

Brazil wants to maintain alliance with China despite close ties with US



Brasilia, July 28 (RHC)-- The regime of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has tried to ease concerns over the potential repercussions its rising intimacy with the United States might have on its ties with China, which remains the South American country's biggest trading partner. Speaking to reporters over the weekend, Brasilia's top diplomat Ernesto Araujo further emphasized that efforts by his nation's far-right government to build closer ties with the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump should not jeopardize relations with Beijing.

"We never had any issue with China. We had an issue with how Brazil itself was organizing, or not organizing, its relationship with China," Araujo said after a meeting in Rio de Janeiro with senior officials of fellow BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) nations.

He said the problem was how previous Brazilian administrations had handled ties with China, the world's second largest economy. This is while prior to his appointment as Brazil's top diplomat, Araujo had made a name for himself by writing a blog post in which he described climate change as a Marxist plot invented to stimulate the Chinese economy and harm the West.

Since taking office, however, he and other members of the administration of rightist President Jair Bolsonaro -- another longstanding China critic and widely referred to as "Trump of the Tropics" -- have taken a more pragmatic attitude toward Beijing.

The development came a week after Bolsonaro announced that his administration has been alerting local companies about the extent of U.S. sanctions against Iran as he continues to engage in efforts to forge very close ties with Washington.

Eyeing closer ties with the United States, Brazil says it has alerted local firms about possible consequences if they do not comply with unilateral American sanctions against Iran. "I, particularly, am getting close to Trump, I was received twice by him. It is the No. 1 economy in the world, our second-largest market, and now Brazil has its arms open to do deals and partnerships," Bolsonaro said on July 21.

This is while Iran called on Brazil earlier this week to allow refueling for two Iranian cargo ships stranded at the Brazilian port of Paranagua due to refusal of the country's state oil company Petrobras to provide fuel to them.

Tehran has further threatened to cancel its imports -- worth nearly \$2 billion per year -- from Brazil, with Iranian Ambassador to Brasilia Seyed Ali Saghayyan telling Brazilian authorities on Tuesday that Iran could easily find new suppliers of corn, soybeans and meat if the South American country refused to permit the refueling of the vessels.

Iran is one of the largest grain importers from Brazil and the complication with the Iranian ships is already worrying Brazilian traders about the broader impact on trade with the Islamic Republic.

Earlier, the Brazilian foreign minister also issued a statement marking the start of the BRICS meeting, calling on his counterparts to "hear the cries" of the people of Venezuela, which is fighting off brutal US economic sanctions and persisting threats of political and military intervention by Washington amid unrest and coup attempts by opposition groups.

"The entire international community needs to hear this scream, understand it and act," Araujo further claimed. "Brazil has heard this scream and I appeal to all of you to hear it too."

Policy views within the BRICS highly differ with regards to the Venezuelan crisis. Brazil is the only member that has joined the US and its allies in recognizing Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido as the country's self-proclaimed president.

Russia and China, on the other hand, remain strong allies of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro. Araujo told reporters that he was trying to "put across Brazil's perspective about Venezuela."

His Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, however, insisted that Caracas had the right to resolve its problems without foreign intervention or use of force.

In other news, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has confirmed that he is considering his son, a federal congressman, for the Latin American country's ambassador to the U.S.

"In accordance with diplomatic practice, we await the American response," said Araujo. "But I am very sure that it will be granted by the U.S. government, and Eduardo Bolsonaro will be a great ambassador." Meanwhile, Bolsonaro's growing ties with the Trump administration as well as his proposal to forge closer relations with the Israeli regime and moving Brazil's embassy to East Jerusalem al-Quds have drawn angry reactions in the Muslim world.

While senior Brazilian officials have backed away from the plan, the idea threatens to damage ties with Muslim countries and jeopardize billions of dollars in Brazilian halal meat exports.

In April, Brazil opened a new trade mission to Israel during Bolsonaro's visit to Jerusalem al-Quds, prompting the Palestinian Authority to consider recalling its ambassador from Brasilia.

Bolsonaro also emphasized last week that his government sides with the Washington on its policy against Tehran which has come under some of the most draconian sanctions ever after Trump unilaterally pulled out of the 2015 multi-lateral nuclear deal with Iran.

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