

Brazil and the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict in the New Century: Between Ambition, Idealism, and Pragmatism

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In recent years, Brazil's economic record and its image as a significant global player have undergone a dramatic transformation. As Brazil's economy has gathered strength over the past decade, its international profile has risen. At the international level, it is now a respected player and an interlocutor with both emerging market countries and industrial states. Brazil, along with the other BRIC countries—Russia, China and India—has become one of the “movers and shakers” in discussions over the global economy and the reform of multilateral institutions. Its self-sufficiency as an oil producer and the world's second largest producer of sugar-based ethanol has enhanced Brazil's position as an important player in the energy field worldwide. Regionally, Brazil has emerged as the leading state in South America, heading the drive toward greater economic integration and political cooperation. It has become a given that Brazil's voice counts and that its president is included in nearly all important international meetings—a significant departure from the practice of the recent past.

Brazil's emergence as a global power over the past decade and the role played by former president Luis Inácio Lula da Silva have attracted considerable media and scholarly attention. Such discussions and commentary have focused primarily on its relations with other Latin American states and its role in promoting regional initiatives, such as the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the idea of a South American Defence Council; the development of a South–South dialogue through initiatives such as the IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) Dialogue Forum and the strengthening of its relations with the other BRIC nations; its leadership role in promoting a new global trade regime; and its efforts at reforming the working of the United Nations system, particularly evident in its quest for a permanent seat in the Security Council.

By contrast, Lula's desire to engage in the international politics of the Middle East, and specifically to play a relevant role in the Israeli–Palestinian peace process, is seldom mentioned as a distinctive feature of Brazil's new diplomatic activism. Such relative neglect is hardly warranted. Under his stewardship, Brazil has made extensive efforts to develop ties in the Middle East. Lula was a frequent visitor to the region. He was the first South American leader to attend an Arab League Summit, and has made state visits to Syria, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Iran. In turn, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad have visited Brazil. By the end of his term, trade between Brazil and the Arab world had increased threefold.

Moreover, Lula significantly raised Brazil's visibility in the Israeli–Palestinian fray, presenting himself and Brazil as a potential mediator to help resolve the conflict. Brazil hosted a series of ministerial visits by Israeli and Palestinian leaders during Lula's eight years in office, including visits by Israeli President Shimon Peres and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. In March 2010, Lula became the first Brazilian president to visit Israel and the Palestinian territories. Brazil opened up a representative office to the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah, and recognized Palestine as a state in December 2010. At the same time, Lula intensified Brazil's relations with Israel. Mechanisms were established for a more regular dialogue on bilateral issues. An agreement on greater cooperation over security was reached, thereby allowing Israeli defense contractors to secure a number of lucrative deals. Brazil also promoted the idea of a free trade agreement between Israel and Mercosur—the first of its kind between Mercosur and an extra-regional country—and this was successfully negotiated. Since taking office two years ago, Lula's successor, Dilma Rousseff, has continued down the same path on the question of Palestine and Brazil's relations with Israel.

Brazil's push toward the Middle East has often been understood as being driven by demographic and economic factors. The largest populations of Syrian and Lebanese migrants are to be found in Brazil and overall over 12 million people of Arab descent live in the country, constituting 5 percent of the local population. Former Foreign Minister Celso Amorim believed that Brazil could not afford to ignore these population dynamics,¹ which are becoming more diverse. Although a large number of Arab-Brazilians trace their roots to the waves of Christian immigration from Syria and Lebanon, more recently Brazil has been a destination for Muslim Arabs as well. According to the 2010 census, the number of people who identify themselves as following Islam increased 29 percent from 2000–2009—yet they still make up less than 1 percent of the population.² Nevertheless, it is likely that it will become increasingly difficult to speak of one monolithic Arab community in Brazil. Less certain still is to infer that the position of the

Brazilian state is a product of particular views of its Arab community rather than a combination of ideological sentiments and geopolitical ambitions that are shared by a broader set of players. Also, Brazil's goal to open up new export markets and attract new inward investment from the Middle East has been seen as a driving force behind closer ties.

