

Bolsonaro's Rallies: 'Democratic Security' Exercise or Preparation for a 'Self-Coup'?

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Is Bolsonaro Following In Trump's Footsteps?

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's supporters [rallied](#) throughout the country on their nation's independence day following his call to send a strong message to what he claims is a cliquish elite that's secretly opposing his agenda. He blames his currently low approval ratings and attendant re-election challenges next year on their alleged efforts. Bolsonaro also believes that the electronic voting machines planned to be used during that time might be rigged and is thus demanding paper ballots instead. His ability to inspire massive rallies over such contentious political issues raises concerns among some that he might be trying to replicate the so-called "insurrection" that former US President Donald Trump was accused of earlier this year.

The Relevance Of Hybrid War Theory

There are two interpretations of what's happening: it's either a "[Democratic Security](#)" exercise aimed at preserving the country's democratic fundamentals (as imperfectly as they presently exist) or subverting them through a "self-coup" that could even set the pretext for what some fear might be an actual military coup in his support. Both explanations share their common origin in [HybridWar](#) theory, especially its [Color Revolution](#) dimension of instrumentalizing protest movements. In its most popular form, an external actor exploits preexisting identity tensions (in this case political and socio-economic ones) for strategic ends via these means, but the technology has proliferated to the point where domestic actors like Bolsonaro can now employ it too.

Miller's Suspicious Detainment

Adding a wrinkle to that strategic observation is this week's [temporary detainment](#) of Jason Miller, Trump's former spokesman and current CEO of the new social media platform Gettr, at the alleged behest of one of the Supreme Court justices presently investigating Bolsonaro. Miller was in the country to attend the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) there and personally met with Bolsonaro during his trip. Speculation abounds about whether Miller might have potentially sought to advise the Brazilian leader about his rumored plans, be they of a "Democratic Security" or "self-coup" nature, hence the alleged reason why he was temporarily detained for questioning.

Ideological Collusion (And If So, Between Whom)?

This development raises more questions than it answers. It remains unclear whether there's any collusion between Miller and Bolsonaro, let alone what the latter might even be planning and whether Miller might be acting as a proxy for Trump and/or other Americans ideologically aligned with the Brazilian leader. Considering that Miller and those who he's associated with back home aren't on positive terms with incumbent US President Joe Biden's administration, it also makes one wonder whether his detainment might have been coordinated with some American political officials, whether to send a message to him and/or as part of an unstated but jointly waged struggle against those who represent the ideologies that they're opposed to.

Complicated US-Brazilian Ties Under Biden

Biden is completely against the phenomenon of so-called "Trumpism" that Bolsonaro represents, though his administration has also [reportedly](#) tried to convince the Brazilian leader to ban Huawei in exchange for his country becoming a NATO partner. US-Brazilian relations are complicated despite Washington being [responsible](#) for Bolsonaro's rise to power in the first place through its earlier [Hybrid War on Brazil](#) that was mostly waged through lawfare, Color Revolution, and of course infowar means. The US always demands that its "partners" fully comply with its demands and is thus very perturbed that Trumpist Bolsonaro of all leaders doesn't have more of an aggressive policy towards China despite having previously campaigned on such.

Trouble Brewing

Pragmatic agricultural-resource-technological ties that ultimately bolster Brazilian strategic sovereignty are responsible for why that hasn't happened, contrary to many observers' expectations who thought that the seemingly ideologically obsessed Bolsonaro would sacrifice these interests in the name of a US-backed anti-Chinese crusade. Concurrent with this, there's no denying that he's become genuinely unpopular over the past year as a result of his controversial policies, which instead of dividing the electorate as potentially planned in order to more effectively rule them in a Machiavellian fashion actually seem to have had the opposite effect. This raises the odds that former President Luiz Inacio Lula Da Silva might win if he decides to run next year.

What Exactly Is "Democratic Security"?

Returning to the article's question of whether Bolsonaro's rallies represent a "Democratic Security" exercise or preparation for a "self-coup", more insight should be shared about what these concepts represent, both in general and in the Brazilian context. The first refers to the instrumentalization of protest movements for the purpose of upholding the political

system as it's understood (key word) to be, whether this is objectively the case or simply the way in which relevant actors perceive it. For instance, the "Stop The Steal" rallies that ultimately inspired the [6 January events](#) were premised on pressuring officials to reverse what their participants sincerely believed to be a rigged election. Bolsonaro's emerging narrative implies something similar.

And What's A "Self-Coup"?

