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FEATURED Q&A

What Did G20 Nations Accomplish in Rio de Janeiro?

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (L) hosted last week's meeting of G20 foreign ministers. Among those attending was Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. // Photo: @LulaOficial via X.

Q Foreign ministers of G20 nations gathered for meetings last week in Rio de Janeiro against a backdrop of conflicts including the wars in Ukraine and Gaza. Among the top officials attending the meetings were U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. What did the foreign ministers accomplish during the meetings? What was at stake during the meetings for Brazil and other Latin American countries? How did Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's statements before the gathering—comparing Israel's actions in Gaza to the Holocaust—affect what was accomplished at the meetings? How did the gathering set up the G20 leaders' summit, to occur in Rio de Janeiro in November?

A R. Evan Ellis, Latin America research professor at the U.S. Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute: "Lula's inappropriate comparison of Israel's actions in Gaza to the Holocaust, and the diplomatic spat it provoked, arguably distracted from his attempt to leverage hosting the G20 to showcase Brazil as a nonaligned global power, brokering peace deals in Ukraine and the Middle East. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the conflict in the Middle East dominated the G20, although Brazil's attempt to capitalize on these to push for U.N. reform got little traction. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's absence reduced somewhat the possibilities from the gathering. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov tried to leverage his presence to show Russia is not isolated. Although some such as Brazil struggled to avoid talking of Russian bad behavior, others, the United Kingdom, Germany and the E.U. Commission put Russia's depredations in Ukraine at the center

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Venezuela Eyes More Than 20 Possible Dates for Election

Venezuela's government on Wednesday proposed more than 20 possible dates for the country's presidential election this year.

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Hundreds of Flights Canceled in Argentina Amid 24-Hour Strike

Unionized air travel workers in Argentina staged a 24-hour strike on Wednesday, leading to the cancellation of hundreds of flights.

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Guyana Not Taking Sides in Dispute Between Exxon, Chevron

Guyana is not taking sides in the dispute between Exxon Mobil and Chevron over the Stabroek oil field, which could scuttle Chevron's purchase of Hess, said Vice President Bharrat Jagdeo.

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Jagdeo // File Photo: Guyanese Government.

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POLITICAL NEWS

Venezuela Suggests Over 20 Possible Election Dates

Venezuela's government, allied groups and other organizations on Wednesday proposed more than 20 possible dates for the country's presidential election, with options ranging from mid-April through early December, the Associated Press reported. The proposal will be presented in the coming days to the National Electoral Council, which will elect the date for the balloting, the wire service reported. If the council selects a date before July 1, it would be in violation of an agreement that the government and opposition representatives signed last October in Barbados, calling for a vote in the second half of the year. The proposal that the government released on Wednesday makes no mention of the participation of candidates that the government has banned from running for office, including María Corina Machado who won the opposition's primary last year and whose ban from running was upheld by the country's supreme court in January. The government's proposal also says officials will extend invitations to "technical missions" of domestic and international observation groups, adding that observers must "comply with strict respect for the constitution, the law and applicable terms," the AP reported. That condition was part of the agreement that the government and opposition signed last October. The opposition's Unitary Platform, Machado's faction, did not participate in the meetings to write the proposal that was released Wednesday, the wire service reported. It also declined to attend Wednesday's announcement and earlier in the week called on the government to adhere to the agreement the two sides reached in Barbados, Bloomberg News reported. Representatives of the Unitary Platform did meet last week with representatives of President Nicolás Maduro's government, with which it has held talks since 2021, the AP reported. The opposition faction's chief negotiator, Gerardo Blyde, told reporters last week that it presented the government's representative, National Assembly leader Jorge Rodríguez, with documents detailing violations of last October's agreement. After the two sides struck the deal to allow a presidential election with each side the ability to choose its candidate, the United States announced a six-month lifting of sanctions on Venezuela's oil industry. However, a week later, the government launched a criminal investigation into the opposition's primary. That was followed by the supreme court's upholding in January of Machado's ban from office. Since then, government authorities also arrested rights activist Rocío San Miguel and members of her family, and Maduro's government has ordered the closure of the local United Nations human rights office. [Editor's note: See related **Q&A** in the Jan. 31 issue of the Advisor.]

