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Can Brazil mediate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Assessing its strategy and capabilities (2003-2010)

Abstract

During the government of Luis Inácio "Lula" da Silva (2003-2010), Brazil has shown an unprecedented commitment toward the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel. Going beyond its traditional low-profile approach, Brazilian diplomacy has publicly and repeatedly proposed to act as a mediator between the parties. While its attempts to act as a broker have been frustrated so far, this chapter chooses to take Brazil's proposal seriously: can Brazil have an impact on the Middle East peace negotiations? Has Brazil the right foreign policy strategy, and the means, to alter the rules and weigh on Israeli-Palestinian talks?

The chapter describes first how Brazil has been advocating its role in order to gain a seat at the negotiating table. It analyzes Brazil's "socio-psychological approach" of mediation, which puts the emphasis on its cultural and political assets for acting as a dialogue facilitator. However, the second section shows how and why, behind its rhetoric of equidistance, Brazilian diplomacy has slid toward a more explicit support to the Palestinians. The final sections explore the future challenges of Brazil's involvement in the region. The author argues that Brazil should avoid interceding as a maverick broker by showing that the variables for a successful mediation are more determined by the relation of power between the parties – including the broker – than by the intrinsic qualities of the mediator.

Introduction

During the government of Luis Inácio "Lula" da Silva (2003-2010), Brazil has shown an unprecedented commitment toward the establishment of an independent Palestinian state

alongside the state of Israel. Going beyond its traditional low-profile approach, Brazilian diplomacy has publicly and repeatedly proposed to act as a mediator between the parties.

While its attempts to act as a broker have been frustrated so far, this chapter chooses to take Brazil's proposal seriously: can Brazil have an impact on the Middle East peace negotiations? While the United States constitutes the main – and sometimes exclusive – third party involved on the peace process, do new players like Brazil have the right foreign policy strategy, and the means, to alter the rules and weigh on Israeli-Palestinian talks?

What is at stake here is the ongoing rise of Brazil as a "global power" (Hurrell, 2010). The country has proven that it could exert influence over global economic issues (in particular within the G20 and the WTO), but its contribution to world peace and international security is still limited (Cervo, 2010). Since Brazil is not a permanent member of the UN Security Council, it has little leverage for defending its vision of the world order, as proven by the negative reception of the Turkish-Brazilian Nuclear Deal with Iran (Sotero, 2010). The Israeli-Palestinian conflict certainly constitutes a testing ground for Brazil's political ambitions.

The first section describes how Brazil has been advocating its role in order to gain a seat at the negotiating table. It analyzes Brazil's "socio-psychological approach" of mediation (Deas, 2013: 6), which puts the emphasis on its cultural and political assets for acting as a dialogue facilitator (Ayres Pinto, 2012). The neutrality of the mediator and the inclusiveness of the talks are a central dimension of this approach. However, the second section shows that behind its rhetoric of equidistance, Brazilian diplomacy has slid toward a more explicit support to the Palestinians. The milestone of this process was the official recognition of the Palestinian state in December 2010. We identify the reasons of this shift, assessing both the role of the values of Brazilian policy makers and of the structure of the international system. The final sections explore the future challenges of Brazil's involvement in the region.

1) Brazil's mediation proposal

a) From prudent detachment to active engagement

Except from a brief period in the mid-1970s[1], Brazil has historically claimed to defend a position of "equidistance" between Israel and the Palestinians (Breda dos Santos, 2003). Its

[1] From 1975, Brazilian diplomacy adopted a more pro-Palestinian stance as an attempt to improve its relations with Arab oil producers after the 1973 energy crisis. Brazil recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization

successive governments made it a point of principle to maintain good relations with all parties. Brazilian diplomats often recall that Brazil was instrumental in the vote of the Resolution 181 partitioning Palestine into two states, a Jewish one and an Arab one (1947)[2], and that the country has hosted an Israeli embassy since 1955 and a Palestinian representation since 1975.

However, until the 2000s, the role of Brazil in the resolution of the conflict remained relatively modest (Vigevani et al., 2002:25). During the 1990s, the country became even more distant and shied away from the Israeli-Palestinian dispute (Reis da Silva and Pilla, 2012:121-122). The dominant idea at that time was that Brazil had no interest in interfering with the United States, which, as the sole superpower, had full scope for dealing with the peace process.

