

UN in the Arab World

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Emerging Powers and the Israeli- Palestinian Conflict:

The Case of Brazil and Venezuela

Guy Burton

University of Kurdistan-Hewler

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In 2009, the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) launched the United Nations in the Arab World Program with the objective of exploring and analyzing the role of the United Nations (UN) in the Arab World and the impact it has had on regional politics and societies.

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Rami G. Khouri *IFI Director*
Karim Makdissi *Faculty Research Director*
Samar Ghanem *Program Coordinator*
Rabih Mahmassani *Communications Manager*
Donna Rajeh *Designer*

Guy Burton
University of Kurdistan-Hewler

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Introduction

What are the prospects of new rising powers to play a role in the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? At present the possibility of direct talks leading to a final settlement of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians looks far from promising. Negotiations between the two sides have been at a standstill since September 2010, when the two sides briefly met under US sponsorship. Expectations had been high that the US would once again take a leading role as a mediator between the two sides, a self-appointed role that it has taken on at regular intervals since Israel and the Palestinians initially committed themselves to working out their differences following the signing of the Oslo accords in 1993. Following his election in late 2008, there was hope that the new US president, Barack Obama, might be able to broker talks between the two. Much of this expectation was based on a mistaken belief that Obama would be cooler towards Israel than his predecessor had been and that he was determined to invest sufficient capital to find an agreement amenable to both sides.

Obama's supposed advantage as the principal interlocutor in the international community regarding the conflict owes much to the strong US presence, both globally and in the region since the end of the Cold War. It is also a position which arguably received broad support from the international state system in the form of the UN, which endorsed the Oslo accords and process. However, against this may be detected a shift, both in the international community's position in relation to the conflict and increasing frustration with the US role. This has overlapped with changes in international relations more generally, namely from a US-dominated unipolar world during the 1990s to a more multipolar one over the last decade. Increasingly, newer and more visible powers appear to be on the rise both at a global and regional level, including China, Brazil, India and Russia outside the region, along with others within the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey and Qatar.

Does this apparent shift in international relations mean that the American domination on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is coming to an end? Can these new state actors offer alternative directions which might contribute towards the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? What would be the nature of that engagement? Given that particular actors like the US and UN have been at the forefront of what is looking increasingly like a failed process, what are the prospects of new and emerging powers from the global south offering new ways forward to a final, lasting, and just settlement?

In particular this working paper considers the involvement of two of these emerging powers – Brazil and Venezuela – and their contribution to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Both share broadly similar positions ideologically, as members of the left which has emerged in Latin America over the past decade, even as they pursue a rivalry towards regional supremacy. At the same time, the two countries also present differences in terms of power projection: on the one hand, Brazil has been perceived as a rising global power in line with other countries such as Russia, India and China (and recently South Africa). The last decade saw the economic importance of these countries grow significantly in terms of their share of global GDP, from 16% in 2000 to 25% in 2010, and contributing 55% of PPP-adjusted GDP growth in 2000-08 (Ministry of Finance, India, 2012: ix, xiv). This is despite the fall in the rate of economic growth over the last few years which may undermine Brazil's national development project. On the other hand, while oil-producing Venezuela may be perceived as more of a regional power (especially given the recent decline in oil prices) it experienced significant international prestige and projection in the last decade. This has much to do with the rise in oil prices which provided growing revenues for its politically controversial and combative late president, Hugo Chavez, to stride the world stage. While never in the same league as the BRIC countries, Venezuela expanded its foreign relations during the 2000s, seeking allies against the US which included a strategic relationship with Iran in the Middle East. With Chavez now gone, Venezuela could potentially shift from a confrontational to a more cooperative stance, serving as a mediator between the US and its allies on the one side and Venezuela's anti-US allies, on the other.

Both Brazil and Venezuela have seen their international influence increase within and outside their region, initially as challengers to US hegemony in the western hemisphere and latterly at a global level. Even if the 2010s may bring retrenchment as a result of economic factors, what have they offered, and can they offer in the future –to enhance their respective position in world politics? What can they offer that may be different and new as a means of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Can states from a region like Latin America, which has traditionally been distant from the Middle East and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, provide an alternative direction?

In order to assess their prospects, this working paper considers their involvement in the following manner: The first part examines the international context in which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict exists. The second part addresses the origins and themes associated with international support for a two state solution. The third part examines the pursuit of a two state solution through the Oslo accords, and the fourth part considers Brazil's and Venezuela's engagement with the Middle East generally and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular. The conclusion reiterates the limitations of the current approach to resolving the conflict and what role emerging powers like Brazil and Venezuela can play towards this end.

The International Context

There are two main observations about the international context relating to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the emergence of new powers: first, the predominance of US power in the wider Middle East region and general support by other powers; and secondly, growing differences between the US and other powers in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict specifically.

