

# As Rubio ends Latin America tour, Trump relishes prospect of deporting US citizens to El Salvador

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US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's first international tour to Latin America this week was a classic exercise of big stick diplomacy, threatening the weaker nations in the region with the diktats of the fascistic Trump administration.

His first stop Sunday was in Panama, whose right-wing President Jose Mulino agreed under threat of an invasion to end its participation in China's Belt and Road Initiative, review the management of ports near the Panama Canal by a Chinese-based corporation, and increase efforts to stop the flow of migrants.

In a clear sign that the Trump administration will stop at nothing until it gains total control of what Washington sees disparagingly as its "own backyard," the State Department claimed later that US government vessels, including military ones, will transit for free. This was flatly denied by the Panama Canal Authority.

In perhaps the most significant leg of the trip, Rubio met on Monday with fascistic Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele, whose obsequiousness toward Trump has only been surpassed by his Argentine counterpart, Javier Milei. Bukele offered to place much of the Salvadoran state at the service of Trump's deportation and repressive operations.

In exchange for a fee, El Salvador agreed to receive an indefinite number of deportees from all nationalities and to detain alleged criminals sent by the United States in the new Cecot (Terrorism Confinement Center) mega-prison, the largest in the Americas which an official inmate population of 40,000.

"We can send them, and he will put them in his jails," Rubio said during a press briefing. "And he's also offered to do the same for dangerous criminals currently in custody and serving their sentences in the United States even though they're U.S. citizens or legal residents."

Despite the blatant unconstitutionality of deporting US citizens, Rubio said the proposal would be "studied," highlighting the low cost of outsourcing incarceration to El Salvador. The only possibility that could be "studied" would be that of riding roughshod over the US Constitution, arrogating to the White House the power to strip citizenship from whomever it views as "undesirable."

Trump could not contain his excitement Tuesday, ranting to reporters in the Oval Office: "If we could get these animals out of our country, and put them in a different country under the supervision of somebody that made a small fee to maintain these people, because you know what you call them hardened criminals, they've been in jail 40 times, there's one 42 times... And, frankly, they can keep them because these people will never be any good."

Elon Musk, the unelected billionaire running much of the Trump administration behind-the-scenes, wrote on X that it was a "Great idea!!"

Susan Akram, an immigration law professor, explained to the *Miami Herald* that US and international law forbid the US government from sending "anyone to a country where they would be subjected to torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment," crimes with which both the US State Department and human rights groups have charged Salvadoran prisons.

Since March 2022, Bukele has maintained a state of exception ostensibly to combat gangs, declaring martial law and deploying troops across the country. About 2 percent of the adult population or 83,000 people have been arrested, in many cases without any credible suspicion of belonging to a gang. Most have remained behind bars indefinitely without trials and others have been subjected to mass trials akin to medieval times.

There are countless reports of detainees suffering torture, deprivation of food and medicines, forced abortions, and other abuses, while the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights found that prisons are overcrowded at a 130 percent occupation rate despite the new prison. Human Rights groups have documented 349 deaths in prisons during the state of exception.

The country has the highest per capita incarceration rate on the planet, with 1,659 prisoners per 100,000, over twice the rate of the second highest country.

The Bukele administration, which is struggling to implement the demands of Wall Street and the local oligarchy, seeks US support to build up the repressive state apparatus and consolidate a personalist dictatorship against opposition in the

working class. This will be the ultimate use of any funds given by the Trump administration ostensibly to pay for holding deportees.

Despite reducing gang activity sharply, the Salvadoran economy saw no significant economic recovery after the initial 2020 COVID-19 slump, while foreign reserves remain below pre-pandemic levels. This has compelled the government to turn to the IMF for a new \$1.4 billion loan, which ended Bukele's experiment of mandating the acceptance of cryptocurrency Bitcoin as a form of payment.

Amid rising poverty, Bukele has also accepted draconian austerity measures demanded in the IMF deal. For 2025, San Salvador has implemented major cuts to education (eliminating \$31 million from the budget) and healthcare (\$91 million) and firing more than 11,000 government employees. In response to strikes and protests last November against the planned cuts, in which relatives of innocent detainees participated, the Bukele administration launched a union-busting campaign targeting union leaders and protesters with firings.

As part of a legislative package directly associated with the implementation of the IMF deal, Bukele's party New Ideas approved last week a Constitutional bill allowing the administration to make any changes, including to limits on re-election which Bukele already violated to win a second term. The changes would require 45 votes in the 60-member legislature, and his party holds 54 seats largely due to electoral and structural changes imposed last year. The first modification planned is the cutting of all government funds to political parties to further undermine the opposition.

Except for a couple of exceptions, the Salvadoran corporate media has failed to draw the parallel between Trump's plans and the mass deportation of thousands of convicts under the Clinton administration that effectively exported gangs established in Los Angeles to El Salvador, where they proliferated in the context of widespread economic desperation.

The agreement reached to turn El Salvador into a dungeon makes clear the connection between Trump's foreign and domestic policies, how the shift toward open dictatorship and colonialism are deeply intertwined.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has aptly described Trump's foreign policy as "a return to the type of naked imperialist aggression last practiced in the Reich's chancellery of Nazi Germany." By abandoning any pretense of respecting international law, the WSWS explains, "It is to be replaced with the law of the jungle, in which the strong do what they will, and the weak suffer what they must."

The expansion of migrant detention in Guantanamo Bay in Cuba and the approach toward the rest of the region confirm this.

On Monday, as Rubio was taking pictures with Bukele with a sunset setting on the beach, the governments of Mexico and Canada announced deals to suspend Trump's threat of devastating 25 percent tariffs by 30 days in exchange for each

side deploying 10,000 troops to the border against drug trafficking and migrants.

On Tuesday, Costa Rica's right-wing President Rodrigo Chaves announced in a joint press conference with Rubio that they had a blueprint for cooperating on migration and security, involving the direct intervention in the Central American country of the Drug Enforcement Agency and Federal Bureau of Investigation.

In Costa Rica, Rubio also railed against those long targeted for regime change: "Nicaragua, Venezuela and Cuba are enemies of humanity and have created the migration crisis, if it had not been for these three regimes there would be no migration crisis in the hemisphere."

This charge by the Trump administration that the flow of migrants to the US border constitutes an "invasion" directed by governments, has also been hurled against Colombia and Mexico. It is directed at buttressing the pseudo-legal pretext for the avalanche of dictatorial executive orders as well as plans for military aggression.

A Trump envoy received guarantees from Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro about receiving deportees, but clearly this has only emboldened the fascist in the White House.

On Wednesday, Rubio met with Guatemalan President Bernardo Arévalo, a US-sponsored puppet promoted by the pseudo-left as a "progressive," and reached a deal to increase by 40 percent the deportation flights to Guatemala carrying migrants of all nationalities. Numerous military flights with deportees handcuffed and chained like slaves have arrived in the past week.

Rubio ended his tour Thursday in the Dominican Republic, whose far-right, billionaire President Luis Abinader hopes for support for his government's own escalation of a racist crackdown against Haitian immigrants and its building of a border wall.

While the Trump administration highlights concessions on migration, Rubio was much less successful in advancing the central objective of US foreign policy: pulling the region away from Chinese economic and political influence. The economic realities of the loss of relative and absolute US economic influence across the region cannot be wished or scared away. No significant agreements were reached on this front in El Salvador or Costa Rica, while Chinese ships and concessions in the Panama Canal so far remain untouched.



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