The active engagement (*engajamento*) of the last decade (Carrilho, 2008; Reis da Silva and Pilla, 2012) can be considered an important shift in Brazilian foreign policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Brazilian ambitions go beyond mere symbolic gestures: drawing upon Brazil's historical good relations with all parties, President Lula explicitly expressed his willingness to participate as an active mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Reis da Silva and Kunrath, 2010).

At the bilateral level, the first sign of this *engajamento* was the opening in September 2004 of a diplomatic representation to the Palestinian National Authority (PA) in Ramallah. Originally suggested by the Palestinian Minister for International Cooperation Nabil Shaath (Amorim, 2011: 51), this new representation has complemented the presence of Brazil in Israel, where the country opened its first mission in Tel Aviv as far back as 1952. Brazil was not the first Latin American country to decide to establish a mission in the West Bank - Chile did it in 1998. But six years later, the context of the second Intifada made the gesture of President Lula even more meaningful. The office serves to carry out consular functions for the around 3,500 Palestinians with Brazilian citizenship in the West Bank[3] who have difficulty reaching Tel

(PLO) in 1975 and the Geisel government voted in favor of the UN General Assembly Resolution 3379 equating Zionism with racism. However, Brazil would abandon this foreign policy only a few years later.

[2] The Brazilian Oswaldo Aranha presided over the 1947 UN General Assembly. Apart from casting his delegation's vote in favor of the Partition Resolution, Aranha played a key role in the adoption of the resolution, preventing delaying tactics and guiding the Assembly to the conclusive vote.

[3] "Tensão em Israel leva Embaixada do Brasil a se preparar para emergência", *BBC Brasil,* August 31, 2012

Aviv because of Israeli blockades, and works toward strengthening diplomatic contacts with the Palestinian Authority (PA).

Besides, Brazil started to take a stand on key issues of the conflict. The Itamaraty (Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs) published several statements regretting the expansion of Israeli settlement activities in the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem (Note nº 393, Note nº 119, Note nº 599, Note nº 67) and condemning the blockade of the Gaza strip (Note nº 349). Even though the tone of these statements has tended to reflect a new empathy toward the Palestinians, the Brazilian diplomacy has also carefully sought to maintain a balance between the two parties. Official notes have been systematically issued to condemn Palestinian acts of violence against Israeli civilians and to recall Israel's right to live peacefully in secure frontiers. This delicate act of balance has been replicated in official trips, with programs systematically including visits to both Israel and the Palestinian territories[4]. As former Foreign Minister Celso Amorim put it, "keeping this balance was important so that Brazil would not disqualify as an interlocutor for both sides, while not renouncing any of its principled positions" (Amorim, 2011).

b) Brazil's attempts to break into the club of international mediators

The unprecedented invitation made by President Georges W. Bush for Brazil to participate in the Middle East peace conference in Annapolis in November 2007 seemed to sanction its emergence as a new relevant actor in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Brazil attended the conference along with India and South Africa, its two partners of the IBSA Dialogue Forum[5]. It was the first time that Brazil and other developing countries were invited to contribute to the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, a process usually reserved to the United States and, on a secondary level, to the members of the Quartet on the Middle East (the US, Russia, the European Union and the UN).

Brazil came with a methodological proposal: to set up a "small support group for the Quartet, which could help advance individual dossiers in the negotiation between Israel and Palestine" (Amorim, 2011: 55). This group would be constituted of the IBSA countries, with "Brazil first

[4] The first official trips made by Foreign Minister Amorim (3 tours) and President Lula (1 tour in 2003) to the Middle East included several Arab countries but not Israel. This decision was highly criticized in the national press, in spite of being justified as part of the organization of South America-Arab countries Summit (ASPA). In May 2005, Amorim visited Israel for the first time, three months after his first visit in Ramallah (West Bank). From then, all official trips to Palestine have included a visit to Israel, and reciprocally.