Commonalities Over the Middle East

Regionally, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is part of the wider international relations of the Middle East. It is part of an environment in which the global and regional system underwent a process of change after 1989, resulting in American primacy. Until the end of the Cold War international relations and regional politics were bipolar, with states facing a choice between patronage and alliance with the capitalist US or the socialist/communist Soviet Union. Following the Soviet bloc's collapse, that choice virtually disappeared with the US becoming the sole hegemonic power. During the 1990s and into the 2000s, US power was largely unchallenged and its dominance became both more visible and direct with the arrival of troops to the region during the 1990s, initially as part of the large US-led coalition to eject Iraq from Kuwait after its occupation in 1990. Following the end of the First Gulf War in 1991 the US military presence remained and then further increased in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, first in relation to the struggle against the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001-02, and then in the invasion and occupation of Iraq in the Second Gulf War after 2003.

Despite the presence of US hegemony in the region, the shift from a unipolar to a more multipolar world during the past decade has been largely unchallenged in the Middle East. The European Union has increasingly sought to engage the region in a process of economic and political liberalization coupled with greater commitment to the rule of law, as a means of addressing its security concerns in relation to terrorism and illegal immigration (Santini 2011). In addition to established powers like Europe, there have been others including new emerging global powers such as Brazil, Russia, India and China (the so-called BRIC states), and regional ones like Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey and Qatar. However, despite the multiplicity of actors, there is a great deal of overlapping interests with Washington, especially the desire for stability and order (with arguably the main exception being Iran which seeks to challenge both the US and regional arrangements through its nuclear program). This is important for both energy consumers like China and India and energy producers like Russia, Saudi Arabia and Qatar (see Assl 2011, 2012, Kapila 2011, Rajiv 2012, Kholsa 2009, Donaldson and Noguee 2009, Trenin 2009, Peterson 2006, Blanchard 2010, Janardhan 2009, Kemp 2011). The primacy of the US in the form of its security umbrella, is supposed to provide not only security but stability. Moreover, given the limited military resources of both global and regional powers in the region (excluding Israel, whose position is due to both its conventional and nuclear military capabilities) these states benefit from Washington's direct presence at little cost to themselves.

Emerging powers' willingness to bandwagon on the back of US-sponsored regional security is reflected in its cautious approach to the Arab Spring. Just as Washington initially sided with the Mubarak regime and promoted political reform in Egypt before events overran their assessment, so have the BRIC countries been wary of significant change. Oil consumers like China and India watched developments unfold in the region with some trepidation, fearful of what the implications of political instability might have economically. Similarly, Russia was loathe to see significant change, but not because of the impact it would have on material resources; indeed, instability in the region can only improve energy prices and Russia's position as a reliable producer. Instead, Moscow and Beijing view the unrest from a domestic perspective: both fear potential pressure from within their borders from political separatists and the economically disaffected, which they aim to address without external interference (Baev 2011, Pollack 2011).

Russian and Chinese attitudes reflect a strong tendency towards national sovereignty and opposition towards foreign intervention among both BRIC countries and other emerging powers. This stance became increasingly evident as the Arab Spring unfolded, especially once it turned into a military confrontation in Libya in early 2011. While the West agitated to support the opponents of the regime, Russia, China and Brazil all abstained from voting in favor of foreign intervention at the UN Security Council, Brazil being a temporary member at the time. More

recently, there have been similar stances even in cases where oil production has not been at stake, as in the case of the growing civil war in Syria since 2012: neither China nor Russia (the latter believed to have a close alliance with the Assad regime) has been willing to support demands for foreign engagement with the opposition.

The BRICs' position was similarly echoed by Chavez in Venezuela. He criticized actual and potential foreign intervention in Libya and Syria respectively on the grounds that it was the West seeking to influence the political processes in both countries (Briceno 2012). But at the same time, he arguably found himself on the wrong side of history: in 2009 he was one of the first to reject criticism of Iranian president Ahmadinejad's re-election and the Green Movement protest which emerged. Then, when the Arab Spring began, he sided with the regimes thereby weakening the public sentiment which had grown up around him during the 2000s. According to Selfa (2011), this was mainly pragmatic, including the need to stabilize oil prices and because in his confrontational nature, anyone who opposed the US must be supported.

Differences Over the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

At the level of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, however, there is much less consensus between the US and emerging global and regional powers. On the surface there is little apparent difference between the US and other states. There has been a consensus in support of a two-state solution since the 1967 war, which was formalized in the Oslo accords. It is further reflected in the non-recognition of Israel's 1980 annexation of east Jerusalem, criticism of its settlement activities in the occupied territory and support for a Palestinian state (Shlay and Rosen 2010).

Against these common goals, there is a noticeable difference in the relative position of the US and other states towards Israel. On the US side there is a high degree of elite support for Israeli goals. This is partially explained by the presence of a strong Israeli lobby in Washington which has developed over time and especially since 1967, resulting in the perception of common interests and the promotion of US policy towards that end (Mearsheimer and Walt 2008). Much of US political support is reflected in congress's commitment to provide regular and substantial amounts of financial and security assistance to Israel, regardless of the actual or perceived threats presented by the Israel lobby (Clarke 1997). That perception has also been aided by the influence that the Israel lobby has in terms of financial contributions for election candidates, both presidential and congressional. Against the power of the Israel lobby, other explanations have been offered to account for the closeness of the two states, including 'shared cultural, moral and intellectual affinities' (Verbeeten 2006). This includes strategic reasons, which have developed since Israel's foundation and the shift of much of the Arab world into the Soviet sphere until 1989. Since the end of the Cold War, US policy has remained close to Israel owing to the support of evangelical Christians and Republicans in the US, buttressed with a widespread sentiment of goodwill by the US public.

