million workers went on strike in India. This has been one of the largest general strikes in the world. The workers, exhausted by almost three decades of neoliberal policies and by the attack on their rights, came

onto the streets to make their case for better livelihoods and workplace democracy. Blockades on train tracks and on national highways closed down sections of the country.

In Bengaluru, information technology workers joined the strike. In Himachal Pradesh workers gathered to demand an end to precarious employment in government service. Workers from a broad range of sectors, from manufacturing to health care, joined the strike. There has been no response from the government. Please read my [report](#) on the strike.

My report is written from Kerala, where almost the entire workforce went on strike. This strike comes after the powerful [Women's Wall](#) that was built on Jan. 1. For a fuller sense of what brought 5.5 million women to form a wall along Kerala, see my [report](#). The title for this newsletter comes from a well-known poem by the late radical poet [Vayalar Ramavarma](#) (1928-1975). When workers struggle, Vayalar wrote, "isn't it something to make the land proud?"

### **Morocco, Sudan, Nigeria and Los Angeles**

This two-day strike comes as workers around the world greeted 2019 with a wave of demonstrations—from the “month of anger” launched in Morocco by trade unions, to the protests in Sudan over rising prices; from teachers’ strike in Los Angeles, to the potential general strike in Nigeria over wages.

An International Trade Union Confederation [report](#) from last year showed that more countries are excluding workers from labor laws—65 percent of countries, at last count—excluding migrant workers and public sector employees and others from the rights afforded to them. There is every indication that

the attack on workers' rights and workplace democracy will continue despite the unrest amongst workers.

## India

Brinda Karat, a leader of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), reflects—in our January Dossier—on the record of the current far-right government in India, the BJP, and on the challenges before the left to produce an alternative agenda to put before the people in the April 2019 general election. Karat offers a sharp assessment of the attacks on women and the denigration of the project of women's emancipation in India:

“Over the past several decades, women have entered public spaces to work and to live. They have established their talents, their skills, and their capacities in numerous spheres. There has been a backlash against this increased assertion. The backlash is shaped by extreme misogyny – or a strong feeling in sections of our society that women have a specific place and anyone who crosses the boundary is liable to be punished. These cultural walls behind which women and girls are expected to live (with some exceptions for certain classes), are stronger than the high walls of a prison. When a woman is raped, she is blamed for entering public space, for being a free citizen, for the clothes she wears, for the person she speaks to, for the place and time where she was. It is the woman who is held responsible for the crime. That is the character of the misogyny.”

Karat's interview goes into depth about the difficult

situation under the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. For example, she makes the following points:

- Because of India's government policies, agrarian distress is acute: An average of 12,000 farmers committed suicide every year of this government's rule. Unemployment is at its highest.
- India stands out for its increased inequalities under Modi's rule. Just 1 percent of the population holds 68 percent of all household wealth, an almost 20-point increase in the last five years. On the other hand, according to the government's socio-economic survey, over 90 percent of India's people have an income of less than 10,000 rupees, or \$143, a year.

It is not axiomatic that high inequality and social distress lead to a progressive politics. In such a context, it is as likely that the culture of working-class solidarity erodes, and social violence grows, producing the seedbed of neo-fascist politics. To that end, Karat makes the case that the left in India—but also elsewhere—needs to engage with the rigidities of our culture.

Cultures promoted by capitalism and the market promote and glorify individualism and promote individualistic solutions. All these add to the depoliticization of a whole generation of young people. This is certainly a challenge: how to find the most effective ways of taking our message to the youth. Then again in India class exploitation is intensified through the caste system and vice versa. To build resistance struggles against the caste system and caste oppression and to link such struggles with the fight against capitalism in terms of struggles and goals is also a challenge. Trade

unions and other class organizations certainly have to be more assertive and attentive to these aspects.

The left, Karat suggests, needs to enter fully into the struggle over how to define the terms of a culture. Questions of dignity as well as discrimination are fundamental to the development of a progressive politics. No emancipatory movement can turn its back on any form of social hierarchy. The democratic impulse must work its way into the most rigid of cultural forms.

Karat offers a clear-headed assessment of the challenges for the left in India's upcoming elections.

## **Brazil**

Meanwhile, from Brazil, João Pedro Stedile looks back at the Brazilian election that elected the neo-fascist Jair Bolsonaro to the presidency. Stedile's interview, which you can read [here](#), explains the current, ugly context in Brazil. Bolsonaro has rapidly proved correct all the concerns about his politics. Stedile believes that the only antidote to Bolsonaro is a vibrant working-class movement; rooted not only in the countryside but also in the urban periphery.

Meanwhile, our Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research team in São Paulo—André Cardoso, Cristiane Tiemi and Olivia Carolino — have a full [assessment](#) (in Portuguese) of the Brazilian economy for 2019. A new law drops the minimum wage while another set of decrees directly attacks Brazil's indigenous communities. The department in charge of indigenous rights, or FUNAI, will lose its oversight to the ministry of agriculture, which is dominated by agricultural, logging and mining business interests. Bolsonaro's Minister

of Agriculture Tereza Cristina Dias was the leader of the agricultural business lobby in the Congress. Sonia Guajajara, the leader of the National Articulation of the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil, or APIB, said after Bolsonaro's decisions: "We are the first to be attacked. We have to be the first to react."

## **Palestine**

We have to be the first to be react. This would have been a phrase familiar to the Palestinian communist [Shadia Abu Ghazaleh](#), born in Nablus in 1949 and killed in 1968. In 1967, Abu Ghazaleh joined the newly formed Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. She abandoned her studies in Cairo to the consternation of her family, who had lost their home in Palestine. "What good is a university degree," Abu Ghazaleh questioned them, "if I have no wall at home to attach it to?"