[5] The IBSA Dialogue Forum (India, Brazil, and South Africa) is an international tripartite grouping created in 2003 for promoting South-South cooperation.

and foremost". Those countries, as advocated by Amorim, display various qualities for such a role: the three emerging and multicultural democracies share "a conciliatory profile, international credibility, and good relations with all parties" (Amorim, 2011:55). Brazil, in particular, has historically defended negotiated solutions within the framework of multilateral organizations, and can claim some success as a mediator in Latin America (Marthoz, 2010: 10): in 1998, for instance, it succeeded in bringing a long-running territorial dispute between Ecuador and Peru to a positive settlement. It also helped calming growing tensions between Bolivia's ruling party and the opposition in 2008. Amorim actually drew on Brazil's own experience of mediation to formulate the idea of a support mechanism (2011:55):

The idea of a support group acting together with a core group is not new in facilitating peace agreements: it was put in practice, for instance, in the Central American conflicts of the 1980s.

Indeed, in 1985, Brazil joined a "support group" (with Peru, Uruguay and Argentina) to help the Contadora peace process, a collective mediation begun in January 1983 by the "Core Four" mediator countries of Panama, Mexico, Venezuela and Colombia to resolve interstate conflict in Central America. The goal of this alliance was to detach Central American conflicts from larger US-Soviet competition and to shift them from military to political and diplomatic levels. Even though Contadora fell short of its objectives, the experiment was positively remembered as it provided a consultative framework and an accurate diagnosis of the region's conflicts (Wehr and Lederach, 1991:88-89).

Drawing on this experience, IBSA members started to coordinate their positions on the Israeli-Palestinian issue – they published several common declarations (like the Note n° 292)[6] –, and initiated several humanitarian projects in Palestine through the IBSA Fund[7].

The Annapolis process gave the signal that the inclusion of new actors in the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations was possible. Even though emerging countries played in fact a marginal role during the discussions – the proposal for a support group was not even put on the table –, new players seemed to have broken into the club of international mediators.

[6] See also http://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/ibsa-commits-increase-talks-peace.

[7] The IBSA Fund financed the construction of a sporting facility in Ramallah and the reconstruction of a hospital in Gaza, the initiation of which was stopped by the blockade imposed on that territory by the Israeli authorities.

This "breath of fresh air" (Amorim, 2011:55) was all the more welcomed that the United States was increasingly losing legitimacy as "honest broker". Its systematic support to Israeli concerns to the detriment of Palestinian demands during the last decade's negotiations, as well as their constant alignment with Israel in their voting at the UN, severely undermined US international credibility as a mediator (Aruri, 2003). The election of Barack Obama in 2008 gave Palestinians a brief hope for a renewed sense of balance in the US understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, but this optimism was short-lived[8].

It is in this context that former US President Jimmy Carter declared that Brazil had a "crucial" part to play in Middle East peace. According to Carter, the United States would not be able "alone to bring peace, since it agrees with almost everything Israel does. […] Brazil can help because it has a lot of influence among developing countries. Brazil can be one of the leaders in this process"[9]. During the same press conference, President Lula argued that the US role as "guardian of peace" in the Middle East had been exhausted: "There will not be peace in the Middle East as long as the United States is the guardian of peace. It is necessary to involve other countries in negotiations".

c) Brazil, everybody's good friend: its best asset

The last two years of Lula's second term witnessed the culmination of his personal activism toward the Middle East. In November 2009, Brazil received the successive visits of the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Israel's President Shimon Peres, and of the president of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas. The five-day visit of Peres was the first state visit by an Israeli president to Brazil in forty years. Peres came to discuss the opportunities to strengthen political ties and to increase economic cooperation, but also to express his concern about Iran. Following a trip to set up Peres' arrival, Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman declared that "Brazil, more than any other country, can try to […] to convince the Palestinians to start direct talks[10]". A few days later, it was Abbas's turn to visit Brazil. The President of the PA repeatedly declared that he believed that Brazil "should play a mediating role in the peace process", praising the fact that President Lula "has

[8] Obama's refusal to take any measure to pressure Israel for ceasing its settlement policy shattered its credibility in Palestinian opinion. The exasperation reached a climax with the US veto on the Security Council resolution condemning continued Israeli settlement expansion as illegal in February 2011.