However, Brazil's growing engagement in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and its seemingly contradictory policies—strong advocacy for Palestinian statehood versus the strengthening of its ties with Israel—speak to a broader set of themes that underlie contemporary Brazilian foreign policy: an admixture of geopolitical ambition, idealism, and pragmatism. Brazil's agenda abroad reflects its growing geopolitical ambitions as an increasingly relevant emerging power and speaks to the core ideological themes of the Workers' Party (in power since 2003) in its emphasis on themes of equality and justice. As Jeffrey Cason and Timothy J. Power aptly argue in a 2009 article in *International Political Science Review*, the ruling party's ideology has been more discernible abroad than at home, where Lula, after assuming power in 2003, continued on the orthodox economic path established by his predecessor, Fernando Henrique Cardoso.³ Indeed, one of the reasons Brazil is now viewed so favorably by international investors is the fact that Lula surprised them by not only carrying on with a mostly market-oriented economic agenda, but taking it further. Meanwhile, it was in the foreign policy arena that Lula's "mark" and that of his party could be expressed. Hence, along with the goal of attaining greater geopolitical relevance, Brazilian foreign policy has also been fueled by idealism. This is nowhere clearer than in the country's position toward the Israeli–Palestine cause, which has offered Brazil an opportunity to display its newfound global assertiveness at relatively low cost. This involvement has also illustrated dynamics in what Fareed Zakaria has called a "post-American world,"⁴ one defined not by anti-Americanism, but by the increasing salience of a more diverse set of players (particularly emerging markets) in world politics—many of whom do not shy away from taking on initiatives that may challenge (yet not directly confront) US policy stances. The Israeli–Palestinian conflict sets up a marker of a "post-American" position, confirming Brazil's new role in the lead-pack group.

Brazil's Growing Global Voice: Geopolitical Ambition at Work

In the last decade, Brazil has sought to recast itself as a global brand and a global power. An increasingly self-confident Brazil has undertaken an ambitious and far-reaching foreign policy agenda. Under Lula, the network of its bilateral relations has expanded considerably. Overseas embassies and offices increased from 150 in 2002 to 230 in 2010. This increase in postings abroad was accompanied by an expansion of the diplomatic corps from 1,000 members in 2005 to 1,400 in 2010.

The promotion of regional initiatives leading to greater South American integration has been the top priority of Brazil's foreign policy. The goal was not only to develop closer economic and political relations in the region, but to use them to increase the clout of Brazil and South America in global negotiations. This goal has been accompanied by intense efforts by Brazil to foster a South–South dialogue and to champion calls for the reform of multilateral global institutions. Former Brazilian foreign minister Celso Amorim lamented that the emergence of a new multipolar order had not led to a corresponding “democratization of multilateral institutions, which suffer from progressive obsolescence” and that “global governance has been running short on legitimacy, transparency and effectiveness, among other reasons, because developing countries remain underrepresented.”⁵ Brazil has been determined to bring about a reform in the workings of the international system, and the expansion of relations with Middle Eastern countries should be seen in the context of its global ambitions and demand for new voices to be heard. For Amorim, “the bridge established between South Americans and Arabs put the old logic that the countries of the South should be tutored by the North in their international endeavors to rest.”⁶

Brazil's growing global presence has been a function of its successful efforts at economic stability initiated during the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2002) and continued throughout Lula's time in office (2003–2010). Both presidents enjoyed significant popular support and were easily reelected after an initial four-year term. However, Lula's 80 percent approval rating in 2011 at the time of the transition of power from his administration to that of his designated (and popularly endorsed) successor, Rouseff, was unprecedented in Brazilian history. Indeed, Lula's ability to continue Cardoso's economic agenda surprised most who expected that the former union leader and president of the Worker's Party (PT, in its Portuguese acronym) would reverse economic policies associated with a neoliberal agenda of market-oriented reforms. On the contrary, Lula carried them further, assembling Congressional approval for even more contentious policy initiatives that Cardoso had been unsuccessful in passing, such as pension reform. Lula's agenda of continuity was particularly fruitful in extending Cardoso's social policies, morphing some earlier initiatives into the popular *Bolsa Familia* cash transfers program.