While emerging powers from the South share US strategic concern in the Middle East and the role that Israel can play in it, there is arguably not the same degree of public sentiment or a lobby comparable to that in the US. For example, in Brazil the Arab lobby is arguably stronger, with campaigners and representatives descended from past Lebanese and Syrian migrants. The lack of strong public support for Israel is reflected in the way that these emerging powers have engaged with Israel, mainly on national security goals (e.g. China seeking to upgrade its military technology, India wanting to build alliances to contain Pakistan, Turkey wanting to balance Syrian influence). Consequently, powers like Russia and China have been more willing to voice criticism of Israel's occupation and settlement activities (Nizameddin 1999, Zambelis 2009).

Despite these differences between the US and other members of the wider international community concerning the conflict, two points are notable. One is the fact that the extent to which these emerging powers have played a more direct role in the political resolution of the conflict has remained relatively limited. Instead, the US has continued to be the most visible and active sponsor of dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians. Another is the fact that the greater US involvement has not led to any significant change in the nature of the occupation or the power imbalance between Israel and the Palestinians. Although the US sponsored talks between the two sides in the 1990s and 2000s based on the principles associated with two states, they have not resulted in any significant breakthrough. Talks at Wye Valley (1998), Camp David in 2000, Annapolis in 2007, and Washington in 2010, have not seen any significant returns from them.

International Support for a Two State Solution

Although there are differences between the US and other powers concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there is some degree of consensus between them concerning the eventual desired outcome. Simply put, the international community with the UN as its representative body, sees the solution to the conflict as one where two states – one Jewish, one Arab- Palestinian – will result. This global consensus has persisted since the end of the Second World War and in the various resolutions presented at the UN, from the decision to partition Palestine in 1947 to the passage of Resolution 242 following the end of the 1967 war in which the recommendation of 'land for peace,' whereby Israel would withdraw its troops from occupied territory in exchange for a full and lasting peace.

Until 1967, the conflict had been between Israel and its Arab neighbours: Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. Although tensions persisted and peace with Egypt and Jordan was only achieved in 1979 and 1994 respectively, much of the focus of the conflict turned inward, to that between Israel and the Palestinians in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The representative Palestinian national movement, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), had originally opposed Res 242 and land for peace, however, following the first intifada (1987-1991), the Gulf crisis (1990-91), the end of the Cold War, and the rise of US hegemony in the region, the PLO increasingly came to accept the proposal as the basis for negotiations. This resulted in the signing of the Declaration of Principles (DOP) between Israel and the PLO in September 1993.

The DOP formed the basis for a series of agreements subsequently worked out between Israel and the PLO over the next year, which became known as the Oslo accords. These initial agreements envisaged a step-by-step process towards an eventual Palestinian state and peace and security between it and Israel by 1999. The accords contributed to the formation of the PA as a transitional Palestinian government. Oslo was therefore not a final agreement, but a prelude to one, by setting out a framework for negotiations, with the most difficult issues – the status of Jerusalem, the Israeli settlements in the occupied territories and refugees and their right of return – to be addressed in the final stages of these negotiations. During this period Israel would withdraw its military forces from the West Bank and Gaza in stages in exchange for PA-imposed security measures.

The Oslo accords were supported by the international community through the UN General Assembly. All of the most challenging issues, i.e. refugees' right of return, the status of Jerusalem and the future of Israel's settlements in the occupied territories, were to be addressed in a final settlement between the two sides. In addition, the UN and its member states sought to play an 'active role in the peace process' and 'provide greater economic and technical assistance to the Palestinians' (UN 2008: 32).

The Oslo Period and After

The signing of the DOP suggested the beginning of the end of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. However, this did not turn out to be the case. First, the DOP did not transform the underlying power imbalance between the two sides. Of the two, Israel was the more powerful; maintaining what Halper (2008) has called a 'matrix of control' over the Palestinians. This matrix includes both direct and indirect forms, including movement restrictions, detention of Palestinians and the use of the PA as a proxy to provide security in the occupied territories (Halper 2008, Klein 2010). Second, there was growing distrust which slowed down the implementation of the accords. In addition to the Israeli government's dilemma were important veto players on each side. This included the Israeli settler movement and the Palestinian Islamist party, Hamas, which did not recognise Israel. These actors opposed Oslo and sought to slow down what they saw as concessions being made by their own sides. In order to keep them on side, both Israel and the PLO began to adopt a slower approach towards implementation, which frustrated the other side and contributed towards an erosion of goodwill and increased suspicion of each other. This eventually erupted in the second intifada after 2000, during which Palestinian militants resorted to suicide bombings in Israeli towns and cities, followed by Israeli state retaliation on the Palestinian residents of the West Bank and Gaza, through destruction of homes, infrastructure and lives (Esposito 2005).

Third, the international community offered no way out of the conflict, even as it turned from the relatively optimistic years of the Oslo period to the violence of the second intifada. This was evident at several levels. At one level was its strong commitment to 'land for peace' and its manifestation in the DOP and Oslo accords with their assumption that the two sides would negotiate directly with each other meant that it was unable to conceive of an alternative solution when that broke down after 2000.