[9] "Carter wants Brazil to play a role in Mid East peace; US mediation exhausted", *MercoPress*, December 22, 2010

[10] "Lieberman urges Brazil: Convince Iran to halt its nukes", *Haaretz (Tel Aviv)*, July 22, 2009

ties of trust with the two parties in the conflict", as well as a "good relationship with the US government"[11].

Palestinian enthusiasm for a Brazilian mediation is no surprise. Palestinian leaders have always looked for countries which could play the outsider card for solving the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. Palestinians are also pragmatic enough to know that a good relation with Israel is a sine qua non condition for such a role. It was PLO chairman Arafat who as far back as 1979 first proposed Norway, traditionally one of Israel's best friends and a trusted ally and NATO partner of the United States, as a channel for negotiations (Waage, 2005:7). Few remember that Arafat also positively welcomed, in 1997, the mediation offer of Carlos Menem[12], despite the fact that the Argentinean President had visited Israel twice (in 1989 and 1991) without granting any meeting with a PLO representative[13].

In March 2010, Lula made a historical visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories, the first of a Latin American president. During the visit, he shrewdly showcased Brazilian assets for leading a Brazilian mediation in the region. He drew attention to the presence in Brazil of large Jewish and Arab diasporas coexisting peacefully side by side for more than a century. "More than 120,000 Jews live here in full harmony with 10 million Arabs. It would seem that people can learn from us"[14]. This idea of an exemplary power of brotherhood in Brazil's multiethnic and multiracial society found its counterpart in Lula's own personality and charisma.

The Brazilian president described himself in an interview with the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, "as a negotiator, not an ideologue, a person who manages to get along with both Hugo Chavez and George W. Bush, with Shimon Peres and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad". Remembering his role as the chairman of the workers union during the years of military rule in Brazil, Lula added: "I was born into the politics of dialogue, I became president of this country through dialogue and I have conducted my entire presidency by means of dialogue. I believe that through dialogue we will succeed in solving all the conflicts which today appear to be

[11] "Abbas prods Brazil to help end Iran support for Hamas", *Haaretz (Tel Aviv)*, November 20, 2009 and "Abbas: Obama is 'doing nothing' for Middle East peace", *Haaretz (Tel Aviv)*, November 24, 2009

[12] "Arafat espera una mediación de Menem en Medio Oriente", *La Nación (Buenos Aires)*, March 20, 1997

[13] "Un convite para visitar Israel", *Página 12 (Buenos Aires)*, July 26, 1999

[14] "Brazil leader talks Mideast peace, how to be friends with both Israel and Iran", *Haaretz (Tel Aviv)*, March 12, 2010

unsolvable[15]". Later, during a speech in front of Israeli businessmen, Lula insisted again on his particular mindset by using a powerful metaphor: "I think that the peace virus has been in me since I was in my mother's womb. I cannot recall the last time I had a fight with anyone".[16]

2) From the diplomacy of neutrality to the politics of dissent

a) Sliding toward a more explicit support to the Palestinians

In spite of this vocal foreign policy, Brazilian diplomacy unofficially infringed its tradition of equidistance and progressively slid toward a more explicit support to the Palestinians.

In parallel with bilateral contacts, Brazil gradually entered the pool of donors of aid to the Palestinians. In September 2006, the Brazilian government attended the International Conference about the Humanitarian Situation in the Palestinian Occupied Territories in Stockholm (Sweden) and gave for the first time a contribution of US$ 500,000 to humanitarian projects developed by the UN in Palestine. In December 2007, Brazil reiterated its gesture at the Paris International Donors' Conference for the Palestinian State, but this time with a donation of US$ 10.5 million. In March 2009, along with Argentina, Chile, Mexico, and Venezuela, the country participated to the International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza, in Sharm El-Sheikh (Egypt), and made a contribution of US$ 10 million, a donation equivalent to the one offered by Russia (Kunrath and Reis da Silva, 2010). In 2010, it contributed US$ 200,000 to the core program budget of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), with an additional donation of US$ 500,000 for the reconstruction of Nahr el-Bared refugee camp in northern Lebanon. In 2011, the Brazilian contribution to UNRWA increased up to US$ 960,000, with a particular emphasis on food aid and education activities in Gaza. In 2012, the donation reached US$ 7.5 million, placing Brazil as UNRWA's largest contributor amongst the BRICS and Latin American countries[17].