Brazil's newfound assertiveness in foreign policy was a result not only of the country's celebrated record of economic stability and significant progress in raising social standards, but also of international developments, particularly the end the Cold War and the worldwide embrace of liberal economic agendas that highlighted the benefits of expanded trade relations. The type of foreign policy embraced by the Lula government in particular was, however, a function of yet more unique domestic factors.

Cason and Power argue that since the Cardoso administration, Brazil had started to undergo a “presidentialization” of its foreign policy agenda that contrasted with the “impressive degree of bureaucratic autonomy and isolation” of Itamaraty (as Brazil’s Foreign Ministry is popularly called). In their view, “the most dramatic indicator of ‘power flowing outward’ from Itamaraty has been the increasingly direct role of the presidency in foreign affairs.” This is a marked change from the way diplomatic policy was carried out in the country prior to 1994. Until then, “Brazilian presidents were highly dependent on the [Itamaraty] and accorded the ministry great autonomy in policymaking.” In fact, presidents did not travel much abroad and “to the extent that they were involved in diplomacy at all it was in the context of carefully stage-managed summits and state visits where outcomes were generally pre-negotiated.”⁶ In contrast, “routinized presidential diplomacy” became a characteristic of the agendas of Cardoso and Lula.⁷

However, the “engagement patterns” of the two were different. Cardoso was an intellectual, well known in the US and Europe. He had been a minister of foreign affairs from late 1992 to early 1993, prior to assuming an important role as the minister of finance responsible for the Plan Real of sustained monetary stabilization. Cardoso’s landslide victory in the presidential elections of 1994 (defeating Lula) was no surprise. Neither was it unexpected that his intellectual credentials would lead him to foster closer ties with his American and European counterparts, all the while playing an active regional role, successfully mediating a border dispute between Ecuador and Peru in 1995.⁸

Lula, for his part, emphasized further regional integration, backing up the inclusion of Venezuela in Mercosur, nurturing South–South relations, and using the tool of presidential diplomacy to reach out to previously underemphasized regions such as Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Prior to finally winning the Brazilian presidency in 2003 (after three previous attempts), Lula had been the president of the PT, which he helped found in 1980. The party “began as an independent socialist party with strong ties to anti-imperialist movements around the world, and within a decade it had become Latin America’s most celebrated leftist party.”⁹

In the realm of foreign policy, Lula “drew on years of transnational linkages forged in labor politics and the growing international recognition of the PT.” This created an interesting paradox. While pursuing orthodox economic policies at home much in line with the liberalizing agenda of international financial institutions, abroad Lula exploited “two decades’ worth of accumulated progressive credentials.” Indeed, as Cason and Power speculate, this was so in order to compensate for his “diminishing progressive credential at home.” As they further explain: “Lula’s macroeconomic policies derived partly from an inherited IMF agreement, partly from authentic ideological change within the PT, and partly from the political

necessity of power sharing with center-right coalition partners. But foreign policy [was] different: it... constituted the main policy domain in which Lula and the PT... had relatively free rein to pursue long-standing ideological goals.”¹⁰

Ultimately, Lula combined his personal charisma, taste for the spotlight, and business-friendly trade policy with a foreign policy strategy that resonated with the grassroots of his Workers’ Party, namely, a new, independent, more assertive and, at times, defiant—especially in respect to the United States—role for Brazil on the world stage.

Brazil and the Palestinian Question: Idealism in the Quest for Increased Relevance

