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FEATURED Q&A

Will Kast Bring a New Era of U.S.-Chile Relations?



On his first full day in office as Chile's president, José Antonio Kast (R) met in Santiago with Deputy U.S. Secretary of State Christopher Landau (L). Kast has warm relations with the Trump administration, in contrast to his predecessor. // Photo: Chilean Government.

Q **Conservative José Antonio Kast took office as Chile's president on March 11, just days after participating in U.S. President Donald Trump's "Shield of the Americas" summit in Florida. Kast's warm relations with Trump stand in contrast to those of his predecessor, Gabriel Boric, who was critical of Trump and his policies. To what extent does Kast's presidency represent a new era of relations between Chile and the United States? What types of cooperation can be expected between the two countries? What does Kast taking power mean for China's diplomatic and economic activities in Chile?**

A **Antonia Urrejola, former Chilean foreign minister and member of the Inter-American Dialogue:** "President Kast's attendance at the 'Shield of the Americas' summit and his evident affinity with President Trump send a clear political signal. Yet Chile's foreign policy has long been defined by something more durable than ideological cycles: a consistent tradition of open engagement, political autonomy and pragmatic management of its relationships with both Washington and Beijing. It is that tradition—and not the preferences of any single administration—that I expect to continue anchoring Chile's international conduct in the years ahead. The numbers impose their own constraints. In 2025, China accounted for 32.7 percent of Chile's total trade—nearly \$65 billion—while the United States represented 17 percent, at roughly \$34 billion. No Chilean government, regardless of political orientation, can ignore that asymmetry. President Kast's own foreign minister, Francisco Pérez Mackenna, acknowledged as much in his first major

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

At Least Two Killed in Latest Boat Strike by U.S. Military

At least two people were killed Friday in the latest U.S. military strike on a boat allegedly transporting illegal drugs. The strike happened in the eastern Pacific off the coast of Costa Rica.

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ECONOMIC

Cuba Restoring Power After Latest Blackout

Power crews were restoring power Sunday after Cuba was hit by its second nationwide blackout in a week.

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POLITICAL

U.S. Prosecutors Reportedly Investigating Colombia's Petro

At least two U.S. federal prosecutors' offices have reportedly launched investigations of outgoing Colombian President Gustavo Petro.

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Petro // File Photo: Colombian Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

U.S. Prosecutors Reportedly Launch Probes of Petro

At least two U.S. federal prosecutors' offices have launched investigations of Colombian President Gustavo Petro, The New York Times reported Friday, citing three unnamed people familiar with the matter. The reported probes, conducted by the U.S. attorney's offices in Manhattan and Brooklyn, have involved agents from the Drug Enforcement Administration and Homeland Security Investigations, the sources told the newspaper. Investigators are looking into whether Petro met with drug traffickers and whether his campaign for president solicited donations from them, the sources told the newspaper on condition of anonymity because they did not have authorization to discuss current investigations. The Drug Enforcement Administration has designated Petro a "priority target," the Associated Press reported, citing unnamed people familiar with the matter and records the wire service reviewed. Multiple investigations have looked into Petro's activities since 2022, according to Drug Enforcement Administration records, the AP reported. It is unclear whether the latest investigations will result in criminal charges, The New York Times reported. There was no indication that the White House was involved in initiating any of the probes, the newspaper reported. For months, Petro and U.S. President Donald Trump sniped at each other, but their relationship appeared to be improving after the two met last month at the White House. Petro denied any ties with drug traffickers in a social media post on Friday. "Never in my life have I spoken with a narcotrafficker," he said on social media site X. "On the contrary I dedicated 10 years of my life, and at the risk of my own existence and provoking the exile of my family, to denouncing the links between the most powerful drug traffickers and politicians in the Congress of the Republic and the local and national governments," he added. The Colombian embassy in Washington said in a statement

that there had been no "formal determination or notification" by U.S. authorities of any such investigation. "Throughout his public life, President Gustavo Petro has consistently and unequivocally confronted criminal activity," the embassy said in a statement, The New York Times reported. Those efforts have included fighting "transnational criminal organizations involved in narcotics trafficking," it added. The embassy also said that "the reported insinuations have no legal or factual basis," the AP reported. Representatives of the two prosecutors' offices in New York, as well as a spokesperson at the Drug Enforcement Administration, declined to comment to The New York Times. A representative of the Department of Homeland Security did not respond to the newspaper's request for comment. Petro's term as president expires in August; the country's constitution bars presidents from immediate re-election. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the Feb. 11 issue of the Advisor.]