Last year, 56 Palestinian children, most from Gaza, were killed by the Israeli military forces. Focus has turned to the elections in Israel, but there is little concentration on the Israeli war crimes against the Palestinians.

Adalah, the legal center for Palestine, notes in a new [report](#) that Israel has shown no willingness to conduct an inquiry or investigation into the killings at the Gaza perimeter. It calls for the intervention of the International Criminal Court. None will be forthcoming.

It will remain to brave people to follow the example of Shadia Abu Ghazaleh and act to force the opening of a new road towards peace in Palestine. Their struggles will be struggles to make their land proud.

Vijay Prashad is an Indian historian, journalist, commentator and a Marxist intellectual. He is the Executive Director of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research and the Chief Editor of LeftWord Books.

Photographs in this article were by Rahul, an independent journalist based in Anantapur (Andhra Pradesh), whose work can be seen at the [People's Archive of Rural India](#).

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## On The Road to a Post-G20 World

The ascendance of China and multilateral trading blocs could eventually spell the doom of the G20 and U.S. global dominance, as Pepe Escobar explains.

**[By Pepe Escobar](#)**

**in Moscow**

*Special to Consortium News*



The trade war launched by the Trump administration against China may not have been solved by a 2½-hour dinner between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Donald Trump at the G20 in Buenos Aires on Saturday. But it may have opened a path towards a drastic realignment.

Way beyond the histrionics surrounding the “family pic” – and whose nods and winks signaled surefire geopolitical capital – the G20 walked and talked like a last gasp to “save” the current turbo-capitalist world (dis)order.

The sherpas at the G20 lost sleep for two consecutive nights trying to come up with a final declaration capable of



appeasing Trump. As virtually every nation at the G20 supports multilateralism on trade, nobody wanted to upset even more the real Big Boss in Buenos Aires: Xi Jinping.

The climax in any case was the U.S.-China bilateral – which carried the potential, if things went downhill, to derail the global economy.

The White House spin was on immediate negotiations – lasting 90 days – over forced transfers of U.S. technology to China; intellectual property protection; an array of non-tariff barriers; and alleged Chinese cyber “intrusions”. If there’s no deal, Washington will raise tariffs on Chinese imports to 25 percent.

Now compare that with the key take away from Beijing, with Wang Yi, the vastly experienced Chinese Foreign Minister, describing the dinner conversation as “friendly and candid.” There were also no specifics on how substantial the allegedly “immediate” Chinese buying of American agricultural, energy and industrial products will be.

Wang, defiant, outspoken, and an expert on Japan, was promoted to state councillor last year, which means the Ministry of Foreign Affairs now has much more clout over other key Chinese institutions. Last summer, Wang coined a priceless take on Trump’s trade war: “The U.S. often says that it is taken advantage of, but this is perplexing. It’s like someone who buys a hundred-dollar product in a supermarket, has the product in hand, and then complains that he is a hundred dollars short. Does that logic stand up?”

**Applying Sun Tzu**

The Chinese negotiation camp though is led by a thoughtful intellectual; Harvard-trained vice-premier Liu He, 66, who directs the all-powerful General Office for the Central Financial and Economic Affairs Commission. Xi heads the commission but it's Liu, his top adviser on economic policy, who actually runs the daily operations. He's also the top interlocutor of U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin.

In the end, Beijing actually applied some modified Sun Tzu tactics to buy time. It has, in parallel, stalled almost to a whisper the "Made in China 2025" agenda, a plan to boost Chinese domestic industry which the Council on Foreign Relations calls a "real existential threat to U.S. technological leadership."

The imminent Chinese leadership in robotics and artificial intelligence does proceed, of course, but now in dissimulation mode.

It's not that Beijing has never thought about so-called "reforms." Steps were already delineated by the China 2030 report, agreed five years ago between premier Li Keqiang and the World Bank, pointing to a progressive privatization of major state corporations and the banking system.

But this will happen on Chinese, not American, timing. Few, if any, analysts have noted that in the new NAFTA negotiated by the Trump administration with Canada and Mexico, and signed in Buenos Aires, that section 32.10 forbids members to negotiate with "non-market economies." That's code for China. Whatever happens next, Beijing will keep being demonized for "predatory" practices – the terminology of choice within the Beltway and enshrined in the U.S. National

Security Strategy.

### **Submission Down South**

On the Global South front, just as the G20 was hosted by South America, the two key regional powers, Brazil and Argentina—one a BRICS member and the other a potential BRICS Plus member—instead of shining, presented a sorry picture. Argentina, with its economy in tatters thanks to a neoliberal puppet, and Brazil, totally humiliated on the brink of being run by a cartoonish neo-fascist, were both prostrated in total submission to the “indispensable nation.”

There are some fascinating nuances, however. Argentina’s neoliberal President Mauricio Macri is really a hyper-multilateralist, pro-free trade, and cooperation proponent in every international forum but his friend, Trump, was instrumental in getting the IMF to take Argentina to the cleaners once again.

Macri has excellent relations with the notorious multilateralists, China and the EU. When the White House claimed that Buenos Aires agrees that China’s trade policies are “predatory,” Argentine diplomats immediately denied it.

No wonder, as Argentina’s fourth nuclear power plant will be financed by China, at \$8 billion. China will become Argentina’s biggest non-institutional lender after a currency swap doubles the nation’s credit line to \$18.7 billion.

