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Brazil's Bolsonaro slams Biden for 'coward threats' over Amazon

By Jake Spring
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BRASILIA (Reuters) - Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro reacted angrily on Wednesday to U.S. Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden's call for a world effort to offer Brazil \$20 billion to end Amazon deforestation or face unspecified "economic consequences."

Bolsonaro wrote on Facebook he interpreted Biden's comment in a U.S. presidential debate on Tuesday night as a threat of economic sanctions if Brazil did not take the offer.

Bolsonaro wrote in Portuguese and English that he does not accept "bribes" or "coward threats."

The president said Brazil was taking action on deforestation and reasserted that he views foreign interest in the Amazon as financially motivated and an attempt to undermine Brazilian sovereignty.

"The greed of some countries towards the Amazon is a well-known fact," Bolsonaro said.

"However, the explicit demonstration of this greed by someone who is running for the presidency of his country is a clear sign of contempt for cordial and fruitful coexistence between two sovereign nations."

In November's U.S. election, Biden is challenging Republican President Donald Trump. Bolsonaro openly admires Trump and has sought to ally Brazil with the Trump administration, with the two leaders seeking to deepen trade ties.

In Tuesday's heated debate, Biden said Brazil provided an example of how Trump "has no relationship with foreign policy."

"The rainforests of Brazil are being torn down," Biden said.

"I would be gathering up and making sure we had the countries of the world coming

up with \$20 billion, and say, ‘Here’s \$20 billion. Stop tearing down the forest. And if you don’t then you’re gonna have significant economic consequences.’”

Official data show that an area roughly the size of Lebanon was deforested in Brazil’s Amazon for 2019, an 11-year high, with preliminary government data for 2020 showing forest clearances up 34.5%.

Bolsonaro’s right-wing government maintains that Brazil is a model of conservation because of the size of forest land still standing.

Brazil has repeatedly said the world should pay up if it wants more forest to be preserved. Brazilian Environment Minister Ricardo Salles reacted on Twitter to Biden’s offer of funding, writing: “Just one question: Biden’s \$20 billion in aid, is that yearly?”.

Bolsonaro ended his statement in English by calling Joe Biden by the wrong first name.

“What a shame, Mr. John Biden! What a shame!”

Reporting by Jake Spring; Editing by Nick Macfie and Howard Goller
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