
Bolsonaro Says He's Open To Meeting Argentina's Fernandez

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Brazil's far-right President Jair Bolsonaro has changed his aggressive tone towards Argentina's new left-leaning government on Wednesday and said he was open to a visit from incoming President Alberto Fernandez, who he previously branded a “red bandit.”

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Bolsonaro said he hoped neighboring Argentina will do well under its new administration because it is Brazil's largest trade partner in Latin America. “We will continue to be partners,” he told reporters in Brasilia.

“Argentina has a lot to offer us and Brazil has a lot to offer Argentina as well,” he said earlier in a speech to the CNI industrial lobby.

Bolsonaro adopted a more conciliatory stance since Fernandez took office on Tuesday, highlighting the importance of relations with Brazil in his swearing-in speech. Brazil was the only country Fernandez mentioned specifically in the speech.

Bolsonaro said Fernandez had sent an “excellent” signal.

Yet the far-right Brazilian president, a former army captain turned politician, criticized the new Argentine leader for picking a defense minister who was not a military officer.

Bolsonaro broke with bilateral tradition by declaring early on that he would not attend Argentina's presidential handover.

Brazilian media reported that Economy Minister Paulo Guedes and other senior members of his cabinet convinced Bolsonaro that Brazil should be present at the event and, at the last minute, he decided to send Vice President Hamilton Mourao.

With two-way trade worth \$27 billion last year, the incentives for cooperation between South America's two biggest economies are strong.

Argentina is the largest market for Brazilian manufactured goods, particularly automobiles, and its financial woes have weighed on Brazil's anemic economic recovery.

Speaking to businessmen, Bolsonaro urged rapid ratification of the free trade agreement signed this year between the European Union and Mercosur, the South American common market formed by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.

The deal's future has been in doubt due to environmental concerns in some European nations and reservations expressed by Fernandez during the election campaign.
