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By Andrea Lobo
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US Secretary of State Pompeo announces “new era” of US-Latin America reaction

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced “a new era in the relationship” between the US and Latin America on Friday at the second Western Hemisphere Counterterrorism Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He repeated this same theme at each stop of his Latin America tour last week, which also included Ecuador, Mexico and El Salvador.

Pompeo demanded greater censorship and spying, and a closer alignment with Washington’s drive against its geopolitical rivals in South America. He also called for the Mexican and Salvadoran governments to step up their anti-immigrant measures.

In an interview with *Infobae* upon his arrival in Argentina, Pompeo, the former chief of the CIA, declared that the purpose of his visit to Argentina was “to help the whole region take down the threat of terror from a number of sources, but certainly from Iran.” When asked about popular opposition to a US presence harming the electoral prospects of Macri, Pompeo responded that “times are changing.”

Argentina is facing its second year of sharp economic contraction and hyperinflation that led the right-wing Mauricio Macri administration to accept the largest IMF loan in history and a correspondingly draconian austerity program. Macri has faced six national strikes since 2016.

The “counterterrorism” summit was organized on the pretext of the 25th anniversary of the bombing of the Israel-Argentina Mutual Association (AMIA), which killed 85 people and left 300 injured. Citing this incident and the bombing of the Israeli embassy in 1992,

leaving 29 dead and 242 injured, the Macri administration designated Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shi'a militia tied to Iran, a "terrorist organization."

Pompeo announced a \$7 million reward for information leading to an alleged perpetrator of both attacks, Lebanese-Colombian Salman Raouf Salman. Neither the financial nor law-enforcement agencies in Argentina or the US have presented any evidence to establish the material, financial or logistical involvement of Salman or, for that matter, anyone else.

At the summit, calls for "lots of international cooperation" were paired with efforts to equate "terrorism" with any form of "extremist" opposition. In the opening address, Argentine Foreign Minister Jorge Faurie proclaimed, "We are worried in our region because we see people acting to keep ties to terrorist organizations and other radicalized elements and also seeking financing." He then called for states to, "above all, control the technologies that diffuse ideas of hate and poison."

The joint communiqué finally called for "preventing and countering violent extremism" and "the risk of terrorist groups profiting from situations of institutional weakness, internal and other conflicts."

Argentina is well known for having overcome "situations of institutional weakness" in the name of combating terrorism and with US assistance. This was the case with the military regime that seized power in the country in the 1970s, organizing the murder and disappearance of over 30,000 workers, students and other perceived opponents of the dictatorship.

A separate agreement was reached between Argentina, Paraguay, Brazil and the US to deploy the military to and increase monitoring of the "tri-border" region of the first three countries, using the fact that it has been home to a large Lebanese Shi'a community since the early 20th century to describe it as a Hezbollah stronghold.

On Saturday, Pompeo arrived in Ecuador, which has also entered into a recession, immediately after a national strike in opposition to the Lenín Moreno administration's rapprochement with US imperialism, the country's IMF loan and structural program, the use by the Pentagon of Ecuador's Galapagos Islands as an air base, and the "rendition of Julian Assange to the US."

After announcing a deal with Moreno on cybersecurity cooperation, Pompeo made declarations on Assange, the WikiLeaks founder, to *El Universo*. "We made the request and he'll be extradited to the US," he said. "I can't comment any more, but my government believes it's important that this man, who was a risk to the world and

endangered American soldiers, be brought before justice.” Pompeo, an evangelical fanatic, had called Assange “a demon” in 2017, and his media organization a “hostile non-state intelligence agency.”

The offensive against WikiLeaks, which published documents exposing US war crimes, along with the corruption and conspiracies of its puppet regimes—the rot of contemporary capitalist relations—is the spearhead of the attacks on freedom of speech and the press. The fear and persecution of Assange is driven by the fear of the ruling class of events like the 2011 Tunisian revolution, triggered by the publication of diplomatic cables by WikiLeaks, and the ongoing mass protests in Puerto Rico, detonated by a leak of explosive text messages by Governor Ricardo Rosselló, revealing the disdain toward the popular masses on the part of the entire ruling clique.

In fact, the betrayal of Assange by the Ecuadorian government, as part of its turn to US imperialism and more authoritarian forms of rule, was preceded by an anti-terrorism hysteria.

A bombing near a police station in January, a car bomb in February and a killing of journalists in March were quickly and unfoundedly attributed by the police to Colombian guerrillas. They were exploited to re-invite the FBI, USAID, and the US Office for Security Cooperation into the country, while the government deployed more than 7,000 troops internally. On June 27-28, US Vice-President Mike Pence met Moreno in Quito and reached a series of security initiatives centered on “security of supply chains between the United States and Ecuador.” This was accompanied by accelerated steps to isolate, monitor and eventually expel Assange from the Ecuadorian embassy in London in April 2019.

On his stop in Mexico, Pompeo applauded the deployment of 21,000 troops by the “left” government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, with the aim of diminishing by one-third the number of migrants reaching the border with the US. Nonetheless, On Sunday, on “Fox and Friends,” Pompeo declared, with utter gangsterism: “President Trump put America in a position where we can convince their government that this is something in their best interest and ours.”

He added that he communicated to Mexican and Salvadoran officials that the goal is to have “zero” migrants reach the US border. On Tuesday, President Donald Trump threatened Guatemala with tariffs, remittance fees and a “ban” unless it agrees to become a

“third safe country,” which would prevent refugees crossing Guatemala northward to seek temporary or permanent asylum in Mexico.

A March 1 Congressional Research Service report notes, “The Trump administration’s approach toward Latin America and the Caribbean has focused heavily on US national security objectives,” explaining that cuts in State Department aid, including security, “could be offset by increased support from DOD [Department of Defense],” citing legislation that authorizes the DOD “to train and equip foreign security forces for counterterrorism operations,” among other purposes. The bulk of aid to Latin America and the Caribbean for 2017, according to the most recently available data, consisted of more than \$250 million provided by the DOD.

The report explicitly notes that in face of a “potential decline in US influence” in the region, such aid “has enabled the US government to influence partner countries’ policies” in the face “a leadership vacuum in the region that other powers have begun to fill,” citing the \$140 billion in Chinese credit to the region since 2005.

In fact, the latest tour follows a trip by Pompeo to Chile, Paraguay, Peru and Colombia to rally governments behind the calls for a military coup against Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro. Pompeo’s statements focused on China’s “predatory” and “malign” presence, noting: “Make no mistake, the commercial activities of China are often profoundly connected to themes of national security.”

Pompeo’s “new era” heralds a headlong assault by imperialism and its Latin American client elites against the working class amid an initial resurgence of the class struggle. Driven by the deepening crisis of American capitalism, Washington is also escalating its confrontation with geopolitical rivals to offset the decline of its regional and global hegemony.

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