

## U.S. Secretary of State Praised and Criticized During Quick Visit to Brazil

*The visit seeks to highlight President Trump's continuing support for a democratic government in Venezuela and garner electoral support from Hispanic-Americans at home.*

By **Lise Alves** - September 19, 2020

SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL – On the **second day of his four day mission to countries in South America**, U.S. Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, arrived in Boa Vista, Roraima, where he visited Venezuelan refugees and met with Brazilian Foreign Relations Minister, Ernesto Araujo.



*U.S. Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo (left) and Brazil's Foreign Relations Minister, Ernesto Araujo, speak to journalists in Boa Vista, Roraima, photo internet reproduction.*

The visit, according to analysts, is linked to the Trump Administration's domestic and international objectives.

"The timing of the visit is undeniably tied to the (November) elections in the United States," Felipe Loureiro, professor at the Institute of International Relations of the University of Sao Paulo (USP) tells The Rio Times. "Florida, one of the key swing states, has a large number of Cuban-American voters who are anti-socialist and happy to see Trump get tough with Maduro."

With the visit, Pompeo sends an important message to this community in Florida, adds Loureiro: the Trump administration continues to strive for democratic regimes throughout Latin America. The state of Florida is crucial for both Trump and Biden, who are technically tied in the race for the state's crucial 29 votes in the electoral college.

And at a time when international efforts to oust Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro have started to dwindle, Pompeo's visit is expected to highlight the Trump administration's continuing support for a change of government in Venezuela.

According to Pompeo, the United States wants to 'represent the people of Venezuela'.

"We must not forget that he (Maduro) is destroying his own country and is also a drug dealer. It is impacting the life of the United States. But we are going to get him out of there," he said to Brazilian journalists.

Earlier this year, the U.S. Justice Department filed drug trafficking charges against Maduro, offering a US\$ 15 million reward for his arrest.



*U.S.'s Mike Pompeo is visiting four countries in four days during his mission to South America, photo Marcelo Camargo/Agencia Brasil.*

During his visit to Boa Vista, U.S. Secretary of State met with a Venezuelan family currently living in a shelter administered by the United Nations and non-governmental aid organization AVSI-Brasil. The shelter is part of Operação Acolhida (Operation Welcome), a humanitarian task force that helps with the relocation of Venezuelan immigrants who enter Brazil through Roraima.

"Secretary Pompeo underscores the importance of US and Brazilian support for the Venezuelan people in their time of need, visiting Venezuelan migrants who are fleeing the man-made disaster in Venezuela," says the press release from the U.S. embassy in Brasilia.

According to Roraima's governor, Antonio Denarium (PSL), the U.S. has already allocated US\$50 million to help Brazil in its project to welcome Venezuelans coming over the border.

"It is a privilege and an honor for the state of Roraima to receive the visit of the Secretary," said Governor Denarium during his speech in the presence of the U.S. officials.

"They came here to see Operação Acolhida, the work that Brazil, through [coordination] of the Ministry of Defense is doing to welcome Venezuelans," added the governor.

But not all Brazilian officials were happy to see the American Secretary of State.

While the governor of Roraima praised Pompeo, Congressional Representative Carlos Zarattini (PT), the Lower House minority leader, issued a request that Foreign Relations Minister Araújo explain the reasons for the visit of the U.S. official to Brazil. The request was signed by 34 other lawmakers, all from the PT (Workers Party) headed by ex-President Lula.



Venezuelan boy plays along the dozens of tents set up in Boa Vista, Roraima for refugees, photo by Antonio Cruz/AgBr

"Mike Pompeo's announced visit to the State of Roraima raises well-founded suspicions that the Donald Trump government emissary is interested in Brazil actively participating in pressures to destabilize the current Venezuelan government and to pollute that country's electoral process. This (objective) contradicts Constitutional principles that govern our foreign policy, such as that of non-intervention," says the document.

According to the Congressman, the Bolsonaro government continues to show its enduring submission to the Trump administration. The lawmaker notes the negative consequences of the Brazilian government's recent decision to maintain the fiscal exemption of ethanol imported from the United States.

"Such a concession without reciprocity mainly affects our poorest region in the country, the Northeast. Almost 70% of the ethanol used in the region comes from the USA, causing losses to producers and reducing jobs," concludes Zarattini.

Chamber of Deputies president, Rodrigo Maia (DEM), also criticized Pompeo's visit to Roraima so close to the U.S. presidential election. According to Maia the visit is not "in line with good international diplomatic practice and is contrary to the traditions of autonomy."

"The patron of Brazilian diplomacy, Baron of Rio Branco, left us a legacy of stability in our borders and peaceful and respectful coexistence with our neighbors in South America," stated Maia after being made aware of Pompeo's statements in Boa Vista.

According to Professor Loureiro, however, Pompeo's visit not only seeks to obtain support from Hispanic-American voters in Florida but also to weaken China's influence in South America.

"It is very significant that for the first time in its history, an American will be presiding over the InterAmerican Development Bank (IDB). The U.S. wants to be able to influence infrastructure loans in the area and reduce Chinese investment in the region," notes the professor.

The on-going China-US commercial war has left many countries feeling pressured to take sides and make alliances.

In his four day tour of South America, Pompeo is also visiting Colombia, Suriname and Guyana. Only in Brazil is the Secretary not expected to meet with the head of state, Jair Bolsonaro.

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