In sum, the absence of any change to the power dynamic between Israel and the Palestinians has coincided with both more strident international criticism of Israel and its occupation and treatment of the Palestinians on the one hand, and the pursuit of alternative approaches by both the Palestinian leadership and its international partners to realise statehood on the other. The PA sought diplomatic recognition which would facilitate this; in 2009 and 2010 Venezuela and Brazil upgraded their diplomatic representation with the Palestinians. In early 2011 international institutions including the World Bank, IMF and the UN reported that the PA was sufficiently institutionalised to be recognised as a state (Haaretz 2011). This statement foreshadowed the Palestinian leadership's decision to circumvent the stalled Oslo process by applying to the UNSC for UN membership as a state in September 2011 (a move that was bound to be curtailed given the likelihood – and subsequent declaration – of the US to wield its veto).

Alongside the currently moribund application for full UN membership, the Palestinian cause has been backed up by international support in other forums, including the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) which upgraded Palestinian representation to observer status in November 2012 and which has regularly criticised Israel's occupation and abuse of human rights (see UNGA 2012). Following the Israeli foreign ministry to remove itself from the UN Human Rights Committee in early 2012, the UN placed Israel on a list of those countries which restricts human rights as a result of a currently un-passed bill restricting foreign funding of domestic NGOs (Ravid 2012).

Despite this international and Palestinian action, it has not led to any changes in the nature of the occupation. The Israeli leadership condemned the Palestinian UN bid, arguing that it disregarded the Oslo process. Israeli opposition was enhanced by the election of a right-wing government in 2009 which included political forces close to the conservative Orthodox Jewish and settler communities, both of whom largely opposed any concessions with the Palestinians. This continues to be the case despite the relative decline in violent conflict and the absence of any direct negotiations between the principals since the unsuccessful US-sponsored talks in 2010.

Brazilian and Venezuelan involvement

It is into this domestic and international context, where Israel remains dominant in the conflict and Palestinian capacity to effect change that Brazil and Venezuela have sought to play a role.

Regional Non-Interference

Brazil and Venezuela are useful case studies to assess the involvement of emerging powers for several reasons. First, they represent a region, Latin America, whose engagement with the Middle East region and relations with Israel and the Palestinians has been relatively limited until recently. Indeed, both countries have seen their relations with the Middle East increase during the past decade. Brazil's current Middle East engagement stems from the more robust foreign policy pursued since 2000 and especially President Lula (2003-10) who expanded Brazil's diplomatic presence, with particular attention to the global South and especially in Africa. According to Lula's foreign minister, Celso Amorim, Brazil pursued more diplomacy and trade with the Middle East region through both bilateral and cross-regional approaches. Relative to other regions, the level of contact was initially low; consequently, there was a significant increase in trade over the decade, tripling between Brazil and Arab countries to \$20bn between 2003 and 2010. At the same time the lack of prior significant links gave Brazil flexibility to develop new lines of contact, including the initiation of the Arab-South American Summits, the first which took place in Brasilia in 2005 before following in Doha in 2009 (Amorim 2011).

Brazil's involvement with the region has continued under Lula's successor, Dilma Rousseff (2011-present). Although perceived to have a less robust foreign policy generally (Sotero 2012, Ituassu 2012), Rousseff has defended the economic grievances of protestors arising from the Arab Spring, while condemning the violence of regimes like Syria, and urging both government and opposition to engage in dialogue (Rousseff 2012). At the same time, Rousseff has sought to articulate a doctrine which reflects this vision: namely that those who intervene on behalf of human rights should not exceed their mandate and provide assistance to those they are supposed to be supporting. In other words, states do not only have a 'responsibility to protect', but also a 'responsibility in protecting' (Rousseff 2011, Evans 2012, Cardoso, Thomaz and Machado 2012).

Meanwhile, as South America's primary oil producer, Venezuela was a founding member of OPEC, whose others members are mainly based in the Middle East. Following his first election in 1999, the former Venezuelan president, Hugo Chavez, followed the course taken by his predecessors in setting out a personal foreign policy agenda (Toro 1991). However, unlike previous presidents, Chavez adopted a more confrontational stance towards the US and its allies. To that end, he sought to revitalize OPEC as an anti-imperialist and anti-colonial tool towards development and independence (Herrera 2008). He cultivated relations with other OPEC members from the early 2000s on to manage production levels so as to increase the price of oil and resulting revenues. This included building strategic alliances with countries which shared his strong antipathy to the US, including Iran. Chavez's developing relationship with Iran may have contributed to a growing distance with Israel, which was reflected in his confrontational rhetoric, eventually culminating in the break of relations between the two countries following the 2008-09 Gaza war.

