

Ibero-America Briefs

It's Official: Lula Will Visit China from April 11 to 15

After pneumonia forced Brazilian President Lula da Silva to cancel his scheduled late March summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping, both governments quickly established a new date for their much-awaited meeting. Lula will be in China April 11-15, and is now planning to meet with Xi April 14. The central issues on the agenda will be: 1) efforts to achieve a negotiated settlement to the Ukraine war (both Presidents have made proposals to that end); 2) bilateral trade and investment agreements, including a breakthrough accord already announced to carry out such transactions in local currencies, China's yuan and the Brazilian real, rather than the now dangerous dollar, using an offshore yuan clearinghouse which includes some 25 countries that use the yuan; and 3) the future activities of the BRICS—of which Brazil and China are founding members—including its expected expansion.

Lula will also travel to Shanghai on April 13 for the formal investiture of former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff as the new President of the BRICS New Development Bank (she has been acting as its President for a week or so but held off on the formal ceremony until Lula could be there). Itamaraty, the Brazilian Foreign Ministry, released an announcement saying that Lula would unfortunately miss a scheduled meeting with the EU's Ursula von der Leyen in Brasilia April 12, but that he would be back in time to meet with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov April 17.

Brazilian media, such as *UOL*, added that the announcement from Itamaraty was written carefully so as to *not* combine the China trip with Lula's scheduled trip to Japan for the G7 Summit in May, even though it would have been logistically easier for him, because the Foreign Ministry wanted to keep the two diplomatic activities totally separate.

The optics in all of this couldn't be clearer.

Honduras Breaks with Taiwan, to Washington's Dismay

On the evening of March 25, Honduras's Foreign Ministry issued a communiqué announcing that the government of President Xiomara Castro had formally broken diplomatic relations with Taiwan, that it recognizes that there is only one China, of which Taiwan is an inalienable part, and that the People's Republic of China is the sole legitimate government of all of China. Honduras has further committed itself to having no further official relationship or contact with Taiwan.

When Honduras announced March 14 that it intended to establish diplomatic relations with China, the U.S. had hoped it could push this back through sufficient pressure. On March 20, President Biden's Special Advisor for the Americas Chris Dodd, with two National Security Council Western Hemisphere "experts" in tow, flew into Honduras to meet personally with President Castro for that purpose.

To no avail. On March 23, Foreign Minister Eduardo Enrique Reina left for Beijing to advance the negotiations for establishing relations. Accompa-

nied by the President's daughter and son-in-law (both members of Congress), they were scheduled to meet with Foreign Minister Qin Gang, Presidential Minister Rodolfo Pastor reported.

On March 30, the Honduran Foreign Ministry tweeted that President Castro had accepted President Xi Jinping's invitation to make an official visit to Beijing which she said she will do "very soon," and is prepared to sign "auspicious agreements" to benefit both nations. Her announcement was warmly greeted by Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning.

On March 23, Honduras's *Proceso Digital* publication addressed the larger reality which led the government to decide to act, despite the U.S. wrath it would incur:

"Honduras cannot remain on the sidelines of the benefits which the new world order could bring, said Minister of Transparency Edmundo Orellana on the establishment of relations with China. He pointed out that a new world order is being built in which China plays a preponderant role.... 'This decision should have been taken at the beginning of this century, but the opportunity is always there, and hopefully we are in time to join that new world order'."

Argentina VP: Dismantle the Financial System That Launders Drug Money

In her characteristic no-holds-barred fashion, Argentine Vice President, and former President, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner told a March 21 conference that the only way to deal with the drug trade that is burgeoning

in the nation's cities, is to go after and "disarm the financial system that launders the drug money." Fernández de Kirchner was addressing the Third International Human Rights Forum in Buenos Aires, sponsored by the Puebla Group of progressive politicians and academics, which had gathered to also address the unparalleled legal persecution of which Kirchner has been a victim for years.

In recent months, the city of Rosario, home to one of the country's most important ports, has seen the drug trade surge, and the Alberto Fernández government has taken emergency action to respond to the increase in murders, gang warfare and general violence plaguing the city.

To understand this, Kirchner said, one must understand the role of neoliberalism "that displaces the state and allows the other great drama of our time, of our region and of our societies, which is the drug trade, to move in. When the State disappears, then this phenomenon arises—the drug trade that takes the place of the state. If we're going to fight against the drug trade, first we have to disarm the financial system which launders the drug money."

She ridiculed those who say they're fighting the cartels to free women and children who have been lured into the retail drug marketing system. Face the facts, she said. "Are we going to believe that gangs with the pompous names of illiterates are the ones that put together the machinery to launder the billions" in drug money? "Please," she told the audience, forget that argument.

Economic, Political War Against Bolivia Intensifies, as China Ties Are Targeted

Financial vultures on Wall Street and in the City of London are intensifying their warfare against Bolivia, warning that Bolivia is on the verge of a currency devaluation due to a shortage of

dollars, and therefore may not be able to meet its foreign debt obligations. On March 24, pointing to the shortage of dollars were said to threaten the country's "macroeconomic stability," Moody's downgraded Bolivia's debt by two notches, to Caa1, and placed it under review for further downgrades.

Economy and Public Finance Minister Marcelo Montenegro has charged that the downgrades by Moody's and Fitch are part of a destabilization campaign that affects the government's ability to maintain macroeconomic stability. He also pointed to speculation and rumor mongering about a dollar shortage that has panicked the population.

Another component of this campaign is the demand by six U.S. Republican lawmakers that President Joe Biden sanction Bolivia for human rights violations. A March 24 [letter](#) to Biden by the six, posted to Sen. Marco Rubio's (R-FL) website, charged that President Luis Arce's government "targets political opponents and undermines the rule of law," and that it is in the national security interests of the United States to demand that Bolivia "uphold the rule of law" and defend its citizens' human rights.

The "political opponents" in question are Jeanine Áñez, jailed for atrocities she committed as "President" of the 2019-2020 government that replaced President Evo Morales after he was ousted in a State Department-run coup in November 2019, and the neo-Nazi Governor of Santa Cruz, Fernando Camacho, a leading figure in that 2019 coup, who is now in pretrial detention on charges of terrorism.

The U.S. Republican Party legislators appear to be more concerned with Bolivia's excellent relationship with China rather than human rights, however, as they howl that the alleged attacks on the opposition "open the door to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and other authoritarian regimes to further impose their strategic interests on

this South American country and the region." The U.S. should hold those Bolivian human rights abusers accountable, the letter demands, so the Bolivian people will "have the ability to rigorously evaluate and debate the merits of investment proposals that the CCP would rather negotiate behind closed doors."

Other signers include Sen. Rick Scott (R-FL), Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA), Rep. Carlos Gimenez (R-FL), Rep. Maria Elvira Salazar (R-FL), and Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL).

China Welcomes Rousseff as President of the BRICS New Development Bank

During the Chinese Foreign Ministry's March 30 press briefing, spokeswoman Mao Ning responded to a question about former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff, who was just unanimously elected as President of the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) by its Board of Governors.

Mao welcomed Ms. Rousseff to her new position, [commenting](#):

[She is] "a renowned stateswoman and economist devoted to global development over the years, (and) enjoys high prestige and significant influence in the world. Her nomination by the Brazilian government as the President of the NDB underscores the importance the Brazilian government sees in the NDB and BRICS, which China appreciates.

"We will continue to deepen all-round cooperation with the NDB and fully support her work. We believe that under her wise and professional leadership and with the concerted efforts of all member states, the NDB will realize greater achievements and development, and make greater contribution to the development and prosperity of emerging economies and developing countries, including BRICS countries."