

International Briefs

Neocolonial System Is Dead, Putin Tells St. Petersburg Int'l Economic Forum

Speaking June 16 at the annual St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, Russian President Vladimir Putin presented an upbeat picture of Russia's economic development in spite of, or even because of, the sanctions imposed by the U.S. and its allies.

He noted that the Russian economy grew by 3.3% (annualized) in April, and that growth for the year could reach 2%, while inflation is at a near low at 2.2%. Unemployment is at an all-time low at 3.3%. Putin said that it still remains higher in some regions, and called for measures to create new opportunities in these regions. Trade with countries that have not buckled under to U.S. demands is steadily rising, and "is moving in the direction of non-dollar exchanges." Said Putin:

"Today, about 90% of settlements with the countries of the Eurasian Economic Union are in rubles, and more than 80% of settlements with China are in rubles and yuan. This means that the ugly international system, which was neocolonial in nature, has ceased to exist. Meanwhile the multipolar world order is being reinforced. And this process is inevitable."

President Putin emphasized that Russian businesses have replaced many of the foreign companies which, under pressure from the West, have left Russia, creating new opportunities for Russian entrepreneurs. "Last year alone, Russian manufacturers filed more than 90,000 trademark applications," he said.

He also stressed the importance of the development of transportation

infrastructure in refocusing trade to those regions which are open to increased Russian export, to the south and the east.

Putin Shows African Peace Mission the 2022 Agreement Initialed by Russia, Ukraine

The African Peace Mission, launched by seven African presidents, met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky June 17 and Russian President Vladimir Putin June 18. The mission—led by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and including Senegal, Zambia, Uganda, Congo-Brazzaville, Comoros, and Egypt—is explained [here](#).

On the eve of their arrival, the *Kyiv Post* wrote that the mission would fail. It quoted Ukrainian political analyst Anatoliy Ohtysiuk: "They will not be able to offer us anything in terms of conflict resolution.... They cannot play the role of mediators. They have little political weight; they do not influence anything."

Zelensky told the delegation the only possible peace plan was his own. Zelensky's plan includes a return to the borders of 2014, including Crimea, and a war crimes tribunal for the Russians.

Zelensky [would not allow](#) Comoros President Azali Assoumani, Chairman of the African Union, to hold his hand as he and the delegation walked together.

In St. Petersburg, the delegation was received more warmly. The opening remarks of Presidents Putin and Ramaphosa are shown [here](#). President Putin recalled his attempt to make peace in March 2022, and [showed](#) the delegation the peace agreement—not previously seen—initialed by both

sides at that time. Ukraine scuttled the agreement after British Prime Minister Boris Johnson made one of his several visits to Kiev.

While President Ramaphosa's travel was unimpeded, a second plane carrying most of his security team and journalists was harassed by three NATO member governments to strip his security, attempt to humiliate the mission, and push its participants into partisanship. It was denied access to Italian airspace for hours, forcing it to circle over the Mediterranean. In Warsaw, Poland the 120 passengers were not allowed to deplane unless they surrendered their arms, which they refused to do, and remained on the plane for 26 hours in difficult circumstances. A woman with diplomatic status from the South African embassy in Warsaw sought to visit the plane, but was first submitted to the outrage of a strip search. Later, the plane sought to catch up with President Ramaphosa via NATO member Hungary, but was denied access to its airspace.

Arab-China Business Conference: The Shift Toward China Intensifies

The 10th Arab-China Business Conference, held June 11-12 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, drew more than 2,000 participants, signifying the shift of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states toward business and economic growth with China. Hosted in Saudi Arabia for the first time and organized by its Ministry of Investment, the conference was held in partnership with the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States, the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, and the Union of

Arab Chambers.

The conference followed Chinese President Xi Jinping's epoch-making meetings March 6-10 in Beijing with Saudi and Iranian representatives, which resulted in the normalization of Saudi-Iranian relations.