Both Venezuela and Brazil challenge US primacy, globally and in the Middle East region, and see themselves as potentially more honest brokers or mediators. Both countries' foreign policy reflects a hemispheric preoccupation with US hegemony and a desire to undercut it. To this end, Brazil under Lula and Rousseff, and Venezuela under Chavez pursued policies towards a more multipolar environment in which US preferences are one of many. In particular this has included a rejection of US preoccupations with a neoliberal Free Trade Agreement of the Americas and the Washington Consensus, in favour of regional and continental organisations like Union of South American Nations which excludes the US and Canada and a Buenos Aires Consensus which is more concerned with notions of solidarity and state-led development (Harris 2005, Kellogg 2007, Husar 2007). These preferences have translated into the two countries' approach to the Middle East as well. As an extra-regional presence in OPEC, Venezuela has historically sought to balance the differences of opinions between its Middle Eastern partners. Chavez's pursuit of higher oil prices during the 2000s began to change this, however; his position found support from Iran and Libya on

the one hand while generating opposition from Saudi Arabia (and its US and Chinese backers who would prefer more stable production and prices) on the other hand (Corrales and Penfold 2011). This also contributed towards closer links between Venezuela and Iran, including through arms purchases and agreements relating to trade, banking and scientific, technical and agrarian cooperation (Clem and Maingot 2011). For Brazil, meanwhile, the development of its greater engagement with the region encouraged it to work with Turkey to reach an agreement with Iran which would control its enrichment of uranium whereby it might transfer a limited amount abroad. The deal was significant in that it offered a breakthrough in the impasse between Tehran and Washington, but was subsequently undermined by the US and other members of the UNSC which voted on sanctions against Tehran (Amorim 2011). More recently, the political changes unleashed by the Arab Spring since 2011 have prompted both Brazilian and Venezuelan policymakers to support national sovereignty and non-interference; Chavez sought a mediating role during the Libyan conflict while as a non-permanent members of the UNSC, Brazil abstained with China and Germany from the vote on foreign intervention in Libya (Gandin 2011). Indeed, Brazil's assessment of the situation in Libya before and since Gaddafi's overthrow has not been positive. President Rousseff expressed concern that NATO was overstepping its mandate by seeking to overthrow Gaddafi when Western intervention should have been restricted to protecting civilians (Evans 2012). The failure to protect has meant that Libya has consequently experienced severe instability as a result of the actions taken (Leahy 2012).

Engagement with Israel and the Palestinians

Given Brazil's and Venezuela's relative distance from the region and the conflict, how have they engaged with the principal players in the conflict? First, the context in which both countries operate is one where they have relatively little leverage over the conflict's participants, and especially Israel as the stronger party. Such leverage would be more closely related to elements of hard power, i.e. military and economic. Militarily, neither country has troops in the region; Brazil last had troops in the Middle East as part of the UN peacekeeping force following the 1956 war, while Venezuela contributed peacekeepers to UN operations in Iraq/Kuwait during the 1990s. In economic terms, both countries run a trade deficit with Israel - with trade with the occupied Palestinian territory being bound up in official Israeli figures and therefore making it difficult to disaggregate. Although the value of trade is significantly larger in the case of Brazil (by almost five times), the value of imports is greater than exports. This is largely due to the higher value of Israeli products over Brazilian and Venezuelan products, which tend to be commodity-based or manufactured (Asociación Latinoamericana de Integración, various years). It also means that the scope for either Latin American country to use trade as a hard power resource by pressuring Israel through the use of economic sanctions is extremely limited, although probably more so in the case of Venezuela on account of its smaller trade relationship than Brazil.

Second, with a lack of hard power options, both countries must resort to greater use of soft power. In other words, lacking the capacity to coerce the conflict principals towards dialogue, the Latin American states must attract support towards its preferred path. That path is in line with the international consensus in support of a two state solution. In practice, this meant that they both maintained that dialogue and direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians is the only means to resolving the conflict. During the 1990s this entailed support for the Oslo process; during the 2000s it has meant support for the UN as a part of the Quartet and its emphasis on the Road Map (Folha de São Paulo 2003, Salon 1996).

Third, in the case of the Palestinians, both Brazil and Venezuela have adopted positions which have received favorable responses. Both have supported the Palestinian desire for statehood and provided assistance for its leadership and people. Chavez's support for the Palestinian and Arab cause became especially visible during Israel's 2006 invasion of Lebanon and in his subsequent rhetoric. Increasingly, he became a popular icon among the Palestinian and Arab people (Selfa 2011). Brazil participated in the 2007 Annapolis and Paris conferences to support Palestinian development and the 2009 Sharm el-Sheikh conference to assist post-war reconstruction of Gaza (Amorim 2011, Saleh, interview, 2011). At the same time, it upgraded its diplomatic relations with the Palestinians in December 2010 in an effort to move the Oslo process forward – and did so without any apparent deterioration in its relations with Israel. This continued under Lula's successor, Rousseff, who called for Palestinian statehood at the UN General

Assembly in both 2011 and 2012 (Meyer 2012). Brazil's commitment was furthered in November 2012 when the Brazilian representative at the UN noted that 'In light of the current obstacles to the immediate admission of Palestine as a full member of the United Nations, we supported, as an interim measure, that Palestine be accorded Observer State status in the United Nations' (Viotti 2012). Financially, Brazil has become a more visible donor in the form of humanitarian assistance, although the bulk of its funds continue to be made through contributions to 'United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)'. According to the Brazilian representative office in Ramallah, this included \$10m made available at Paris for infrastructure in the agricultural, health and education sectors and \$25m for reconstruction in Gaza, of which \$7m has so far been spent and a further \$7.5m was being made available by December 2011. It has also contributed finances to build a sports centre in Ramallah, rebuild the Red Crescent hospital in Gaza, and a new special needs centre in Nablus in partnership with South Africa, India and the UN.