The Militarized Evangelical Banana Republic, formerly known as Brazil, once again, did not fail to deceive. French

President Emmanuel Macron – already embattled by the Yellow Vest insurrection across France – reiterated that a free trade deal between the EU and Mercosur, under negotiation for nearly twenty years now, can only be clinched if the Brazilian government, under Jair Bolsonaro, does not ditch the Paris climate change Accord.

Prior to the G20, Bolsonaro abdicated from hosting the UN summit on climate change in 2019 – as Brazil may leave the Paris Accord to the benefit of the powerful agro-business lobby ravaging the Amazon rainforest. For Macron, self-styled leader not only of the EU but global environment, that's a major red line. And that will translate into a French veto on a deal with Mercosur. No wonder Macri has got to be furious.

## **Enter the R20**

Crucially, Xi Jinping once again stressed in Buenos Aires that Beijing supports “necessary reforms” to the World Trade Organization (WTO). But these should protect the “interests” of developing countries – and China still defines itself as a developing country.

That brings us to a road map that should please the Global South.

Yaroslav Lissovolik, former Deutsche Bank and IMF official, at the essential Valdai Discussion Club, which he directs, proposed a horizontal format to coordinate trade and infrastructure integration: namely, an “R20” – as in Regional 20 – that “would bring together the largest regional heavyweights in the world economy represented by 10 regional blocks.”

This “connectivity track” within the R20 format, as Lissovolik describes it, might become the essential platform interlocking many current infrastructure projects, from the vastly ambitious – and well funded – Chinese-led New Silk Roads, or Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to the still quite vague Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), driven by Japan and India.

It’s not about nations; it’s about regional trade blocks. They might well become the uber-building blocks of a post-G20 world after a definitive, world system-shattering moment is brought upon us: when the [petroyuan](#) eclipses the dollar.

**Pepe Escobar, a veteran Brazilian journalist, is the correspondent-at-large for Hong Kong-based [Asia Times](#). His latest book is [2030](#). Follow him on [Facebook](#).**

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## Welcome to the Jungle

A troubling new era has begun in Brazil with the election on Sunday of the far-right Jair Bolsonaro as president, writes Pepe Escobar.

**By Pepe Escobar**

*Special to Consortium News*



It’s darkness at the break of (tropical) high noon.

Jean Baudrillard once defined Brazil as “the chlorophyll of our planet”. And yet a land vastly associated worldwide with the soft power of creative *joie de vivre*

has elected a fascist for president.

Brazil is a land torn apart. Former paratrooper Jair Bolsonaro was elected with 55.63 percent of votes. Yet a record 31 million votes were ruled absent or null and void. No less than 46 million Brazilians voted for the Workers' Party's candidate, Fernando Haddad; a professor and former mayor of Sao Paulo, one of the crucial megalopolises of the Global South. The key startling fact is that over 76 million Brazilians did not vote for Bolsonaro.

His first speech as president exuded the feeling of a trashy jihad by a fundamentalist sect laced with omnipresent vulgarity and the exhortation of a God-given dictatorship as the path towards a new Brazilian Golden Age.

French-Brazilian sociologist Michael Lowy has described the Bolsonaro phenomenon as "pathological politics on a large scale".

His ascension was facilitated by an unprecedented conjunction of toxic factors such as the massive social impact of crime in Brazil, leading to a widespread belief in violent repression as the only solution; the concerted rejection of the Workers' Party, catalyzed by financial capital, rentiers, agribusiness and oligarchic interests; an evangelical tsunami; a "justice" system historically favoring the upper classes and embedded in State Department-funded "training" of judges and prosecutors, including the notorious Sergio Moro, whose single-minded goal during the alleged anti-corruption Car Wash investigation was to send Lula to prison; and the absolute aversion to democracy by vast sectors of the Brazilian ruling classes.

That is about to coalesce into a radically anti-popular, God-given, rolling neoliberal shock; paraphrasing Lenin, a case of fascism as the highest stage of neoliberalism. After all, when a fascist sells a "free market" agenda, all his sins are forgiven.

### **The Reign of BBBB**

It's impossible to understand the rise of Bolsonarism without the background of the extremely sophisticated Hybrid War unleashed on Brazil by the usual suspects. NSA spying – ranging from the Petrobras energy giant all the way to then President Dilma Rousseff's mobile phone – was known since mid-2013 after Edward Snowden showed how Brazil was the most spied upon Latin American nation in the 2000's.

The Pentagon-suppliant Superior War College in Rio has always been in favor of a gradual – but surefire – militarization of Brazilian politics aligned with U.S. national security interests. The curriculum of top U.S. military academies was uncritically adopted by the Superior War College.

The managers of Brazil's industrial-military-technological complex largely survived the 1964-1985 dictatorship. They learned everything about psyops from the French in Algeria and the Americans in Vietnam. Over the years they evolved their conception of the enemy within; not only the proverbial "communists", but also the Left as a whole as well as the vast masses of dispossessed Brazilians.

This led to the recent situation of generals threatening judges if they ever set Lula free. Bolsonaro's running mate, the crude Generalito Hamilton Mourao, even threatened a military coup if the ticket did not win. Bolsonaro himself said he would never "accept" defeat.

This evolving militarization of politics perfectly meshed with the cartoonish BBBB (Bullet, Beef, Bible, Bank) Brazilian Congress.