On December 3, 2010, in response to a request sent the previous week by Mahmoud Abbas, President Lula announced that Brazil was recognizing Palestine as a state along the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as its capital. Within a month, Abbas flew to Brasilia to lay the cornerstone of the new Palestinian embassy in the Brazilian capital, the first embassy of its kind in Latin America, and to attend the inauguration ceremony of President-elect Dilma Rousseff. Lula justified this step as being “just and coherent with the principles defended by Brazil in relation to the Palestinian question” and in keeping with Brazil’s conviction that the best way to arrive at a solution to the conflict was for the two countries to engage in negotiations. He continued: “[Brazil] has historically defended, particularly during my administration, the achievement of the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for a cohesive, safe, democratic, and economically viable state coexisting in peace with Israel.” In his letter to President Abbas confirming this decision, Lula reaffirmed Brazil’s commitment to regional stability and humanitarian relief to the people of Palestine along with Brazil’s condemnation of “any terrorist acts carried out for any purpose.”¹¹ In addition, the Brazilian president commended the Palestinian Authority on its “successful efforts” to spur the economy in the West Bank and improve security conditions for people living in the occupied territories. Among the BRIC nations, Brazil was the last to recognize Palestine as a state. By December, over 100 countries, including almost all the African and Arab states, had taken this step. Although Latin American countries had been reticent to follow suit, Brazil’s move now paved the way for others on the continent. Argentina and Uruguay immediately followed its lead and were soon joined by a further six countries.

While the timing of Brazil’s recognition of Palestine took many observers by surprise, the move was not unexpected. According to Rui Falcão, president of Lula’s political party, “throughout its history, the PT has expressed support for a negotiated solution to the conflict, reflected in the coexistence of two states within

the 1967 borders,” hence the party’s wish for “negotiations in which Palestinians finally have the right to their own sovereign state—independent, democratic, and viable—in the direction of just and lasting peace in the region.”¹² In fact, prior to Brazil’s official recognition of Palestinian statehood, the PT’s Secretariat for International Relations had already launched a campaign through its *Comitê pelo Estado da Palestina Já* [Committee for the State of Palestine Now] in August 2011.¹³

During the first official visit of a Brazilian president to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories in March 2010, Lula stated that the challenge ahead for the Palestinians was well known: “the removal of the cruel blockage to which the Palestinian people have been subjected.” The separation wall, he added, “exact[s] a high price in terms of human suffering as well as material loss.”¹⁴ The president reaffirmed Brazil’s support for the “existence of a sovereign, safe, and peaceful Israeli state,” but also criticized the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, referring to them as “unilateral initiatives” that “paralyzed negotiations” and “accelerated the deterioration of everyday life in the occupied territories and.... also fuel fundamentalism everywhere.”¹⁵ From the outset of his administration, Lula had sought to play a more visible role in the Middle East and specifically in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. One of his first steps in office was to open a Brazilian representative office in Ramallah, headed by a diplomat with the rank of ambassador. Brazil was also the only Latin American country to attend the Annapolis peace conference held at the end of November 2007. Shortly after that meeting, in February 2008, Lula dispatched his foreign minister, Celso Amorim, on a five-nation visit to the Middle East where he visited Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Syria in addition to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. During Amorim’s visit to Ramallah, Brazil and the PA agreed to intensify their political dialogue and to arrange for their respective governments to meet periodically to discuss bilateral, regional, and international matters of concern.

Combined with his forthright support for the Palestinians, Lula was becoming openly critical of the US role in the peace process. In welcoming President Abbas to Brazil at the end of November 2009, Lula contended that the US was incapable of negotiating a resolution to the conflict. Calling on Washington to step aside in favor of other actors, Lula saw the United Nations as the body that should be responsible for overseeing negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. Brazil’s support for multilateralism in this case reflected its preference for a “post-American” alternative to US mediation efforts—one where it can figure prominently as the “balanced voice” needed in the resolution of international conflicts.¹⁶

Indeed, prior to leaving for Israel and the Palestinian territories in what he termed his “mission of peace,” Lula presented himself as a potential mediator to the conflict.

He argued that the peace process was in need of “someone with neutrality to speak the truth to the Israelis, to tell the truth to the Palestinians, Iranians, Syrians, and whoever wanted to hear the truth.” When asked about Brazil’s newfound interest in the region, and particularly his desire to help Israel and the Palestinians resolve their differences, Lula responded, “Now Brazil takes part in the G20, G90, G70, G14, G 13, G8, G 5, and G4; hence, we now have an extraordinary variety of fora in which several countries interested in conflict resolution are present.” According to Lula, Brazil had always been interested in seeking a resolution to the conflict, but “it was never as interested as it is now.”¹⁷

For Israelis, Lula fell far short of his own standard of neutrality. As already noted, he publicly castigated Israel during his visit for its punitive policies toward the Palestinians yet showed little understanding or empathy for Israel’s security concerns. Nor was his visit to the region without controversy. Avigdor Lieberman, Israel’s foreign minister, refused to meet with him due his failure to visit the grave of Theodor Herzl, the founder of the Zionist Movement. The following day, however, in sharp contrast, Lula was pictured draped in an iconic Palestinian black-and-white checkered *keffiyeh* [headdress] laying a wreath at Yaser Arafat’s mausoleum in Ramallah.

