

## Introduction

When the UN General Assembly passed the 1947 partition resolution on Palestine, Brazil was presiding over the meetings, and its delegate delayed the vote multiple times to secure the maximum number of votes in favor of the partition. From that point until 2002, Brazilian policy closely aligned with the US position on Israel. However, with President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's election in 2002, Brazil's stance became less aligned with Israel and shifted toward a more balanced and neutral approach between conflicting international poles. This shift, however, was not consistent and fluctuated, particularly during the 2019–2022 period under President Jair Bolsonaro's right-wing government. After Lula da Silva's return to the presidency in early 2023, Brazilian policy once again moved towards a less pro-Israel stance, particularly in response to the aftermath of the Operation al-Aqsa Flood.

Brazil holds substantial qualitative significance in Latin America, encompassing around 47.8% of the continent's area and accounting for nearly half of its population (214 million out of approximately 434 million).

### First: Determinants of Brazilian Foreign Policy on the Palestine Issue

Three key factors largely shape Brazil's policy toward Palestine:

#### 1. The Influence of the Brazilian Agricultural Lobby

The trade relationship, particularly in the agri-food sector and related investments, is a key factor in Brazil's policy towards the Middle East. Agri-food products account for 27% of Brazil's agricultural trade, amounting to \$18 billion with Arab countries, \$2 billion with Iran, and \$2 billion with Israel. In comparison, trade with the Palestinian Authority (PA) stands at approximately \$30 million, making Israeli trade with Brazil 60 times larger than that with the PA. Furthermore, Israel was the first country outside South America to sign a trade agreement with Mercosur, the Southern Common Market, in 2007, where Brazil is the leading member.



The agricultural sector wields significant influence within the government, with 300 members of the Brazilian legislature—two-thirds of the body—affiliated with its interests. This powerful lobbying presence allows them to block any policies that might negatively impact the agricultural sector. A notable example of their influence is the successful obstruction of Bolsonaro's plan to move the Israeli embassy to Jerusalem. After receiving a warning from the LAS that such a move could harm trade relations between Brazil and Arab countries, the agricultural lobby's pressure led Bolsonaro to instead open a commercial representation office in Jerusalem, rather than relocating the embassy.

## **2. The Growing Movement of Christian Zionism**

Studies in political sociology from Latin America indicate a growing shift from Catholicism to Evangelicalism, which may increase the potential for conversion to “Christian Zionism” within the Evangelical movement. Christian Zionism advocates for the establishment of a “Jewish state” in the Promised Land as a precursor to Christ’s return. Some estimates suggest that the proportion of Christian Zionists in Brazil could reach 40% within the next decade. The Pentecostal movement, which supports both Bolsonaro and Israel, plays a significant role in this trend. A concerning aspect of this movement is its deepening influence within political power structures, as it currently holds 25% of the seats in the parliament and 17% in the Senate.

## **3. Brazil-Israel Security Relations**

The 1970s marked the beginning of security relations between Brazil and Israel. Faced with intense leftist pressures, right-wing administrations in Latin America sought support from the US and other powers, including Israel. These security ties were formalized in 2008, and even during his second presidency (2007–2010), leftist leader Lula da Silva continued this policy by signing a security cooperation agreement with Israel to leverage its technological advancements. In 2014, Brazil engaged an Israeli security and defense systems company to manage and coordinate security for the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, and the relationship has continued since.

## **Second: The Impact of Brazilian-Israeli Relationship Determinants on Operation al-Aqsa Flood's Ramifications**

It is challenging to grasp Brazil's stance on the repercussions of Operation al-Aqsa Flood without considering the three preceding variables, which have led Brazilian scholars to describe the country's approach as equidistant diplomacy. This approach avoids taking a clear side in the conflict, irrespective of the ruling political movement.

This diplomatic stance is evident in the pro-Israeli right wing (the Liberal Party) retracting some of its previous positions of support for Israel, while the left wing (the current ruling Workers' Party) has not supported the Palestinian side as strongly as expected. The following practices illustrate this relative equidistance:

1. The ruling left-wing government in Brazil has adopted the accusation that Israel has committed genocide in the Gaza Strip (GS), describing it as a "Holocaust." Brazil has backed South Africa's initiative to bring the case before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), reflecting its alignment with the BRICS group, which includes both countries. Additionally, in May 2024, the Brazilian government blocked a deal to purchase Israeli weapons. It has continued to criticize the expansion of Israeli settlements, advocating for a two-state solution and the Palestinian right to self-determination. Brazil has also played a role in drafting and supporting resolutions at the UN General Assembly and Security Council calling for a ceasefire in GS.

However, da Silva condemned the resistance attack on 7/10/2023 as an "act of terrorism," while asserting that the Israeli response was "disproportionate to the Palestinian action." Although da Silva recalled his ambassador from Israel, he did not sever diplomatic relations. The commercial office in Jerusalem continued its operations as usual. Security ties were not fully severed but were instead "suspended." While trade in food between the two sides continued, Israel blocked the departure of some Brazilians from GS following the outbreak of hostilities, permitting their exit only after more than a month, whereas individuals of other nationalities were allowed to leave sooner.

2. The right-wing opposition, known for its strong alignment with Israel, has organized a series of meetings with the Israeli ambassador and has provided venues for him to screen films that claim to depict "terrorist activities" by resistance groups. A Brazilian state also awarded Benjamin Netanyahu the title of "honorary citizen," and Bolsonaro's wife cast her vote in recent elections while wearing a T-shirt depicting the Israeli flag. This aligns with right-wing policies that mirrored those of US President Donald Trump, including recognizing



Jerusalem as Israel's capital, supporting the Abraham Accords between Arab countries and Israel, and denying the existence of Palestine. Additionally, Netanyahu was hosted as the first Israeli prime minister to visit Brazil. Nevertheless, Bolsonaro decided against moving the Brazilian embassy to Jerusalem after receiving warnings from the agricultural lobby, as previously mentioned.

### **Conclusion**

The information above highlights Brazil's significant qualitative influence, particularly in Latin America, and the presence of overlapping factors in decision-making. It also underscores the current favorable environment under President da Silva's leadership to support the Palestine issue, driven by the severe Israeli actions and the war on GS. Thus, it is essential to intensify efforts to develop the relationship with Brazil both officially and publicly. This includes increasing activities and events in Portuguese, facilitating visits and engaging directly with Brazilian agricultural lobbies and through Arab diplomats. Additionally, Arab Christians, especially Palestinians living in Brazil, should actively engage with Brazilian Christian communities, particularly the Catholic sectors.

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