Congress is virtually controlled by military, police and paramilitary forces; the powerful agribusiness and mining lobby, with their supreme goal of totally plundering the Amazon rainforest; evangelical factions; and banking/financial capital. Compare it with the fact that more than half of senators and one third of Congress are facing criminal investigations.

The Bolsonaro campaign used every trick in the book to flee any possibility of a TV debate, faithful to the notion that political dialogue is for suckers, especially when there's nothing to debate.

After all, Bolsonaro's top economic advisor, Chicago Boy Paulo Guedes – currently under investigation for securities fraud – had already promised to "cure" Brazil by bearing the usual gifts: privatize everything; destroy social spending; get rid of all labor laws as well as the minimum wage; let the beef lobby plunder the Amazon; and increase the weaponizing of all citizens to uber-NRA levels.

No wonder *The Wall Street Journal* normalized Bolsonaro as a "conservative populist" and the "Brazilian swamp-drainer"; this fact-free endorsement ignores that Bolsonaro is a lowly politico who has only passed two pieces of legislation in his 27 lackluster years in Congress.

### **WhatsApp Me to the Promised Land**

Even as large misinformed masses progressively became aware of the massive Bolsonaro campaign manipulative scams on WhatsApp – a tropical post-Cambridge Analytica saga; and even as Bolsonaro pledged, on the record, that opponents would have only two options after Sunday's elections, jail or exile, that was still not enough to arrest Brazil from inexorably slouching towards a dystopian, militarized BET (Banana Evangelical Theocracy).

In any mature democracy a bunch of businessmen – via black accounting – financing a multi-tentacle fake news campaign on WhatsApp against the Workers' Party and Lula's candidate Haddad would qualify as a major scandal.

WhatsApp is wildly popular in Brazil, much more than Facebook; so it had to be properly instrumentalized in this Brazilian remix of Cambridge Analytica-style Hybrid War.

The tactics were absolutely illegal because they qualified as undeclared campaign donations as well as corporate donations (forbidden by the Brazilian Supreme Court since 2015). The Brazilian Federal Police started an investigation that now is bound to head the same way of the Saudis investigating themselves on the Pulp Fiction fiasco in Istanbul.

The fake news tsunami was managed by the so-called Bolsominions. They are a hyper-loyal volunteer army, which purges anyone who dares to question the "Myth" (as the leader is referred to), while manipulating content 24/7 into memes, viral fake videos and assorted displays of "Bolso-swarm" ire.

Consider Washington's outrage at Russians that may have interfered in U.S. elections allegedly using the same tactics the U.S. and its comprador elites used in Brazil.

### **Smashing the BRICS**

On foreign policy, as far as Washington is concerned, Reichskommissar Bolsonaro may be very useful on three fronts.

The first one is geo-economic: to get the lion's share of the vast pre-salt reserves for U.S. energy giants.

That would be the requisite follow-up to the coup de grace against Dilma Rousseff in 2013, when she approved a law orienting 75 percent of oil wealth royalties towards education and 25 percent to health care; a significant U.S.\$ 122 billion over 10 years.

The other two fronts are geopolitical: blowing up the BRICS from the inside, and getting Brazil to do the dirty work in a Venezuela regime change ops, thus fulfilling the Beltway obsession on smashing the Venezuela-Cuba axis.

Using the pretext of mass immigration from Venezuela to the Brazilian stretch of the Amazon, Colombia – elevated to the status of key NATO partner, and egged on by Washington – is bound to count on Brazilian military support for regime change.

And then there's the crucial China story.



China and Brazil are close BRICS partners. BRICS by now essentially means RC (Russia and China), much to the disgust of Moscow and Beijing, which counted on Haddad following in the footsteps of Lula, who was instrumental in enhancing BRICS geopolitical clout.

That brings us to a key point of inflexion in the rolling Hybrid War coup, when the Brazilian military became convinced that Rousseff's cabinet was infiltrated by agents of Chinese intel.

Still, China remains Brazil's top trade partner – ahead of the U.S., with bilateral trade reaching \$75 billion last year. In parallel to being an avid consumer of Brazilian commodities, Beijing has already invested \$124 billion in Brazilian companies and infrastructure projects since 2003.

Chicago Boy Guedes has recently met with Chinese diplomats. Bolsonaro is bound to receive a top Chinese delegation right at the start of his mandate. On the campaign trail, he hammered that “China is not buying in Brazil, China is buying Brazil”. Bolsonaro might attempt to pull a mini-Trump sanction overdrive on China. Yet he must be aware that the powerful agribusiness lobby has been profiting immensely from the U.S.-China trade war.

A mighty cliffhanger is guaranteed to come at the 2019 BRICS summit, which will take place in Brazil: picture tough guy Bolsonaro face to face with the real boss, Xi Jinping.

So what is the Brazilian military really up to? Answer: the Brazilian “Dependency Doctrine” – which is a true neocolonial mongrel.

On one level, the Brazilian military leadership is developmentalist, geared towards territorial integration, well-patrolled borders and fully disciplined, internal, social and economic “order.” At the same time they believe this should all be carried out under the supervision of the “indispensable nation.”

The military leaders reason that their own country is not knowledgeable enough to fight organized crime, cyber-security, bio-security, and, on the economy, to fully master a minimal state coupled with fiscal reform and austerity. For the bulk of the military elite, private foreign capital is always benign.

An inevitable consequence is to see Latin American and African nations as *untermenschen*; a reaction against Lula's and Dilma's emphasis on the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and closer energy and logistical integration with Africa.

### **Can't Rule Out Military Coup**

Despite this there is internal military dissent – which could even open a possible way towards the removal of Bolsonaro, a mere puppet, to the benefit of the real thing: a general.