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[15] *ibidem*

[16] "Lula tells Israeli businessmen he has 'peace virus'", *ANBA (Agência de Notícias Brasil-Árabe)*, March 15, 2010

[17] http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=1345

Such amounts are still low when compared with the aid provided by the European Union[18] or the Gulf Arab states[19]. It is however remarkable, since the country generally provides technical cooperation (the Brazilian Cooperation Agency also runs eight projects in Palestine since 2008[20]), but no financial donations at that time. The Palestinian Territories have become in fact the first recipient of humanitarian aid sent by Brazil out of Latin America (ABC/IPEA, 2010: 26).

The rapprochement between Brazil and the PA crossed a threshold with the South American-Arab Countries summits (ASPA), a process launched at the initiative of President Lula to reinforce interregional relations. Not surprisingly, Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas has been one of the few Arab leaders to attend the three summits (Brazil, 2005, Qatar, 2009 and Peru, 2012). For the PA, these meetings have been a fantastic opportunity to familiarize its South American counterparts with the Palestinian cause. The issue gained remarkable importance in the political coordination between the two regions. The paragraphs devoted to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have considerably extended over the successive final declarations, involving, in addition to a strong support to the establishment of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, more and more specific issues such as the status of the Palestinian prisoners in Israel (Art. 2.2) or the preservation of the Palestinian cultural heritage (Articles 2.6, 2.9) (Vagni, 2012). Brazil, as the regional coordinator for South America[21], played a pivotal role in introducing the PA to its South American partners.

In November 2009, Abbas visited Brazil as part of a South American tour aimed at launching a campaign to gain membership in the United Nations for the State of Palestine. Brazil's response to the PA petition came one year later. On December 3, 2010, the Brazilian government announced the official recognition of the Palestinian state based on borders that existed before the 1967. More than any other gesture, this decision ratified the change of orientation of Brazilian diplomacy toward a clearer support to Palestinian demands. The resolution, which took Washington by surprise, was strongly opposed by the United States

[18] According to the European Commission's data, the total EU Assistance to the Palestinian People in 2011 reached € 459 million. http://eeas.europa.eu/occupied_palestinian_territory/ec_assistance/eu_aid_to_palest_2011_en.pdf

[19] For example, at the International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza in 2009, Kuwait pledged $300 million and Saudi Arabia alone $450 million.

[20] Cf. interview with ABC official in charge of the cooperation with Asia (Central and Middle East) and Africa. 17th September 2012, Brasilia.

[21] South American Regional Coordination was supposed to be transferred to UNASUR, but the institutional deficiencies of the regional organization delayed the transfer.

and Israel, which rejected what they considered as a "unilateral" and "counterproductive" move[22].

Despite these reactions, the Brazilian government did not take any step back. The election of Dilma Rousseff as President did not change the foreign policy orientation in this regard. President Abbas attended President Rousseff's inauguration in January 2011, and symbolically launched the construction of the Palestinian embassy in Brasilia. Brazil also pushed for the conclusion of Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the PA, a treaty that was finally signed by all MERCOSUR members in December 2011, four years after the FTA with and Israel (2007).

b) Ideology or structural effect?

How to explain this gradual diplomatic move toward a more explicit support to the Palestinians?

The first reason certainly traces its roots in the historical sympathy of the Workers' Party (PT) for the Palestinian cause, owing to its anti-colonial and anti-imperialist dimension. During the 1980s, the PT built ties with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Lula maintained personal contact with Yasser Arafat[23]. This Palestinian connection still exists among Brazilian social movements. Several prominent figures of the Brazilian Left, like Aldo Rebelo (Communist Party of Brazil), are staunch advocates of the Palestinian cause, while active members of the Arab diaspora continue to spread information and arguments in favor of Palestinian demands. A Brazil-Palestine parliamentary group was created in 2002 at the initiative of the deputy Jandira Feghali (PCdoB-RJ) and a parliamentary delegation visited the Occupied Territories in 2004[24].