Under Chavez, Venezuela was critical of Israeli violations of state sovereignty. In 2006 Chavez condemned Israel's war against Lebanon, leading him to recall his ambassador to Israel and expelling the Israeli ambassador, and also its attacks in the occupied territories, including the arrests of newly elected Palestinian ministers and parliamentarians following Hamas's election victory. In 2009 Chavez officially recognised Palestinian statehood and began formal diplomatic relations. That same year he began to offer solidarity-oriented forms of assistance through the development of links between Telesur and Palestinian broadcasting and a student exchange programme (Hernando, interview, 2011). In this regard, Venezuelan policy towards the Palestinians reflects some of the public diplomacy efforts made by the US to appeal to wider Arab societies since the 1940s through exchange programmes, educational visits and the use of the media (Lord 2006, Rugh 2006). Initiated in 2010, the exchange programme provides educational opportunities for 20 new students from the occupied territories and refugee communities in Lebanon and Jordan each year to study at the Chavez-associated 'mision' (mission) universities in Venezuela. Meanwhile, in terms of more conventional assistance, Venezuela sought to provide food and medicine to Palestinians in Gaza during the 2008-09 war (Hernando, interview, 2011).

In short then, Brazil has sought equidistance between Israel and the Palestinians, while Venezuela has been more confrontational. For the former Brazilian foreign minister, Celso Amorim (2011), Brazil's stance was helped by not having a direct interest in the conflict, or a preference for one party over the other (Reis da Silva and Kunrath 2010, Uziel, interview, 2011). Sometimes this could be taken to extremes, as the example of Brazil's position in relation to the 2008-09 Gaza war shows; despite the disproportionate nature of Israeli attacks and resulting deaths, its UN representative sought balance by condemning violence on both sides, from Israel's military raids into the strip to the deaths of Israelis (Viotti 2009). At the same time, Brazilian policymakers believe that the wider dialogue may contribute to new ways of resolving the conflict. In his 2006 address to the UN General Assembly, Lula proposed an international conference with an expanded number of state participants to support the peace process (Lula 2006, Amorim 2011b). Alongside this, Brazilian engagement with the conflict might draw upon recent statements by Lula's presidential successor, Dilma Rousseff, in support of 'responsibility while protecting' alongside the globally accepted norm of 'responsibility to protect'. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict this could be used as a demand on Israel. Insofar as Israel continues to claim its presence as an occupying one in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, it is therefore bound under international obligations to ensure the protection of Palestinians and their livelihoods. In practice this may not amount to much, since the Israeli army's behaviour with closures and curfews reveals the extent to which it perceives all Palestinians as enemies. However, the promotion of 'responsibility while protecting' at all opportunities would serve both to expose Israel's failures and delegitimize its permanent occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

Forth, the contrary positions of Brazil and Venezuela in relation to the conflict's principal players have resulted in different views among Israelis and Palestinians. Although no data – polling or otherwise – exists on Israeli or Palestinian public opinion relating to the two countries or Latin America more generally, discussion with representatives of each national leadership's diplomatic community suggests distinct views, in particular greater concern – and a more favorable impression – with Brazil over Venezuela. On the one hand, Chavez's more confrontational stance diminished whatever limited influence Venezuela might have had on Israel; Israeli state and societal observers of Latin America did not see Chavez as a potential partner (Shavit, Margalit, interviews, 2011). At same time, more Venezuelan efforts to appeal to the Palestinians have yielded it only limited support. Munjed Saleh, the PA foreign minister's assistant

for Latin America and the Caribbean, and a long-time observer of the region, claims that while Chavez's support for the Palestinians was welcome, he does not feel that it has led to any significant changes in the form of new channels of engagement or partnership. Rather than Palestinian independence being a priority for Chavez, he saw his more pro-Palestinian position as part of a wider anti-imperialist stance against the US and its proxies (Saleh, interview, 2011). By contrast, Brazil is seen as both a more significant player and partner for both sides. This presumably has much to do with the relative position of Brazil in relation to Venezuela: Brazil is seen as a potential future global power while Venezuela is not; meaning that it is more important for both Israel and the Palestinians to cultivate good relations with Brasília than Caracas as far as it is possible. For Israelis this is evident at both state and societal levels. For the latter – and especially those in the peace camp – increasing Brazil's involvement in the peace process (along with Latin America more generally in the form of Mercosur) would be an important symbolic step (Margalit, interview, 2011); it would reflect the more multipolar nature of the global system. However, such differences of opinion regarding Brazil's and Venezuela's relative influence are limited to a narrow view of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict solely. Arguably Venezuela could have a significant role to play in relation to Israel's wider security concerns, especially with regard to Iran and its nuclear programme; Venezuela's relationship with Tehran makes it a potential mediator between it and Israel.