Not surprisingly, Israel responded frostily to Brazil’s decision (as well as that of other Latin American states) to recognize Palestine. Equally, Brazil’s move came under cross-party attack in Washington. According to Ilena Ros-Lehtinen, the top Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Brazil’s decision was “regrettable and will only serve to undermine peace and security in the Middle East,” since “responsible nations would [rather] wait to take such a step until Palestinians return to direct talks with Israel and recognize its right to exist as a Jewish state.” Eliot Engel, chair of the House subcommittee overseeing relations with Latin America and at that time co-chair of the Congressional Brazil Caucus, agreed that “Brazil’s decision to recognize Palestine is severely misguided and represents a last gasp by a Lula-led foreign policy, which was already substantially off track.... Brazil is sending a message to the Palestinians that they need not make peace to gain recognition as a sovereign state.” Engel tied the move to Lula’s “coddling” of Iranian President Ahmadinejad and warned that though it was understandable that Brazil wanted to establish itself as a voice in world affairs, “it is making the wrong choices as it tries to do so... One can only hope that the new leadership coming into Brazil will change course and understand that this is not the way to gain favor as an emerging power or to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.”¹⁸

Such wishful thinking for a change in Brazilian policy failed to take into account Brazil’s emergent geopolitical ambitions and the new direction of its foreign

policy. Brazil under the leadership of Rousseff has continued its public advocacy of Palestinian rights. In her remarks to the opening sessions of the 66th UN General Assembly in September 2011, President Rousseff vigorously asserted that Palestine needed to be represented as a full member of the United Nations and that the only way for Israel to achieve real peace and security was through the creation of a free and sovereign Palestinian state. At the end of October 2011, Brazil voted in support of Palestinian membership in UNESCO, and the following year, on November 29, 2012, it supported the resolution according Palestine non-member observer status at the UN.

Brazil also took the lead in the negotiations leading to the free trade agreement between Mercosur and the Palestinian Authority, signed at the end of December 2011. Given the current low level of trade between the Mercosur bloc and Palestine,¹⁹ the signing of this agreement is more symbolic than practical in that it gives the Palestinians an equal standing with Israel, the only other extra-regional country to have such an arrangement with the South American trading bloc. Equally symbolic was the inclusion, at Brazil's insistence, of a clause in the summit's final declaration not only reaffirming Mercosur's ongoing support of Palestinian rights but also demanding greater involvement of the Mercosur states in the Middle East peace process.²⁰

The most noticeable expression of Brazil's engagement on the Palestinian issue has been the upping of its support for the Palestinian refugees through a marked increase in its contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) annual budget. In 2010, Brazil's contribution to UNRWA's core budget stood at \$200,000, which it supplemented with an additional donation of \$500,000 for the reconstruction of the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp in northern Lebanon. The next year saw a five-fold increase in the level of Brazil's support, raising its contribution to a little short of \$1 million, with a focus on the delivery of food aid and educational programs to Gaza. More significantly, it pledged to raise its contribution for 2012 to \$7.5 million, thereby becoming UNRWA's largest donor among the BRIC countries, far outstripping the support of Russia, India, and China, and all other Latin American countries.²¹

In recognition of Brazil's newfound commitment to the refugee issue, UNRWA's commissioner-general Filippo Grandi travelled to Rio de Janeiro in August 2012 where he encouraged the Brazilian government to consider applying for membership to the twenty-five-member UNRWA Advisory Commission, and in doing so becoming the only Latin American country and first BRIC nation to take this step. During his visit, Grandi even suggested that the "pacification" programs of Rio's *favelas* [slums] could serve as a model for Palestinian refugee camps and

that “the social policies and practices that Brazil has tried out in the *favelas* can be studied and lessons can be learned to improve the way we [UNWRA] work, especially with young people in the refugee camps.”²²