Interestingly enough, frequent official visits to the Occupied Territories seem to have also contributed to Brazilian awareness of the Palestinian issue. Amorim, who visited five times Israel and the Palestinian Territories between 2005 and 2010, evokes the role of his trips in his growing empathy toward the Palestinians (2011:54):

[22] "Brazil angers US and Israel with its pro-Palestine move", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, December 7, 2010

[23] In 1982, the PT published Lula's own letter to Arafat in response to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon that struck at PLO headquarters in Beirut. Cf. John Tofik Karam's chapter.

[24] The delegation was integrated by Jamil Murad (PCdoB-SP), Nilson Mourão (PT-AC), Leonardo Mattos (PV-MG) and Vanessa Grazziotin (PCdoB-AM). http://www2.camara.leg.br/camaranoticias/noticias/50638.html

My contacts with President Mahmoud Abbas, with the then Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei, and with my official counterpart allowed me to have a deeper view of the grim situation the Palestinian people were going through, as did also my car journey from the Jordan–Palestine crossing point at the Allenby Bridge and back. It is hard to describe the strong impression caused by the numerous road blocks and detours to which Palestinian nationals are subjected, in contrast with the highly protected Israeli motorway running over their territory, which they are barred from using.

Ideological affinities and empathy were not, however, the sole driver of this political shift. The structure of the international system also pushed Brazil to adopt a more assertive stance. After the disillusion of the Annapolis conference (2007), where emerging powers were relegated to a mute participation, Brazilian diplomacy needed to distinguish itself from great powers for existing. Unlike regional powers like Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia or Qatar, Brazil does not hold a strategic position that could naturally justify its inclusion in the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Without making a different opinion heard, one can hardly imagine how Brazil would be able to become a relevant player. In a context where the United States tends to favor Israel over the Palestinians, the Brazilian government was thus mechanically led up to support, at least symbolically, the Palestinians, as an effort to level the playing field between them and the Israelis.

This "soft balancing" behavior – a notion that refers to all non military tools that second-tier powers can use to "delay, frustrate, and undermine the superpower's unilateral policies" (Pape, 2005) –is one of the very few available strategies that middle powers can use on the international stage for compensating their lack of representation in global governance and the unipolar structure of global politics (Hurrell, 2006; Flemes, 2007). As Bertrand Badie puts it, "in a globalized and deeply inegalitarian world, dissent is highly likely to take hold as an essential dynamic of the international game" (Badie, 2012: 165). In that sense, the unyielding and systematic support of the hegemon to Israel contained the seeds of its own contestation.

3) Has Brazil ruined it chances of mediation?

a) Israel, a reluctant party

Even though the Itamaraty tried to minimize the impact of Brazil's support to Palestinian demands on its relations with Israel, one can reasonably assume that this shift partially damaged the mutual confidence between the two countries.

Certainly, Brazil has not been as radical as Venezuela, Bolivia and Nicaragua, whose governments suspended their diplomatic relations with Israel during the conflict in the Gaza Strip (winter 2008-2009), and in the aftermath of the Israeli military operation against the "Gaza Freedom Flotilla" (May 2010) in the case of Nicaragua. Brazil joined its voice to the many around the world condemning what they consider "disproportionate" Israeli operations, but never adopted a hostile stance against Israel.

However, some symbolic gestures have questioned Brazil's impartiality in Israeli eyes. For instance, the fact that Lula refused to lay a wreath at the grave of Theodor Herzl during his visit to Israel but visited a few days later the tomb of Arafat in Ramallah, hurt the nationalist feelings of some Israeli politicians[25]. More importantly, the recognition of the Palestinian state was a very sensitive issue for the Israel. Even if Lula emphasized in the letter sent to President Abbas that the Brazilian decision did not imply abandoning "the conviction that negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians are indispensable to achieve the concessions needed from both sides" (Amorim, 2011:56), Israeli authorities expressed their "sadness and disappointment" over the Brazilian decision[26].

Many observers consider that this position jeopardized Brazil's chances to be accepted and co-opted as a mediator. For Pedro Seabra, for example, "the truth is that […] Brazil can no longer profess full impartiality in the matter. Claiming that support for unilateral actions is perfectly compatible with further bilateral negotiations […] cannot elude the fact that Brazil has forfeited its alleged neutrality and any possibility of ever equitably mediating this conflict" (Seabra, 2010:2).