When the Workers' Party was in power, the Navy and the Air Force were quite pleased by strategic projects such as a nuclear submarine, a supersonic fighter jet and satellites launched by Made in Brazil rockets. Their reaction remains to be seen in the event Bolsonaro ditches these techno-breakthroughs for good.

The key question may be whether there is a direct connection between the cream of the crop of Brazilian military academies; the “dependency generals” and their psyops techniques; different evangelical factions; and the post-Cambridge Analytica tactics deployed by the Bolsonaro campaign. Would it be a nebula congregating all these cells, or is it a loose network?

Arguably the best answer is provided by war anthropologist Piero Leirner, who conducted deep research in the Brazilian Armed Forces and told me, “there’s no previous connection. Bolsonaro is a post-fact. The only possible connection is between certain campaign traits and psyops.” Leirner stresses, “Cambridge Analytica and Bannon represent the infrastructure, but the quality of information, to send contradictory signals and then an order resolution coming as a third way, this is military strategy from CIA psyop manuals.”

There are cracks though. Leirner sees the arch of disparate forces supporting Bolsonaro as a “bricolage” which sooner or later will disintegrate. What next? A sub-Pinochet General?

### **Why Bolsonaro is not Trump**

In *The Road to Somewhere; The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics*, David Goodhart shows that the driving force behind populism is not the fascist love of an ultra-nation. It’s anomie – that feeling of a vague existential threat posed by modernity. That applies to all forms of Right populism in the West.

Thus we have the opposition between “Somewheres” and “Anywheres”. We have “Somewheres” that want their nations’ democracy to be enjoyed only by the “home” ethnicity, with the national culture not contaminated by “foreign” influences.

And we have “Anywheres” who inhabit the rootless postmodern vortex of multiculturalism and foreign travel for business. These are a demographic minority – but a majority within political, economic, educational and professional elites.

This leads Goodhart to make a crucial distinction between populism and fascism – ideologically and psychologically.

The standard legal distinction can be found in German constitutional law. Right populism is “radical” – thus legal. Fascism is “extreme,” thus illegal.

Trump being labeled a “fascist” is false. Bolsonaro in the West has been labeled “The Tropical Trump.” The fact is Trump is a Right populist – who happens to deploy a few policies that could even be characterized as Old Left.

The record reveals Bolsonaro as a racist, misogynist, homophobic, weaponizing thug, favoring a white, patriarchal, hierarchical, hetero-normative and “homogenous” Brazil; an absurdity in a deeply unequal society still ravaged by the effects of slavery and where the majority of the population is mixed race. Besides, historically, fascism is a radical bourgeois Final Solution about total annihilation of the working class. That makes Bolsonaro an outright fascist.

Trump is even more moderate than Bolsonaro. He does not incite supporters to literally exterminate his opponents. After all, Trump has to respect the framework of a republic with long-standing, even if flawed, democratic institutions.

That was never the case in the young Brazilian democracy – where a president may now behave as if human rights are a communist, and UN, plot. The Brazilian working classes, intellectual elites, social movements and all minorities have plenty of reasons to fear the New Order; in Bolsonaro’s own words, “they will be banned from our motherland.” The criminalization/dehumanization of any opposition means, literally, that tens of millions of Brazilians are worthless.

### **Talk to Nietzsche**

The sophisticated Hybrid War rolling coup in Brazil that started in 2014, had a point of inflexion in 2016 and culminating in 2018 with impeaching a president; jailing another; smashing the Right and the Center-Right; and in a post-politics-on-steroids manner, opening the path to neo-fascism.

Bolsonaro though is a – mediocre – black void cipher. He does not have the political structure, the knowledge, not to mention the intelligence to have come so far, out of the blue, without a hyper-complex, state of the art, cross-border intel support system. No wonder he’s a Steve Bannon darling.

In contrast, the Left – as in Europe – once again was stuck in analog mode. No way any progressive front, especially in this case as it was constituted at the eleventh hour, could possibly combat the toxic tsunami of cultural war, identity politics and micro-targeted fake news.

They lost a major battle. At least they now know this is hardcore, all-out war. To destroy Lula – the world’s foremost political prisoner – the Brazilian elites

had to destroy Brazil. Still, Nietzsche always prevails; whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger. The vanguard of global resistance against neo-fascism as the higher stage of neoliberalism has now moved south of the Equator. No pasarán.

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## Future of Western Democracy Being Played Out in Brazil

Stripped to its essence, the Brazilian presidential elections represent a direct clash between democracy and an early 21<sup>st</sup> Century neofascism, indeed between civilization and barbarism, writes Pepe Escobar.

**By Pepe Escobar  
in Paris**

*Special to Consortium News*



Nothing less than the future of politics across the West – and across the Global South – is being played out in Brazil.

Stripped to its essence, the Brazilian presidential elections represent a direct clash between democracy and an early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, neofascism, indeed between civilization and barbarism.

Geopolitical and global economic reverberations will be immense. The Brazilian dilemma illuminates all the contradictions surrounding the Right populist offensive across the West, juxtaposed to the inexorable collapse of the Left. The stakes could not be higher.

Jair Bolsonaro, an outright supporter of Brazilian military dictatorships of last century, who has been normalized as the

“extreme-right candidate,” won the first round of the presidential elections on Sunday with more than 49 million votes. That was 46 percent of the total, just shy of a majority needed for an outright win. This in itself is a jaw-dropping development.