U.S. Strike on Boat Allegedly Carrying Drugs Kills Two

The latest U.S. military strike on a boat allegedly transporting illegal drugs killed at least two people on Friday and left one seriously injured, the Associated Press reported, citing Costa Rican authorities. The strike happened in the eastern Pacific, off the Central American country's coast. In a post on social media site X, the U.S. Southern Command said three "narco-terrorists" had survived the strike and that the U.S. Coast Guard had been notified to activate a search and rescue operation. "Intelligence confirmed the low-profile vessel was transiting along known narco-trafficking routes in the Eastern Pacific and was engaged in narco-trafficking operations," the U.S. Southern Command said in the post. The military command also posted video of the boat being hit and exploding. "Upon arrival, one person was found with severe burns and significant chest trauma and was transported in critical condition to the Golfito Hospital," Steven Umaña, regional operations coordinator

NEWS BRIEFS

Petrobras, Pemex Explore Partnership: Brazil's Lula

The state-run oil firms of Brazil and Mexico could soon launch a partnership to explore for oil and gas in the Gulf of Mexico, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva said at a conference on Friday, Reuters reported. Lula said that he recently called Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum to discuss the potential Petrobras-Pemex partnership, the wire service reported. "Pemex could get a great deal of help from Petrobras," Lula said, pointing to the Brazilian firm's experience with drilling for oil in deep waters, Reuters reported.

Mexico's Femsa to Lay Off Workers in Financial Technology Division

Mexican bottling firm Femsa will lay off an undisclosed number of workers in its financial technology unit Spin, the firm said on Friday, Reuters reported. Femsa, the world's largest bottler of Coca-Cola, saw slow earnings growth from its consumer credit services in the fourth quarter of last year, the wire service reported. The firm plans to prioritize its Oxxo convenience stores, a spokesperson told Reuters.

Banco Santander Brasil Taps Finkelsztain as New Chief Executive Officer

Banco Santander Brasil has named Gilson Finkelsztain, the head of the B3 stock exchange, as its new chief executive officer, Bloomberg News reported Friday. As CEO, Finkelsztain will replace Mario Leão, who took over as CEO of Santander's Brazilian unit in 2022, the bank said in a statement. Leão will remain in his position until July to help oversee the transition. Finkelsztain has headed the stock exchange since 2017 and previously worked at Santander between 2011 and 2013, according to his LinkedIn profile.

for the Costa Rican Red Cross, told the AP. "In addition, two people were found with no vital signs," he added. The strike brought to at least 159 the number of people killed in U.S. military strikes of allegedly drug-laden boats since they began last September.

Brazilian Finance Minister Resigns to Run for Governor

Brazilian Finance Minister Fernando Haddad has resigned in order to run for governor of São Paulo state, the Associated Press reported Friday. Haddad's resignation was published in the government's official gazette on Friday; Haddad confirmed on Thursday that he would seek the governorship of São Paulo. In the election, he will likely face the state's current governor, Tarcísio de Freitas, the AP reported. As finance minister, Haddad will be replaced by Dario Durigan, who had served as the finance ministry's executive secretary. "I don't run in elections to bargain, I run to win," Haddad said Thursday at an event in São Paulo state. Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva joined Haddad at the rally in the city of São Bernardo do Campo, Reuters reported.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Cuba Restoring Power After Another Nationwide Blackout

Cuba's power grid collapsed on Saturday for the second time in a week, Cuban energy ministry officials said in a post on social media site X. Power crews had restored service to just a fraction of residents in Havana by Sunday morning, and microsystems had been set up in some urban areas elsewhere in the country, the Associated Press reported. By Sunday evening, grid service had been restored for most of the island, from Pinar del Río to Guantánamo, energy minister Vicente de la O Levy said in a post

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interview, stating that Chile would maintain relations with major powers—China included—"beyond personal tastes or ideologies." Therein lies the real constraint on President Kast's foreign policy. Enhanced security cooperation with Washington, alignment on democracy, human rights and other multi-lateral agenda items in international forums such as the United Nations, and greater openness to U.S. investment are all plausible outcomes. But a strategic decoupling from Beijing is not. Chile has spent decades building a broad international presence, grounded in technological neutrality and a refusal to take sides in superpower disputes. That doctrine was not born on the left, and there is no reason it should disappear with the right. Where China should pay attention is not to any diplomatic rupture, but to concrete signals: the U.S.-opposed Chile-China submarine fiber optic cable project will be an early indicator of how far ideological affinity goes when it collides with the country's structural interests. The central question of Kast's presidency is not whether he has good chemistry with Trump—that much is clear. The question is whether that chemistry will prevail over the economic rationality that has guided Chile for decades."