ECONOMIC NEWS

Airline Workers' 24-Hour Strike Cancels Flights in Argentina

Hundreds of flights were canceled in Argentina on Wednesday amid a 24-hour strike by unionized air travel workers who are demanding higher wages, the Associated Press reported. Although the majority of the South American country's 50 airports are technically still open, 331 flights were affected by the national strike called by the Association of Aeronautical Personnel, the Argentine Association of Airline Pilots and the Union of Senior and Professional of Aero Commercial Companies, Aerolíneas Argentinas, the state-owned operator, said in a statement posted online. Twenty-four thousand passengers are estimated to have been affected, with the strike implicating a financial loss of about $2 million, the statement added. In particular, airline workers are rejecting the 12 percent increase in wages airline employees were offered, which they deem insufficient in the wake of Argentina's rising inflation, La Nación reported. Union members blame the government for a breakdown in salary negotiations last week after the government offered the

NEWS BRIEFS

Haiti's Henry Agrees to Hold Elections by Mid-2025: Caribbean Leaders

Caribbean leaders said on Wednesday that Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry has agreed to hold general elections by mid-2025, the Associated Press reported. The announcement was made in a statement released by members of the Caricom regional trade bloc at the termination of a four-day summit in Guyana. At the gathering, Henry agreed to work with the opposition and civil society to hold the elections. The international community is continuing to raise money for the deployment of a foreign armed force to Haiti. [Editor's note: See related **Q&A** in the Feb. 1 issue of the Advisor.]

Ecuadorean Judge Orders Trial of Five Suspects in Candidate's Assassination

A judge in Ecuador ruled on Wednesday that five of the six suspects in last year's assassination of presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio will stand trial, the Associated Press reported. They include Carlos Angulo, the currently imprisoned leader of Los Lobos gang, who is accused of orchestrating the murder from within his prison cell. Judge Irene Pesántez ordered the release of one suspect due to a lack of evidence. Villavicencio was fatally shot last August as he left a campaign rally in Quito.

Biden, Trump Making Separate Trips Today to U.S.-Mexico Border

U.S. President Joe Biden and his rival, former President Donald Trump, are making separate trips today to the U.S.-Mexico border as immigration is heating up as a major campaign issue. Biden is visiting Brownsville, Tex., where illegal border crossings have declined, while Trump is heading to Eagle Pass, Tex., where illegal crossings have escalated in recent months.

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pay raise, the Associated Press reported. The cost of living in Argentina rose 46 percent in December and January. At Ezeiza international airport, the country's largest airport, which is located outside of Buenos Aires, only two lost-cost companies–Flybondi and American Airlines–were still operating.

BUSINESS NEWS

Guyana Taking No Sides in Oil Majors' Dispute: VP

Guyana's government is not taking sides in a dispute between U.S. oil majors Exxon Mobil and Chevron over the giant Stabroek oil field off the South American country's coast, Vice President Bharrat Jagdeo said Wednesday, Reuters reported. "Whatever is the outcome, we will live with it," Jagdeo told the wire service on the sidelines of a meeting of Caribbean leaders in Guyana's capital, Georgetown. "This is a matter for Exxon, Chevron and Hess," he added. Last October, Chevron announced that it had agreed to acquire medium-sized rival Hess in a $53 billion all-stock deal, The New York Times reported. Chevron is seeking to buy Hess largely for its stake in the Stabroek block. A consortium led by Exxon and also involving Hess and China's CNOOC are producing 400,000 barrels of oil per day in the block, which produced nothing just four years ago. Earlier this week, Exxon said it intended to assert its right over Hess' 30 percent stake in the block, using a contractual right of first refusal, Reuters reported. In a regulatory filing on Monday, Chevron warned investors that Exxon's assertion could mean that Chevron will not complete its purchase of Hess "within the time frame the company anticipates or at all," The Wall Street Journal reported. Chevron's deal for Hess would not need Guyana's approval, Jagdeo told Reuters Wednesday. "Chevron is a company with a global reputation, and we welcome their entry into Guyana," he said. He added that Guyana would also accept the outcome if the deal does not go through.

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of discussion. In addition, Lavrov's pre-G20 visits to Venezuela and Cuba were notably without substance, while the omission of Nicaragua from his trip raised questions. The most important meetings were probably the sidebar discussions, including between Argentine Foreign Minister Diana Mondino and British Foreign Minister David Cameron, illustrating the Milei government's work to improve the relationship, despite the Falklands/Malvinas issue. The most productive sidebar may have been U.S. Secretary of State Blinken's talk with Brazilian counterpart Mauro Vieira, which went far longer than expected, reflecting the large number of issues the two countries have to coordinate on, both in the region and globally. Sadly, continuing wars in Ukraine and the Middle East may still dominate the agenda when the G20 presidents meet in November."