Saudi Arabia's cabinet on March 28 approved a memorandum on granting the Kingdom the status of a dialogue partner in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

On May 28, the New Development Bank, founded in July 2014 at the BRICS summit in Fortaleza, Brazil, announced that it was in talks with Saudi Arabia, which was seeking to become the bank's ninth member.

Trade between Arab countries and China in 2022 surged to \$430 billion, a 31% jump over 2021; Saudi-China trade accounted for \$106 billion of this. This year, China agreed to build a steel plant in Saudi Arabia (which neither the U.S. nor Britain has ever deigned to do). At the Riyadh conference, 30 trade deals, worth \$10 billion, were signed, including a \$250 million deal to manufacture rail cars and wheels in Saudi Arabia.

These deals come despite recent visits to Riyadh by U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Secretary of State Antony Blinken, bearing advice to the Saudis to decrease their connection with China. While Saudi Arabia will maintain ties with the U.S., it appears that it will not remain the West's watchdog in the Arab world. On June 11, when asked about U.S. criticism of Saudi Arabia's ties with China, Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman replied, "I totally ignore it."

In closing the conference, Dilma Rousseff, President of the New Development Bank, stated:

"China and Saudi Arabia have the potential to re-write the rules of the global energy market, ... embracing new models of economic collaboration," She noted that this could offer "greater possibilities for countries that

are marginalized by the traditional international financial system."

Honduran and Chinese Presidents Hold Historic Meeting in Beijing

Chinese President Xi Jinping and Honduran President Xiomara Castro met June 12 at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, during Castro's state visit to China. Castro is the first Honduran President ever to visit China, and also the first female President of her country. After their public meeting, in which the two witnessed the signing of 22 bilateral agreements and memoranda of understanding, they also met privately, before attending the state dinner held to honor the Honduran President.

The joint declaration issued following their meeting indicates a wide range of exciting cooperation opportunities across political and economic spectra, beginning with Honduras's decision to "actively participate" in the Belt and Road Initiative. Honduras also "supports the Global Development Initiative ... supports the Global Civilization Initiative and the Global Security Initiative proposed by the Chinese side and is prepared to actively participate in same, recognizing their important role in responding to global challenges."

During the open part of their meeting, Castro told Xi that, having experienced the cruelty of the neoliberal system, her goal is—

"to achieve real and equitable human development to obtain real independence. That's why we're here." Our priority "is global and domestic security. We have the possibility to define, plan and execute joint investment projects with co-financing for infrastructure, roads, ports, airports, telecommunications, energy, food security, research, science, technology, railroad construction between the Atlantic and the Pacific, and a Free Trade

Agreement which takes into account our asymmetries. The history of art and culture are essential in this relationship with China, as well."

President Xi told Castro that, since becoming President,

"You have led the Honduran people to stand up for themselves and to reach new achievements in the country's development. I sincerely congratulate you for that. Our bilateral relations will be guided by a perspective that is both strategic and for the long term."

Both leaders recognized that "history and the world are changing in ways never before seen," and both are "prepared to jointly defend the international order based on international law and the UN Charter and true multilateralism." China will begin negotiating a Free Trade Agreement with Honduras, for which a special trade mission led by China's deputy trade minister will travel to Tegucigalpa in July.

Could Victoria 'Maidan' Nuland Become New Deputy Secretary of State?

Veteran journalist Seymour Hersh, in his latest article, published today under the headline, "Partners in Doomsday," reports that the imminent departure of Wendy Sherman as Deputy Secretary of State—she retires June 30—has triggered a "near panic" in the State Department "about the person many fear will be chosen to replace her: Victoria Nuland."

Hersh points out that the "hawkishness and antipathy for Vladimir Putin" of Victoria Nuland, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, "fit perfectly with the views of President Biden." But a "person with direct knowledge of the situation" describes Nuland as "running amok among the various bureaus of the State Department while Tony Blinken is on the road." Blinken is off to China and then to the UK.