This harsh statement needs to be put in perspective. Nothing indicates that Brazil, even with a scrupulous equidistant position between the parties, would have been accepted by Israeli negotiators as a valid broker. Several elements suggest the opposite. Israel always constitutes the most difficult side to convince to enter into negotiations. Its leaders' goodwill is determinant and those have never accepted mediation without deep trust and friendship with the third party. As the stronger party, Israel has little to gain from the internationalization of the conflict. As a consequence, Israelis have constantly avoided any interference from the outside, except from very close friends (Waage, 2005:7).

[25] "Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman stayed away from the Knesset during Lula's address to protest the Brazilian president" http://en.mercopress.com/2010/03/16/lula-da-silva-calls-for-palestinian-state-during-official-visit-to-israel

[26] "Brazil recognises Palestine", *Al Jazeera*, 05 December 2010

The current state of play is another key variable. In 1993, Israel was convinced that the time was ripe for clinching a deal, because Arafat and the PLO were severely weakened politically by perceived support of Saddam Hussein and financially by the loss of funding from the Gulf (Waage, 2005:8). Israeli interest in reaching a final agreement with the Palestinians radically changed after 9/11 attacks. Facing the second Intifada, Israel radically strengthened its security in the name of the fight against terrorism while it expanded its settlements in the West Bank, without suffering any serious consequence on its diplomatic relations. Israel blamed the failure of the peace process on the Palestinians, shrugging off its own responsibility in the negotiations impasse. Meanwhile, Western powers worried about the rise of political Islam in Palestine and used all possible pressure to reduce the influence of Hamas in the Gaza Strip. In this context, Israelis have neither been in a hurry to go back to negotiations nor keen to make any concession.

b) Being realistic about Brazil's capabilities as a mediator

The reluctance of Israel to enter into negotiations under the auspices of countries such as Brazil is not necessarily a bad news. It probably prevented Brazil to intercede as a maverick but isolated broker, in conditions where it would not have been able to properly address such a complex negotiation and strike a fair deal.

Certainly, drawing upon the Annapolis Conference of 2007, Brazil officially expressed its interest of joining a collective mediation. However, the experience of the nuclear-fuel swap deal with Iran shows that Brazil is sometimes intrepid enough to propose solutions which by-pass multilateral negotiations. In the Israeli-Palestinian case, Brazilian diplomats frequently refer to the Norwegian experience. The idea of offering a back channel negotiation, in which Brazil could act as a facilitator, seems very appealing to the Itamaraty. In fact, Brazilian diplomats have been in touch with their Norwegian counterparts to learn from their experience, and some informal meetings have taken place in Jerusalem. Moreover, Brazil has already been involved in unofficial negotiations between Israel and Syria[27]. In an interview, Brazilian Foreign Minister Amorim told that he more than once personally conveyed messages between Syria's President Bashar al-Assad and then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud

[27] "Brazil can be crucial to Middle East peace process, says Jimmy Carter", *Telegraph (London)*, 20 Dec 2010

Olmert for restarting Syrian-Israeli indirect peace talks, which were mediated by Turkey but broke off during Israel's late 2008 war against Hamas in Gaza[28].

But audacity and political willingness are not enough. The failure of the Turkish-Brazilian mediation in the Iranian nuclear crisis did not set a very good precedent. According to Paulo Sotero, President Lula overestimated his and his country's powers of persuasion, and finally proposed a deal too close to Iran's interests (Sotero, 2010b:74).

Mediating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict entails its own specific risks. The asymmetry of power between the two parties is the key feature for understanding the difficulties of a third-party intervention. In this regard, the analysis made by Hilde Henriksen Waage (2005) of the Norwegian experience of Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking is very instructive.

The Norwegians did everything possible to ensure a symmetrical process for creating a climate of trust between the adversaries. However, according to Waage, this sense of equality was an illusion. The discussions were actually dominated by the Israeli point of view. Norway got trapped by its very own role of broker. Not only had Scandinavian mediators very little room for maneuver to balance mutual concessions on unwilling parties, but they ended up espousing Israeli demands. As Waage puts it: "the main reason for this position was that it was the only way to protect their role in the process: the Norwegians knew full well that they had to be acceptable as a facilitator first and foremost to the stronger party. They also knew that playing by Israel's rules was the only way an agreement could be reached and that if the Palestinians did not give in to what Israel considered important, the talk - and Norway's role - would end" (Waage, 2005:19).