Brazil and Israel: Pragmatism Wins Out

In the 1990s, Israel’s relations with Latin America received little attention. Geographical distance and the difficult stabilization efforts of Latin American economies meant that the region hardly figured on Israel’s radar screen. With the establishment of relations in the 1990s with India, China, and Turkey, Israeli defense industries, which had featured so prominently in relations with Latin American countries, now began to explore new and more prosperous markets.

The mid-2000s saw a renewed interest by Israel in Latin American countries in general and in Brazil in particular. Brazil was responsive to those overtures, and has been keen to strengthen its ties with Israel. At the very moment Brazil recognized Palestine as a state, it was putting the finishing touches on a new security accord with Israel. The past decade has witnessed a deepening in the bilateral ties between Brazil and Israel. It has been marked by a series of high-profile ministerial visits, the signing of a number of cooperation agreements, growth in trade, and above all a high degree of military cooperation and arms sales.

In 2005, two ministerial visits, first by Israel’s Minister of Industry Ehud Olmert to Brazil in March, followed by a return visit to Jerusalem by Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim in May, helped pave the way for a new era of cooperation between the two countries. Those visits led to the drawing up of a Memorandum of Understanding for the Establishment of Bilateral Consultations; the enabling of regular political dialogue; the signing of an agreement for cooperation in industrial research and development in February 2007; and the completion of negotiations for a free trade agreement between Israel and the Mercosur bloc in December 2007.

Israel’s renewed interest in Latin America, and in particular in developing relations with Brazil, became much more noticeable in 2009 following a series of high-profile visits by Israeli leaders to the continent. In May, Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon attended the annual summit of the Organization of American States in Honduras, the first time in over a decade that Israel had sent such a high-level representative to the meeting. This was followed by a ten-day, four-nation (Brazil, Argentina, Peru, and Colombia) tour by Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman in July, and a visit by President Shimon Peres to Argentina and Brazil in November.

Lieberman's visit to Brazil was the first by an Israeli foreign minister since 1986 and forty years had elapsed since President Zalman Shazar had landed in Brazil.

Much was made at the time, and since, of the fact that these visits were seen as part of a concerted effort by Israel to head off the possible recognition of Palestinian statehood by Latin American countries and to counter the growing influence of Iran on the continent. Such an analysis was reinforced by the timing of the visit of Peres, who arrived in Brazil a fortnight ahead of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.²⁵ Brazil in particular had adopted a much more conciliatory line toward Iran than the United States and other Western powers. Lula had been supportive of Iran's efforts to develop a civilian nuclear program and was against imposing further sanctions on the Iranian regime, seeing them as counterproductive. Instead, he had urged Western leaders to engage in a dialogue with Iran.

But the idea of the Latin American continent as a new geopolitical battlefield for Israel offers only a partial explanation for Israel's renewed interest in relations with Brazil and other South American countries. Both Lieberman and Peres were accompanied on their visits by large business delegations, including leading representatives of Israel's top military and security companies. Away from the headlines, areas of future economic and security cooperation were high on the agenda. During his visit, Peres held talks with the Brazilian defense minister and helped conclude negotiations over a \$350 million contract for Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) to supply unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to Brazil.

In March 2010, President Lula became the first ever Brazilian president to visit Jerusalem. As noted earlier, Lula's visit was not without controversy. His criticism of Israel's policies toward the Palestinians and his refusal to visit Herzl's grave made headlines. Yet, while publicly castigating Israel for its policies regarding the Palestinians, Lula was also lavishing praise on Israel for its high-tech sector and entrepreneurial spirit as well as highlighting the investment opportunities for Israeli companies in Brazil. Addressing an audience of leaders of the Israeli business community, Lula spoke of a new investment plan for Brazil (launched in 2011 as the Greater Brazil Plan) and encouraged them to embrace the business opportunities it offered. During his visit, Lula also revealed that the Brazilian Congress had given its final approval for a free trade agreement between Israel and Mercosur. As part of this agreement, nearly all of Israel's exports to the Mercosur countries would become tax exempt by 2017. As a sign of growing friendship, Israel and Brazil announced at the time of the visit that their cabinets would convene a joint meeting biannually, an arrangement that Israel currently holds with only Italy and Germany.