His opponent, Fernando Haddad of the Workers’ Party (PT), got only 31 million votes, or 29 percent of the total. He will now face Bolsonaro in a runoff on October 28. A Sisyphean task awaits Haddad: just to reach parity with Bolsonaro, he needs every single vote from those who supported the third and fourth-placed candidates, plus a substantial share of the almost 20 percent of votes considered null and void.

Meanwhile, no less than 69 percent of Brazilians, according to the latest polls, profess their support for democracy. That means 31 percent do not.

### **No Tropical Trump**

Dystopia Central does not even begin to qualify it. Progressive Brazilians are terrified of facing a mutant “Brazil” (the movie) cum Mad Max wasteland ravaged by evangelical fanatics, rapacious neoliberal casino capitalists and a rabid military bent on recreating a Dictatorship 2.0.

Bolsonaro, a former paratrooper, is being depicted by Western mainstream media essentially as the Tropical Trump. The facts are way more complex.

Bolsonaro, a mediocre member of Congress for 27 years with no highlights on his C.V., indiscriminately demonizes blacks, the LGBT community, the Left as a whole, the environment “scam” and most of all, the poor. He’s avowedly pro-torture. He markets himself as a Messiah – a fatalistic avatar coming to “save” Brazil from all those “sins” above.

The Goddess of the Market, predictably, embraces him. “Investors” – those semi-divine entities – deem him good for “the market”, with his last-minute offensive in the polls mirroring a rally in the Brazilian *real* and the Sao Paulo stock exchange.

Bolsonaro may be your classic extreme-right “savior” in the Nazi mould. He may embody Right populism to the core. But he’s definitely not a “sovereignist” – the motto of choice in political debate across the West. His “sovereign” Brazil would be run more like a retro-military dictatorship totally subordinated to Washington’s whims.

Bolsonaro’s ticket is compounded by a barely literate, retired general as his running mate, a man who is ashamed of his mixed race background and is frankly pro-eugenics. General Antonio Hamilton Mourão has even revived the idea of a military coup.

Manipulating the ticket, we find massive economic interests, tied to mineral wealth, agro-business and most of all the Brazilian Bible Belt. It is complete with death squads against Native Brazilians, landless peasants and African-American communities. It is a haven for the weapons industry. Call it the apotheosis of tropical neo-pentecostal, Christian-Zionism.

### **Praise the Lord**

Brazil has 42 million evangelicals – and over 200 representatives in both branches of Parliament. Don’t mess with their *jihad*. They know how to exercise massive appeal among the beggars at the neoliberal banquet. The Lula Left simply didn’t know how to seduce them.

So even with echoes of Mike Pence, Bolsonaro is the Brazilian Trump only to a certain extent: his communication skills – talking tough, simplistically, is language understandable to a seven-year old. Educated Italians compare him to Matteo Salvini, the Lega leader, now Minister of Interior. But that’s also not exactly the case.

Bolsonaro is a symptom of a much larger disease. He has only reached this level, a head-to-head in the second round against Lula’s candidate Haddad, because of a sophisticated, rolling, multi-stage, judicial/congressional/business/media Hybrid War unleashed on Brazil.

Way more complex than any color revolution, Hybrid War in Brazil featured a law-fare coup under cover of the Car Wash anti-corruption investigation. That led to the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff and Lula being thrown in jail on corruption charges with no hard

evidence or smoking gun.

In every poll Lula would win these elections hand down. The coup plotters managed to imprison him and prevent him from running. Lula's right to run was highlighted by everyone from Pope Francis to the UN's Human Rights Council, as well as Noam Chomsky. Yet in a delightful historical twist, the coup plotters' scenario blew up in their faces as the front-runner to lead the country is not one of them, but a neofascist.

"One of them" would ideally be a faceless bureaucrat affiliated with the former social democrats, the PSDB, turned hardcore neoliberals addicted to posing as Center Left when they are the "acceptable" face of the neoliberal Right. Call them Brazilian Tony Blairs. Specific Brazilian contradictions, plus the advance of Right populism across the West, led to their downfall.

Even Wall Street and the City of London (which endorsed Hybrid War on Brazil after it was unleashed by NSA spying of oil giant Petrobras) have started entertaining second thoughts on supporting Bolsonaro for president of a BRICS nation, which is a leader of the Global South, and until a few years ago, was on its way to becoming the fifth largest economy in the world.

It all hangs on the "vote transfer" mechanism from Lula to Haddad and the creation of a serious, multi-party Progressive Democratic Front on the second round to defeat the rising neofascism. They have less than three weeks to pull it off.

### **The Bannon Effect**

It's no secret that Steve Bannon is advising the Bolsonaro campaign in Brazil. One of Bolsonaro's sons, Eduardo, met with Bannon in New York two months ago after which the Bolsonaro camp decided to profit from Bannon's supposed "peerless" social engineering insights.

Bolsonaro's son tweeted at the time, "We're certainly in touch to join forces, especially against Cultural Marxism." That was followed by an army of bots disgorging an avalanche of fake news up to Election Day.

A specter haunts Europe. Its name is Steve Bannon. The specter has moved on to the tropics.

In Europe, Bannon is now poised to intervene like an angel of doom in a Tintoretto painting heralding the creation of a EU-wide Right Populist coalition.

Bannon is notoriously praised to high heavens by Italian Interior Minister Salvini; Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban; Dutch nationalist Geert Wilders; and scourge of the Paris establishment, Marine Le Pen.