A Peter M. Siavelis, professor of politics and international affairs at Wake Forest University: "José Antonio Kast's presidency signals a transformation in relations between the United States and Chile in comparison to the government of former President Gabriel

on X. The island-wide outage came just five days after another grid failure left Cuba entirely without power for a period of 29 hours, Agence France-Presse reported. Cuba has increasingly suffered in recent months from a shortage of fuel, which power generation plants accounting for roughly 80 percent of the island's electricity supply under normal conditions. Under diplomatic pressure from the United States, Cuba has been unable to import any major

Boric. Kast's campaign promises on issues such as immigration, drug trafficking and transnational gang activity bring him into close alignment with the policies of the Trump administration and the other right-wing presidents attending the 'Shield of the Americas' summit. While Boric conducted

“Kast will need to walk a fine line, and his government will likely not represent a simple pro-U.S. shift.”

— Peter M. Siavelis

a friendlier relationship with Washington than many other leftists in Latin America, his attitude toward the United States was cooperative but independent, and more focused on democracy, human rights and multilateralism. Chile's new government will be more fully aligned with the United States and its domestic and foreign policy agenda. However, Kast will need to walk a fine line, and his government will likely not represent a simple pro-U.S. shift. China remains Chile's largest trading partner, especially for copper, meaning that Kast is likely to pursue a dual strategy characterized by political alignment with the United States and economic pragmatism with China. At the same time, Chile could become a more reliable U.S. partner in strategic competition with China, especially in relation to infrastructure projects, technol-

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shipments of crude or fuel oil since Jan. 9, AFP reported. U.S. President Donald Trump had threatened steep tariffs against countries that supply Cuba with oil products. Trump's administration has demanded that Cuba's government release political prisoners and make immediate economic and political reforms, the AP reported. Trump has also recently floated the idea of a "friendly takeover" of Cuba by the United States, the wire service reported.

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ogy and critical minerals such as copper and lithium. Ultimately, the challenge for Kast will not be choosing sides, but rather managing the growing tension between Chile's strategic and ideological alignment with the United States and its deep economic dependence on China."

A Gregory Ross, senior associate for Brazil and the Southern Cone at McLarty Associates: "As seen in his participation at the 'Shield of the Americas' summit, President Kast has added Chile to the map of conservative Latin American governments aligned with the Trump administration. Even so, Chile's foreign policy—long shaped by pragmatism and institutional continuity—is unlikely to shift dramatically, at least in comparison to other countries recently represented at the summit, such as Bolivia and Honduras. Kast's presidency represents more of a recalibration in engagement with the United States, with security quickly becoming the clearest area of convergence. A core pillar of both Kast's campaign and President Trump's regional agenda, it points to expanded cooperation against transnational organized crime, particularly in Chile's northern border regions. Energy security and critical minerals will also feature prominently, with both countries already agreeing to launch formal consultations on critical minerals and rare earths supply chains.

Yet even as he leans into the relationship with Washington, Kast is unlikely to disrupt Chile's deep ties with China. China remains Chile's top trading partner, accounting for about 40 percent of exports, and it is an

“Even as he leans into the relationship with Washington, Kast is unlikely to disrupt Chile's deep ties with China.”

— Gregory Ross

increasingly important investor in sectors such as electricity distribution, mining and agribusiness. Recent tensions arising from U.S. sanctions on outgoing Boric administration officials linked to a proposed China-backed fiber-optic cable underscore the constraints facing Kast, especially related to strategic infrastructure. Ultimately, Kast's foreign policy is likely to be defined less by a full pivot, and more by the balancing of greater security and political alignment with Washington with sustained economic engagement with China."

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta.

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Upcoming Event

ONLINE EVENT: Evidence in Motion – A Regional Dialogue on the Challenges of Measuring Child Development

March 25, 2026 | 11:00 a.m. ET

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