As in the 1980s, the sale of advanced weapon systems and security cooperation is again a central feature of the burgeoning Israeli–Brazilian relationship, with Brazil becoming the fifth largest importer of Israeli arms from 2005–2010. Over the past decade, Elbit systems, one of the world’s largest defense contractors, has secured a significant foothold in the growing Brazilian market, with annual sales and contracts averaging over \$70 million. In 2008, it was awarded a \$187 million contract by Embraer, the Brazilian aircraft company, to supply avionics upgrades for the Brazilian AMX jet project.²⁴ This was followed by a contract in January 2010 to supply Hermes 450 surveillance drones to the Brazilian air force and an \$85 million contract to upgrade eleven Brazilian F-5 fighters. In January 2011, Elbit’s Brazilian subsidiary, Aeroeletronica, which it had purchased in 2001, was awarded a \$260 million contract for unmanned vehicle gun turrets by the Brazilian Ministry of Defense.

Gaining a foothold in the expanding Brazilian defense sector has become an important goal for Israeli defense companies, especially once Israel’s alliance with Turkey, a major and profitable arms market, collapsed in 2009. That effort received a significant boost in December 2010 with the signing of a security cooperation agreement between Israel and Brazil. Included in the agreement was a confidentiality clause under which Brazil undertook not to transfer classified technology to a third party, thus paving the way for Israeli companies to begin offering the country some of their most advanced weapon systems. The agreement also allowed for Israeli companies to become better positioned in the bidding for highly desirable and lucrative defense and homeland security contracts (estimated to be worth over \$5 billion) in the lead-up to the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics, both of which will be hosted by Brazil.²⁵

Conclusion: Looking ahead

Brazil’s approach to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has remained true to the course set by President Lula. Brazil under Dilma Rousseff has continued to be a strong and vocal advocate of Palestinian statehood. Shortly before the November 29, 2012 vote on Palestinian membership in the United Nations, Brazilian Foreign Minister Antonio Patriota visited Israel and the Palestinian territories, where he reaffirmed Brazil’s willingness to help mediate a resolution to the conflict. At home, in December 2012, Brazil hosted the Forum Social Palestina Livre [World Social Forum for a Free Palestine], a gathering of political activists, civil society groups, and transnational networks organized by supporters of the ruling Workers’ Party.

Brazil’s promotion of the Palestinian cause serves its interests at home and overseas. Domestically, it speaks to the idealism and principles of the Workers Party, which has held power since 2003. Abroad, it offers Brazil greater visibility,

not only reflecting its ambitions of becoming a global player, but also forming a central element in Brazil's efforts in challenging American dominance, and in promoting multilateralism to address and resolve global issues, thereby increasing the relevance of new emergent powers.

But if we are witnessing the emergence of a "post-American" global order, then Brazil's engagement with the Israeli–Palestinian conflict also reveals that pragmatism and self-interest will feature prominently in the approach of "new" powers to the resolution of global conflicts. Brazil has sought to strengthen its relations with Israel. For all its support of the Palestinian cause, Brazil sees Israeli investment, its high-tech sector, and the procurement of Israeli technology and advanced weapons as critical in the continued modernization of its economy and the development of its military exports.

This sense of pragmatism and *realpolitik* has also guided Israel's approach to Brazil. Recognizing Brazil's importance as an economic actor and emerging global power, and its potential as a market for its military exports, and aware that it has little chance of affecting Brazil's position, Israel has chosen to overlook its rhetoric on the conflict and work with Brazil, not against it. Indeed, Brazilian–Israeli relations have never been stronger. Since Rousseff came to power two years ago, five Israeli ministers have visited Brazil. Trade between the two countries has continued to flourish and Israeli military and security companies have deepened their presence in the growing Brazilian homeland security and defense markets. In April 2012, Rafael Advanced Defense Systems, one of Israel's leading defense contractors, acquired a 40-percent stake in the Brazilian aerospace company GESPI Aeronautics, and that summer the commander of the Brazilian air force paid a visit to Israel to discuss areas of future cooperation.