Last month, Bannon set up The Movement; at first sight just a political start-up in Brussels with a very small staff. But talk about Boundless Ambition: their aim is no less than turning the European parliamentary elections in May 2019 upside down.

The European parliament in Strasbourg – a bastion of bureaucratic inefficiency – is not exactly a household name across the EU. The parliament is barred from proposing legislation. Laws and budgets can only be blocked via a majority vote.

Bannon aims at capturing at least one-third of the seats in Strasbourg. He's bound to apply tested American-style methods such as intensive polling, data analysis, and intensive social media campaigns – much the same as in Bolsonaro's case. But there's no guarantee it will work, of course.

The foundation stone of The Movement was arguably laid in two key meetings in early September set up by Bannon and his right-hand man, Mischael Modrikamen, chairman of the quite small Belgian Parti Populaire (PP). The first meeting was in Rome with Salvini and the second in Belgrade with Orban.

Modrikamen defines the concept as a “club” which will “collect funds from donors, in America and Europe, to make sure ‘populist’ ideas can be heard by the citizens of Europe who perceive more and more that Europe is not a democracy anymore.”

Modrikamen insists, “We are all sovereignists.” The Movement will



hammer four themes that seem to form a consensus among disparate, EU-wide political parties: against “uncontrolled immigration”; against “Islamism”; favoring “security” across the EU; and supporting “a Europe of sovereign nations, proud of their identity.”

The Movement should really pick up speed after next month’s midterms in the U.S. In theory, it could congregate different parties from the same nation under its umbrella. That could be a very tall order, even taller than the fact key political actors already have divergent agendas.

Wilders wants to blow up the EU. Salvini and Orban want a weak EU but they don’t want to get rid of its institutions. Le Pen wants a EU reform followed by a “Frexit” referendum.

The only themes that unite this mixed Right Populism bag are nationalism, a fuzzy anti-establishment drive and a – quite popular – disgust with the EU’s overwhelming bureaucratic machine.

Here we find some common ground with Bolsonaro, who poses as a nationalist and as against the Brazilian political system – even though he’s been in Parliament for ages.

There’s no rational explanation for Bolsonaro’s last-minute surge among two sections of the Brazilian electorate that deeply despise him: women and the Northeast region, which has always been discriminated against by the wealthier South and Southeast.

Much like Cambridge Analytica in the 2016 U.S. election, Bolsonaro’s campaign targeted undecided voters in Northeastern states, as well as women voters, with a barrage of fake news demonizing Haddad and the Workers’ Party. It worked like a charm.

### **The Italian Job**

I’ve just been to northern Italy checking out how popular Salvini really is. Salvini defines the May 2019 European Parliament elections as “the last chance for Europe.” Italian Foreign Minister Enzo Moavero sees them as the first “real election for the future of Europe.” Bannon also sees the future of Europe being played in Italy.

It's quite something to seize the conflicting energy in the air in Milan, where Salvini's Lega is quite popular while at the same time Milan is a globalized city crammed with ultra-progressive pockets.

At a political debate about a book published by the Bruno Leoni Institute regarding exiting the euro, Roberto Maroni, a former governor of the powerful Lombardia region, remarked: "Italexit is outside of the formal agenda of the government, of the Lega and of the center-right." Maroni should know, after all he was one of the Lega's founders.

He hinted however that major changes are on the horizon. "To form a group in the European parliament, the numbers are important. This is the moment to show up with a unique symbol among parties of many nations."

It's not only Bannon and The Movement's Modrikamen. Salvini, Le Pen and Orban are convinced they can win the 2019 elections – with the EU transformed into a "Union of European Nations." This would include not just a couple of big cities where all the action is, with the rest reduced to fly over status. Right Populism argues that France, Italy, Spain, and Greece are no longer nations – only mere provinces.

Right Populism derives immense satisfaction that its main enemy is the self-described "Jupiter" Macron – mocked across France by some as the "Little Sun King." President Emmanuel Macron must be terrified that Salvini is emerging as the "leading light" of European nationalists.

This is what Europe seems to be coming to: a trashy, Salvini vs. Macron cage match.

Arguably the Salvini vs. Macron fight in Europe might be replicated as Bolsonaro vs. Haddad in Brazil. Some sharp Brazilian minds are convinced Haddad is the Brazilian Macron.

In my view he is not. He has a background in philosophy and he's a former, competent mayor of Sao Paulo, one of the most complex megalopolises on the planet. Macron is a Rothschild mergers and acquisitions banker. Unlike Macron, who was engineered by the French establishment as the perfect "progressive" wolf to be released among

the sheep, Haddad embodies what's left of really progressive Left.

On top of that – unlike virtually the whole Brazilian political spectrum – Haddad is not corrupt. He'd have to offer the requisite pound of flesh to the usual suspects if he wins of course. But he's not out to be their puppet.

Compare Bolsonaro's Trumpism, apparent in his last-minute message before Election Day: "Make Brazil Great Again," with Trump's Trumpism.

Bolsonaro's tools are unmitigated praise of the Motherland; the Armed Forces; and the flag.

But Bolsonaro is not interested in defending Brazilian industry, jobs and culture. On the contrary. A graphic example is what happened in a Brazilian restaurant in Deerfield Beach, Florida, a year ago: Bolsonaro saluted the American flag and chanted "USA! USA!"

That's undiluted MAGA – without a "B".

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Jason Stanley, professor of philosophy at Yale and author of *How Fascism Works*, takes us further. Stanley stresses how "the idea in fascism is to destroy economic politics... The corporatists side with politicians who use fascist tactics because they are trying to divert people's attention from the real forces that cause the genuine anxiety they feel."