The second concept concerns the instrumentalization of protest movements to either directly subvert the political system contrary to how it's understood (once again, that's the keyword) to be, whether this is objectively the case or simply the way in which it's perceived. Continuing with the Trump example, his opponents claimed that the participants of the 6 January events sincerely desired to overthrow the constitutional order after storming the Capital no matter how practically impossible it was for such a single act to achieve that outcome. In the Brazilian context, something similar might be in the works for those same ends with similarly impossible odds of success or perhaps to serve as the pretext for a pro-Bolsonaro military coup.

Entrenched Elite

There are some broader themes that these strategic thoughts touch upon which should also be addressed. Firstly, it's ironic that Bolsonaro is waging an increasingly intense political war against what he claims is a cliquish elite that's secretly against him since such an elite had previously helped him rise to power with American backing. It's unclear to what extent they're truly sabotaging his agenda and how much such claims might just be self-interested rhetoric to excuse his declining approval rating, but there should be no denying that much of the elite is indeed corrupt and potentially still under US influence. On that topic, another theme is worthwhile pondering, and that's the extent of US influence over recent events.

The Influence Of The New Cold War

Although Bolsonaro is a fiercely pro-US leader, he nevertheless has serious ideological differences with the Biden Administration, both in general and in particular when it comes to Brazil's role in the New Cold War between the US and China. His refusal to completely bend to his patron's political will with respect to banning Huawei in exchange for his country becoming a NATO partner must have sent alarm bells ringing in Washington. Bolsonaro's ties with Miller-connected Trump and other US conservatives fertilize the ground for rumors to abound about whether there might be some collusion between these ideologically allied movements. This also raises questions about whether the Biden Administration might have played a role in Miller's detainment.

US-Backed Lawfare 2.0?

Building upon that train of thought is the third theme that should be explored more deeply by intrepid observers and it's whether the US is once again instrumentalizing its lawfare tools in the Brazilian Supreme Court against the country's incumbent leader. This possibility is in spite of Bolsonaro originally being brought to power partially as a result of such means "hacking" Brazil's democracy and the its former government's own "Democratic Security" rallies at the time (albeit of a much less threatening nature) failing to offset this course of events. To be absolutely clear, this doesn't imply that the current opposition is colluding with the US but it does suggest that the US might be deliberating whether its interests could

best be served through them instead.

The Opposition's Response

This leads to the fourth theme of wondering how the opposition will react to these increasingly complicated developments. Genuine grievances against Bolsonaro and his (former?) US backers [veritably exist](#) and none of the above-mentioned concerns should ever be exploited to discredit that. Nevertheless, the scenario is now emerging whereby it's possible that the US might be preparing for – if not actively working towards – a post-Bolsonaro future considering his low approval ratings as of late and especially his refusal to ban Huawei. Whether through legitimately democratic means during next year's elections or via lawfare and possibly even fraud, it can't be discounted that the US is now once again working towards regime change in Brazil.

The Military Factor

The next point to ponder is what role the military might play in shaping the strategic situation. While Bolsonaro-led Brazil is considered to be firmly in the US' camp, it's still thus far refusing to go as far as sanctioning Huawei and thus risking the complete rupture of its ties with China which have so far helped preserve some degree of strategic sovereignty. Some speculate that certain influential military forces are opposed to this Faustian deal despite they themselves generally being pro-US in nature, just not to the ultra-extreme point of sacrificing their country's objective interests for their partner's sake. It remains to be seen whether they'd play a positive or negative role in Bolsonaro's speculative plans ahead of next year's elections.

The Two Most Important Variables

The two most important variables to watch are therefore the lawfare and military ones since these will likely be the decisive factors determining whether Bolsonaro's "Democratic Security" or "self-coup" plans succeed. If they're both on the same side against him, then he stands no chance of pulling either scenario off, but if they remain divided as seems to be the case at least at this moment, then the situation will remain much more dynamic and thus uncertain, especially when considering the fact that the opposition will likely stage their own "Democratic Security" rallies in an attempt to thwart what they believe is his planned "self-coup". The self-sustaining cycle of both sides instrumentalizing protest movements will contribute to Brazil's destabilization.

"The New Normal"

Intense political warfare, even if only of a mostly non-kinetic nature for now at least, might very well become the so-called "new normal" in the coming future unless something major happens to drastically shift the scales of success in one or another direction. This could be the Supreme Court doing something serious against Bolsonaro and/or the military getting more directly involved, whether in Bolsonaro's support or against him. The only conclusion that can confidently be arrived at right now is that the Hybrid War on Brazil never really ended but simply evolved, recently influenced to an uncertain extent by the US' own domestic political changes brought about [by similar processes](#) as well as the changing geopolitics of the New Cold War.

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