

Washington Wants Brazil to Become a NATO Partner, but this Does Not Favor Brazilian Interests

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Brazil and the US seem to be getting closer once again, after a short period of diplomatic tensions. Recently, US officials expressed their support for Brazil to be promoted to the status of NATO's global partner. Due to Biden's criticisms against Bolsonaro (motivated by the environmental crimes committed in the Amazon Forest), the Brazilian government reversed a part of its anti-China narrative in 2021 and allowed Huawei's participation in the Brazilian 5G market. Now, apparently, the US wants to “regain” Brazil as a regional ally, aiming to prevent China's advance into South America. Also, with Latin America gradually returning to the center of Washington's geopolitical interests, Brazil's role as a US satellite becomes progressively more important, considering Brazil's strategic value in building an encirclement strategy against Venezuela.

Last week, a committee of American officials traveled to Brazil's capital, Brasilia, to initiate a series of strategic dialogues with representatives of the Brazilian government. On the occasion, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan demonstrated the US support for Brazil to become a global NATO partner. The country's entry into the Western military alliance's cooperation program was discussed between Sullivan and Brazilian Defense Minister Walter Braga Netto. Subsequently, Sullivan met with President Bolsonaro himself, reinforcing bilateral diplomacy, offering the proposal and showing his personal support for this measure.

Sullivan imposed only one condition on Brazil: the return of the veto to Huawei. Chinese participation in the Brazilian 5G is considered a frontal threat to American interests as it represents an expansion of the influence of one of Washington's biggest geopolitical rivals into an extremely strategic territory within the American continent itself. For the US, banishing China from the central and southern subcontinents is crucial to ensuring its regional hegemony – and it is precisely regional hegemony that the US is trying to consolidate by growing NATO's presence in South America. In this sense, the American adviser's message was clear: one thing depends on the other – to enter the NATO program, Brazil needs to ban the Chinese company, without a third way.

To avoid conflicts and try to maintain the current 5G market scenario, Brazilian officials tried

to negotiate some alternatives, proposing ways to limit the Chinese presence without resorting to a total ban, but Sullivan denied any negotiations in this regard. Later, the American Embassy reaffirmed the adviser's words and published a note showing that it was very concerned about the national security of countries that allow Huawei to act (maintaining Donald Trump's narrative on the use of 5G services for espionage by Beijing). The Chinese Embassy in Brasilia vehemently repudiated the American attitude and also published a note, stating that the Americans want to "sabotage the Sino-Brazilian partnership", in addition to saying that the US is a "hacker empire" and the real threat to global cybersecurity.

Within the Bolsonaro team, there are many different opinions on the topic. In fact, Bolsonaro personally believes in all anti-China narratives and supports the banishment of Huawei, but he had to give up his ideologically motivated plans and think pragmatically in recent months as he no longer had American backing. Now, this backing resurfaces and then the Brazilian president will have to decide between maintaining the status quo or resuming the policy of automatic alignment with Washington. The Brazilian Intelligence Agency is also in favor of the ban because it fears possible threats to national security, but the Armed Forces, on the other hand, are not unanimously in favor of the measure, as they know that it is important for national defense to maintain peaceful relations with the US rivals. With this scenario, the debate is far from over.

Bolsonaro has always tried to guarantee Brazil's entry into NATO (as a member or partner) and this was one of the main promises of his electoral campaign. Former President Trump himself never promised Brazil a role in the alliance and with Biden the project became even more distant – now, suddenly, it is the Biden government itself that makes the idea come back with much more force, which is not by chance: occupying Brazil is important for the US to be able to curtail Chinese influence on the American continent and, even more, consolidate a strategy of encirclement against Venezuela.

US interest in Brazil emerges as a continuation of recent events in the Americas. The assassination of the Haitian president, the attempted colorful revolution in Cuba and the crisis with foreign ships along the Venezuelan coast are multiple aspects of the American new incursion on its own continent. Washington is trying to neutralize the territories where it disputes influence with China (such as Brazil) and, as a result, suffocate "unrecoverable" governments (such as Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua). "Regaining" Brazil is positive for the Americans in this double sense: reducing Chinese influence and encircling Caracas.

It is more likely that Bolsonaro will accept the proposal, considering that not only he but also the Intelligence Agency, some ministers and many parliamentarians want Brazil's entry into NATO. But the measure will encounter resistance, as a part of the military has a pure pragmatic view and knows that accepting the proposal means exchanging peaceful relations with major world powers, such as China and Russia, for a subordinate role in the alliance, which seems to favor only the US. In addition, it must be remembered that China is Brazil's largest trading partner and that Brazilian participation in NATO would represent a real blow to bilateral relations. In this sense, the Brazilian business and agrarian sector will severely oppose the acceptance of the American offer.

Certainly, there will be even more polarization in the Brazilian scenario in the coming months.

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