Bolsonaro has mastered these diversionist tactics. And he excels in demonizing so-called Cultural Marxism. Bolsonaro fits Stanley's description as applied to the U.S.:

"Liberalism and Cultural Marxism destroyed our supremacy and destroyed this wonderful past where we ruled and our cultural traditions were the ones that dominated. And then it militarizes the feeling of nostalgia. All the anxiety and loss that people feel in their lives, say from the loss of their healthcare, the loss of

their pensions, the loss of their stability, then gets rerouted into a sense that the real enemy is liberalism, which led to the loss of this mythic past.”

In the Brazilian case, the enemy is not liberalism but the Workers’ Party, derided by Bolsonaro as “a bunch of communists.” Celebrating his astonishing first round victory, he said Brazil was on the edge of a corrupt, communist “abyss” and could either choose a path of “prosperity, freedom, family” or “the path of Venezuela”.

The Car Wash investigation enshrined the myth that the Workers’ Party and the whole Left is corrupt (but not the Right). Bolsonaro overextended the myth: every minority and social class is a target – in his mind they are “communists” and “terrorists.”

Goebbels comes to mind – via his crucial text *The Radicalization of Socialism*, where he emphasized the necessity of portraying the center-left as Marxists and socialists because, as Stanley notes, “the middle class sees in Marxism not so much the subverter of national will, but mainly the thief of its property.”

That’s at the center of Bolsonaro’s strategy of demonizing the Workers Party – and the Left in general. The strategy of course is drenched in fake news – once again mirroring what Stanley writes about U.S. history: “The whole concept of empire is based on fake news. All of colonization is based on fake news.”

### **Right Against Left Populism?**

As I wrote in a [previous column](#), the Left in the West is like a deer caught in the headlights when it comes to fighting Right populism.

Sharp minds from Slavoj Zizek to Chantal Mouffe are trying to conceptualize an alternative – without being able to coin the definitive neologism. Left populism? Popularism? Ideally, that should be “democratic socialism” – but no one, in a post-ideology, post-truth environment, would dare utter the dreaded word.

The ascent of Right populism is a direct consequence of the emergence

of a profound crisis of political representation all over the West; the politics of identity erected as a new mantra; and the overwhelming power of social media, which allows – in Umberto Eco’s peerless definition – the ascent of “the idiot of the village to the condition of Oracle.”

As we saw earlier, the central motto of Right populism in Europe is anti-immigration – a barely disguised variation of hate towards The Other. In Brazil the main theme, emphasized by Bolsonaro, is urban insecurity. He could be the Brazilian Rodrigo Duterte – or Duterte Harry: “Make my day, punk.”

He portrays himself as the Righteous Defender against a corrupt elite (even though he’s part of the elite); and his hatred of all things politically correct, feminism, homosexuality, multiculturalism – are all unpardonable offenses to his “family values.”

A Brazilian historian says the only way to oppose him is to “translate” to each sector of Brazilian society how Bolsonaro’s positions affect them: on “widespread weaponizing, discrimination, jobs, (and) taxes.” And it has to be done in less than three weeks.

Arguably the best book explaining the failure of the Left everywhere to deal with this toxic situation is Jean-Claude Michea’s *Le Loup dans la Bergerie* – The Wolf Among the Sheep – published in France a few days ago.

Michea shows concisely how the deep contradictions of liberalism since the 18th century – political, economic and cultural – led it to TURN AGAINST ITSELF and be cut off from the initial spirit of tolerance (Adam Smith, David Hume, Montesquieu). That’s why we are deep inside post-democratic capitalism.

Euphemistically called “the international community” by Western mainstream media, the elites, who have been confronted since 2008 with “the growing difficulties faced by the process of globalized accumulation of capital,” now seem *ready to do anything* to keep its privileges.

Michea is right that the most dangerous enemy of civilization – and

even Life on Earth – is the blind dynamics of endless accumulation of capital. We know where this neoliberal Brave New World is taking us.

The only counterpunch is an autonomous, popular movement “that would not be submitted to the ideological and cultural hegemony of ‘progressive’ movements that for over three decades defend only the *cultural* interests of the new middle classes around the world,” Michael says.

For now, such a movement rests in the realm of Utopia. What’s left is to try to remedy a coming dystopia – such as backing a real Progressive Democratic Front to block a Bolsonaro Brazil.

One of the highlights of my Italian sojourn was a meeting with Rolf Petri, Professor of Contemporary History at the Ca Foscari University in Venice, and author of the absolutely essential *A Short History of Western Ideology: A Critical Account*.

Ranging from religion, race and colonialism, to the Enlightenment project of “civilization”, Petri weaves a devastating tapestry of how “the imagined geography of a ‘continent’ that was not even a continent offered a platform for the affirmation of European superiority and the civilizing mission of Europe.”

During a long dinner in a small Venetian trattoria away from the galloping selfie hordes, Petri observed how Salvini – a middle-class small entrepreneur – craftily found out how to channel a deep unconscious longing for a mythical harmonious Europe that won’t be coming back, much as petty bourgeois Bolsonaro evokes a mythical return to the “Brazilian miracle” during the 1964-1985 military dictatorship.

Every sentient being knows that the U.S. has been plunged into extreme inequality “supervised” by a ruthless plutocracy. U.S. workers will continue to be royally screwed as are French workers under “liberal” Macron. So would Brazilian workers under Bolsonaro. To borrow then from Yeats, what rough beast, in this darkest hour, slouches towards freedom to be born?

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