At least until the end of Rousseff's term in office (2015), we are likely to see the pattern of Brazil's engagement with Israel and the Palestinians remain one that meshes ambition, idealism, and pragmatism in a more assertive foreign policy agenda that, for all its normative flavor, is ultimately grounded in material self-interest. In that respect, it is a pattern of foreign policy behavior that is not too dissimilar to that of other emerging powers.

Notes

- ¹ Celso Amorim, "Brazilian Foreign Policy under President Lula (2003–2010): An Overview," *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*, 53 (2010), 235.
- ² "Muslim Population Grows 29% in Brazil," Brazil–Arab News Agency, September 3, 2012.

- ³ Jeffrey Cason and Timothy J. Power, "Presidentialization, Pluralization, and the Rollback of Itamaraty: Explaining Change in Brazilian Foreign Policy Making in the Cardoso–Lula Era," *International Political Science Review*, XXX:2 (2009), 117–140.
- ⁴ Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World* (New York, 2009).
- ⁵ Amorim, op.cit., p. 216.
- ⁶ Ibid., p. 235.
- ⁷ Cason and Power, op cit., p. 121.
- ⁸ The first two democratic presidents of Brazil (after democratization in 1982), Jose Sarney and Fernando Collor, travelled abroad seven to eight times a year. Cardoso left Brazil ninety-two times during his eight-year-term (Cason and Power, op. cit). In turn, Lula paid 259 visits to eighty-three foreign countries, including international meetings (Amorim, op. cit.)
- ⁹ Paulo Sotero, "Brazil's Rising Ambition in a Shifting Balance of Power," *Politics*, XXX:1 (2010), 71–81.
- ¹⁰ Cason and Power, op cit, p.127
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Brazilian Foreign Ministry "Cartas dos Presidentes Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva e Mahmoud Abbas a respeito do Reconhecimento pelo Governo Brasileiro do Estado Palestino nas Fronteiras de 1967," Nota No. 708, 2010.
- ¹³ Rui Falcão, "PT saúda a Palestina pelo resultado da votação na ONU," November 30, 2012, www.pt.org.br/noticias/view/pt_sauda_a_palestina_pelo_resultado_da_votacao_na_onu.
- ¹⁴ Partido dos Trabalhadores, "Comitê pelo Estado da Palestina Já! será lançado em SP," August 23, 2011, www.pt.org.br/noticias/view/comite_pelo_estado_da_palestina_ja_sera_lancado_em_sp.
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- ¹⁹ "US lawmakers blast Brazil's Palestinian move," *AFP*, December 3, 2010, and <http://engel.house.gov/latest-news/rep-engel-condemns-brazilian-recognition-of-palestine-along-1967-borders-as-severely-misguided/>.
- ²⁰ In 2011, the total level of trade between Brazil and Palestine amounted to less than \$16 million: Brazilian exports to Palestine totaled \$15.7 million and imports from Palestine were just \$80,000.
- ²¹ "Mercosur signs free trade agreement with Palestinian Authority," *Mercopress*, December 21, 2011, <http://en.mercopress.com/2011/12/21/mercosur-signs-free-trade-agreement-with-palestinian-authority>
- ²² www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=1193.

- ²³ See Fabíola Ortiz, "Brazil invited to join U.N. Palestine Refugee Agency," *IPS News Agency*, August 21, 2012. Brazil has yet to respond to that request. Membership of the UNRWA Advisory Commission requires a contribution of \$15 million over a three-year period. The UN general Assembly would have to vote on Brazil joining the Advisory Commission.
- ²⁴ Greer Fay Cashman, "Peres to emphasize Iranian threat on South America trip," *Jerusalem Post*, November 6, 2009 and Caroline Glick, "Why Latin America turned," *Jerusalem Post*, November 12, 2010. In June 2011, Danny Ayalon addressed the OAS annual meeting and called on OAS states to act against Iran.
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