Stephen Johnson, former U.S. deputy assistant secretary of defense for Western Hemisphere affairs: "Forums like the G20 can seem like time wasters because any consensus is general and mostly non-binding. Take, for instance, President Lula's proposals to make multilateral organizations like the United Nations more effective. He would end the right of a single member in the Security Council being able to veto important decisions. Trouble is, the United Nations has low membership standards that allow in dictatorships. Some would likely bolt if the Security Council somehow got teeth. However, side discussions can help advance members' bilateral interests. U.S. Secretary of State Blinken and President Lula were able to sit down and discuss Brazil's help in easing tensions between Venezuela and Guyana over Venezuela's threats to invade Guyana's Essequibo region. He also urged Lula to press Venezuela to honor its commitment to hold free and fair elections as well as stay engaged in helping to bring peace in Haiti. All of these things Lula can do without snubbing his base in the Latin American left. Concluding the two-day forum, participating foreign ministers did tee up the following agenda: promoting social inclusion and fighting hunger, building sustainable infrastructure to curb climate change, and pressing reform of global multilateral institutions. After years of isolation on the world stage under former President Jair Bolsonaro, Lula wants to reassert Brazil's global prominence. At the November leaders' summit, he will likely have to do that over the din of ongoing Russia/Ukraine and Israeli/Palestinian conflicts. And if Russian President Vladimir Putin remains invited, despite an arrest warrant by the International Criminal Court, that alone could steal the whole show."

Peter Hakim, member of the Advisor board and president emeritus of the Inter-American Dialogue: "Unless they are somehow resolved by then, the Israeli-Hamas war in Gaza and the Ukraine-Russian war will dominate the course of this year's G20 meeting of presidents scheduled for November in Brazil. Climate change, migration, economic problems and a variety of other concerns will, of course, be discussed, but they are likely to be on the back burner. News reports on the preparatory sessions in Rio de Janeiro focused overwhelmingly on Lula's declarations four days prior to the Rio meeting accusing Israel of genocide—which he repeated in several other settings, including his one-on-one discussions with U.S. Secretary of State Blinken. It is unlikely that many other countries will fully endorse the Brazilian view on Israeli's actions in Gaza or that Brazil will enhance its international standing and perhaps come closer to securing a long-desired seat on the U.N. Security Council. But the United States may find itself increasingly isolated in its support for Israel. The United States might even find its relations with Brazil and several other Latin American nations turning sour if Washington is unable to persuade Israel to wind down

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its assault in Gaza and agree to negotiating a cease-fire that could set the basis for developing a peace agreement to end the war in Gaza—and perhaps even lead to a long-sought agreement on a two-state solution. Whatever direction the Gaza conflict takes, it could have an especially profound impact on the U.S. presidential election this year (which occurs just two weeks prior to the G20 session) and, of course, who takes charge of U.S. policy next year."

Anabel Teixeira, senior associate for Brazil and the Southern Cone at McLarty Associates: "The inaugural ministerial meeting of Brazil's G20 presidency was an important opportunity for the country to advance an ambitious G20 agenda, and Brazilian Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira emphasized the group's significance as a vital platform to address international tensions and advocate for global governance reform. However, Brazil's G20 priorities, encompassing issues like ending poverty, hunger reduction and climate change, were relegated to the background over President Lula's recent comments on the crisis in Gaza and further complicated by the death of dissident Alexei Navalny in a Russian prison. The ministerial meeting underscored the delicate balancing act in Brazil's foreign policy and challenges for Brazil's leadership at the G20 against a volatile geopolitical backdrop. President Lula did have constructive meetings with both U.S. Secretary of State Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov on the sidelines.

> **"The ministerial meeting underscored the delicate balancing act in Brazil's foreign policy..."**
>
> **— Anabel Teixeira**

Looking ahead, the G20 summit in November presents a promising opportunity for Brazil especially in addressing global challenges where it holds strong credentials, such as poverty and hunger reduction."

Fulton Armstrong, senior fellow at American University's Center for Latin American & Latino Studies and former U.S. National Intelligence Officer for Latin America: "The G20 summit in Rio de Janeiro last week gave participating foreign ministers a chance to lambaste Vladimir Putin as their Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, sat nearby. But the Ukraine invasion and Navalny's death—and deep disagreements over Gaza—overshadowed the summit's official agenda of hunger, climate change and other global challenges. Those issues showed that, rhetoric about new agendas aside, the United States and its allies remain focused on problems that have been around for 70 or 80 years. As host, President Lula sought, but did not get, progress on his passionate issues of 'profound reform' of the United Nations, the World Trade Organization and multilateral banks. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken publicly stated general agreement with summit goals, but all the publicity was about the two leaders' private disagreement—a short 'frank exchange' within a 90-minute meeting—over Lula's characterization of Israel's military operations in Gaza as 'genocidal.' (Colombian President Petro and Bolivian President Arce separately agreed with Lula.) It would be unfair to expect the secretary at a G20 Summit to clarify the contradictory signals Washington is sending Latin America about how countries deal with gangs, reduce inequality, hold elections, rescue economies, overcome the democracy-threatening predecessors and—if the U.S. Southern Command is to be believed—deal with the near Chinese invasion of the continent. But a focus on a seven-decade-old agenda, instead of the issues that affect the region every day, may not help."

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