At the same time, while Israeli officials recognise Brazil's growing importance, they did not think that Lula, or other Latin American leaders sufficiently understood the tensions in the conflict. The head of the Latin America section in the Israeli Foreign Ministry, Dorit Shavit, claimed that during his presidency, Lula viewed relations between Jews and Arabs from his own national perspective; as a result he overlooked the shared national identity that Brazilian Jews and Brazilian Arabs shared and disregarded the contested national narratives at work between Israelis and Palestinians (Shavit, interview, 2011). For Palestinians, Brazil is seen as the most important Latin American state, meaning that the maintenance of relations is important. Although relations between Brazil and the Palestinians predates Lula's presidency, the relationship was perceived to be especially warm after 2003 on account of Lula's appreciation of the difficulties faced by Palestinians combined with a stronger commitment to social justice for the Palestinian people (Saleh, interview, 2011). Arguably, this recognition might account for official Palestinian acceptance of Brazil's more balanced approach to the conflict and accommodation of both sides, despite the asymmetrical nature of the conflict.

Potential ways forward and conclusions

This working paper has looked at the current configuration of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including the moribund nature of the Oslo process, along with some of the measures being taken to transform it. This includes the asymmetrical relationship between Israel and the Palestinians, where the former operates a 'matrix of control' which maintains its preferences on the ground (i.e. ongoing occupation, the presence of settlements, denial of refugees' right of return, the annexation of east Jerusalem). Increasingly, the last decade has seen the emergence of new global and regional powers which have differences of opinion with the primary external power in the conflict, the US, even as they generally support the prevailing American-dominated regional order.

As emerging powers, Brazil and Venezuela constitute part of the international state system. This is represented by the UN, which has been consistent in its commitment to the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict along the lines of two states. This was expressed in the 1947 partition plan and in the conceptualisation of 'land for peace' since 1967, including in the Oslo accords during the 1990s and the Road Map since 2002. Until recently the international community through the UN did not play a significant role in the political dimension of the conflict, tending to engage with it through economic and technical assistance. The pursuit of two states was generally in the hands of the US, which was the primary extra-regional power in the Middle East.

Since the 1990s, however, the American position has been challenged by emerging powers. The US position is seen as relatively close to the Israeli leadership while more members of the international community have been prepared to criticise Israel for its behaviour and abuse of human rights, including the Goldstone report on Israel's 2008-09 war in Gaza which left around 1400 Palestinians and 13 Israelis dead (UN Human Rights Council 2009). Yet at the same time, there is arguably little demand by emerging powers for the US to play a lesser role in the conflict: none of the BRIC countries has actively sought to supplant the US as the guarantor of the Oslo process; at most, Brazil under Lula called for a broad international conference which would have brought other states into the process. More recently, Rousseff has talked about 'responsibility while protecting', a concept which has yet to be tested in practice.

Alongside the US, the other significant external actor in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the European Union (EU). It provides the second-most amount of financial assistance to the Palestinians after Washington. But despite doing so, it has arguably opted out of taking a more robust stance in relation to the conflict. This is evident in its approach to the wider region and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since the 1990s. First, given the EU's expansion to the south and east, it has come into closer contact with the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). As a result, it began to develop a defensive policy based on the promotion of political and economic liberalisation among MENA countries in order to stimulate development at home and thereby stem the flow of illegal migrants into Europe (Salama 2002, Holden 2009). By the time the Arab Spring exploded, the EU's policy was perceived by many in the Arab world as insufficient, focusing on modest reforms and not addressing the significant political and economic challenges faced by these societies (Santini 2011: 287). Second, these concerns have led to a regional approach to policy and the signing of individual action plans with the different governments in the region which have largely focused on strengthening economic ties. Indeed, in the case of the action plan signed with the PA in 2005, the EU acknowledges the difficulties presented by Israel's closures and restrictions, but offers no suggestions as to how they are to be overcome (EC 2005). Finally, the EU remains strongly committed to the Oslo process and the political leadership provided by the EU in this regard. As a result, it is unlikely that it will play a more confrontational role to the US or its Israeli ally.

Given the distance and lack of contact between emerging powers from the south like Brazil and Venezuela on one side, and Israel and the Palestinians on the other, it is perhaps unsurprising that the two Latin American states have relatively little capacity for leverage in their engagement with the conflict principals. That said, it is striking how Brazil and Venezuela have both offered contrasting ways that each has sought to address the conflict. In the case of Venezuela, this has resulted in direct confrontation with Israel over its behaviour; while this has been appreciated by Palestinian officials, it has cut little ice with the Israelis, who do not see Venezuela as a significant influence in their part of the world. However, Venezuela may potentially be entering a new era now that the figure which has dominated

its politics, Hugo Chavez, has passed on. The highly presidentialised nature of Venezuelan foreign policy means that Chavez's successor, Nicolás Maduro, could potentially play a more conciliatory role in relation to Israel while rebuilding the goodwill lost by Chavez on account of his support for the region's regimes during the Arab Spring.

In contrast to the possibilities presented by Venezuela, Brazil is a country which is perceived by both Israelis and Palestinians as an increasingly global power. Moreover, Brazil has adopted a less confrontational position and proposed wider dialogue involving more actors in the international system as a means to facilitating negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

For the conflict principals, Brazil's voice is a welcome one. But at the same time, it is hard to see Lula's suggestion for an international conference involving a wider cross-section of the international community as being sufficient to make a difference in terms of the conflict. The appeal to dialogue between the two sides has been a consistent theme of the international community and by the UN in its public statements regardless of the context, whether during the optimistic Oslo period, during the violence of the second intifada or in the current moment in which there is neither peace nor war.

If there are to be changes which might contribute towards the resolution of the conflict – or at least provide the basis for a process which will lead towards a final and peaceful settlement – then the nature of the international community's engagement with the conflict and the two parties will have to change. Appealing for a return to talks without recognising that it is not a conflict between two equal sides will lead nowhere. Providing assistance to the Palestinians in the form of economic, financial and technical support without tackling the primary – political – causes of the conflict, namely Palestinian sovereignty, is insufficient. At best it can only alleviate the suffering brought about by dispossession; the continuing presence and need for UNRWA after more than 60 years indicates the failure of the international community's mission so far. This also includes the involvement of the primary global power which has been engaged in the conflict thus far, the US. Despite the relatively closer links between its political elite and Israel, the US reflects international concern over the presence of settlements in the occupied territory and abstained in the UNSC regarding Israel's 1980 annexation of east Jerusalem. Yet even on such issues it is unable to make much headway. Similarly, its efforts to realise a final settlement in the form of the Camp David talks, went unrealised.

Instead, the international community should look at alternative ways to change the dynamics of the conflict. It could do so by tackling the underlying imbalance between Israel and the Palestinians, in particular by raising the cost of the occupation for Israel. There are several ways this might be done by states like Brazil and Venezuela, whether individually or in concert with other governments. One way would be to promote Palestinian statehood – and therefore sovereignty – through the use of those international bodies and forums where American exceptionalism and its veto power may be curtailed. The past year has seen several examples of this, such as the UNGA, granting the Palestinians observer status short of full membership. At the same time, it is important to note that such measures on their own are not enough; although they reflect the international community's commitment to the two state solution and provide greater legitimacy for Palestinians, they do not directly address the conflict.

To tackle the occupation emerging powers like Brazil or Venezuela may therefore need to challenge Israel directly. This may be done individually or in partnership with other states, depending on the particular policy and the relative weight and influence that each may have in relation to Israel. Such policies may include sticks and carrots. In the case of sticks, the arrest of Israelis alleged to have engaged in war crimes (e.g. in Gaza as a result of the 2008-09 war) and the imposition of economic sanctions on products coming from Israeli settlements in the occupied territories should be considered, along with the promotion of such campaigns in international organisations and forums like the International Criminal Court, the UN Human Rights Committee and the World Trade Organisation.

'Carrot' policies might include engagement with different elements of Israeli civil and political society to press for a resolution to the conflict. As well as building ties with those more sympathetic to such moves, emerging powers should use whatever resources they have to cultivate links with those groups unconvinced by the need for dialogue with the Palestinians and the need for negotiations. Soft power tools, including culture, public diplomacy and connections with Diaspora groups in Israel may be a way to encourage change from within as opposed to without, especially 'stick' policies and the use of international institutions like the UN. Like other emerging powers, Brazil and Venezuela have the opportunity to pursue these politics. Representatives of the left-wing governments in each country can build links with other like-minded political activists while engaging with the Israeli and Jewish Latin American community. At the same time, linking the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the wider issue of regional security in the Middle East could potentially open up other avenues for Brazil and Venezuela to aid the peace process. Economically, both countries are expanding and deepening ties with the Middle East region, including the Arab world. This will bring them into closer contact with the Palestinian market. Politically, both Brazil and Venezuela have sought to play a mediating role in the region. Brazil did so in 2010 when it participated in a deal with Turkey to enable Iran to develop its nuclear programme peacefully and without producing uranium on its territory. Venezuela has built closer links with Tehran during the 2000s which means that it could serve as an interlocutor between Israel and Iran over issues of mutual concern, such as the Israel's fear of Iran's nuclear programme and Iranian sponsorship of militant groups such as Hezbollah, and Iran's suspicion of Israeli force against its nuclear programme.

In conclusion, if the international community generally, and emerging powers like Brazil and Venezuela specifically, are to play a full role in realising a full and just settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – one in which there are two states and peace between each other and the wider region – then it is necessary for a change of direction. Until now the current approach taken by the international community through the UN and supported by the emerging powers of the global south has offered little in the way of a final resolution. A more imaginative approach, one in which action combines both multilateral action at the international level with engagement at the local level is needed. Actors, whether local, national or international, need to work together across a range of measures if they are to transform the present situation of Israeli power and Palestinian powerlessness, and bring about the conditions for the much-desired dialogue and anticipated settlement. But ultimately, for this to happen there has to be, not only recognition of current failures, but the political will to change course as well.

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The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI)

American University of Beirut | PO Box 11-0236, Riad El Solh 1107 2020, Beirut, Lebanon
Tel: +961-1-374374, Ext: 4150 | Fax: +961-1-737627 | Email: ifi@aub.edu.lb | Website: www.aub.edu.lb/ifi