Concretely, this meant persuading the PLO to give up positions Israel found unacceptable on the one hand, and persuading the PLO to accept the positions put forward by Israel on the other. Norway had neither carrots nor sticks to use in relation to Israel. With regard to the Palestinians, though, Norway had both (Waage, 2005:19).

Norway played a major role in making Palestinians accept the deal on the table. Israelis and Palestinians signed a historical agreement in Washington under the auspices of the US administration. The Norwegian diplomacy got international recognition: Oslo became known as the "Capital of Peace", and Norwegian gained an increased access to important world

[28] "Brazil explains recognition of Palestine", *Politico*, December 03, 2010, http://www.politico.com/blogs/laurarozen/1210/Brazil_explains_recognition_of_Palestine_.html

leaders. However, the results of the "Oslo process" have proved to be quite different from what many had hoped: the situation on the ground progressively deteriorated, seriously undermining the viability of a future Palestinian state. Beyond the responsibility of the actors' behavior – in particular the most extremist ones –, many observers have pointed out the internal flaws of the agreement. Some result from miscalculations of the Palestinian negotiators, but others were the product of a Norwegian mediation which pressed Arafat to accept the deal. The exclusion of East Jerusalem from the area under Palestinian self-rule and the absence of an extraterritorial corridor between Gaza and the West Bank are examples of issues negotiated with the Norwegian insistence with consequences on the long run for the edification of a Palestinian state.

Brazilian diplomats would probably not be in a different situation than their Scandinavian counterparts. Beyond the question of the little leverage that Brazil has on Israel, the carrot-and-stick approach does not fit Brazilian way of conceiving its foreign policy. It is very likely that Brazilian diplomacy would not be disposed to use any kind of sanction for imposing solutions on unwilling parties. The very notion of punitive action is alien to Brazil's view of itself and its role in international politics (Brun, 2012: 322).

Hilde Henriksen Waage's conclusion of the Norwegian experience is that such a third-party role could only be reserved to a strong mediator, basically a superpower like the United States (Henriksen Waage, 2005:19).

4) In search of a role

a) A less presidential diplomacy

Since she took office in 2011, President Dilma Rousseff has been clearly less proactive towards the Middle East than her predecessor. Several factors explain this reorientation. First, Brazil is facing since 2011 larger economic and social challenges that have led Dilma to focus more on domestic issues than foreign policy. Her lower-profile style on the international stage contrasts with the highly personalized diplomacy conducted by Lula. On the other hand, the unstable situation in the Arab world makes it particularly difficult to build up any foreign policy strategy in the region. A good example is the visit of Egypt's President Mohamed Morsi to Brazil in May 2013. Dilma Rousseff was then particularly emphatic on the role that Egypt, as a regional leader, should play in the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, making clear that Brazil could bring its support to any mediation initiative. While the idea of

partnering with Egypt on this specific issue could have been a promising move, the destitution of Mohamed Morsi, less than two months after his visit in Brasilia, ruined the efforts that had been done.

If a greater presidential involvement is therefore unlikely to happen, it is important to stress that the Itamaraty has done its own follow-up. Antonio Patriota, Dilma's former Foreign Minister, has pursued Amorim's efforts with the same zeal. In July 2012, he organized a seminar entitled "Side by Side - building peace in the Middle East: a role for diasporas"[29]. Fifty leaders of the Arab and Jewish communities of Brazil attended the event. The idea was to engage them to play a more active role in advocating peace in the Middle East, and taking their own experience as a message against hate and violence. For Patriota, the underlying objective was also to encourage diaspora leaders to promote the Brazilian mediation to the Israeli and Arab governments. A few months later, the Brazilian Foreign Minister visited Israel and the West Bank in October 2012 and reiterated Brazil's disposal to mediate for peace in the Middle East[30]. It is too early to know if the replacement of Patriota by Luiz Alberto Figueiredo Machado will change Itamaraty's involvement towards the Palestinian issue, but there is no indication either that Brazil is still interested.

b) Prospects for a multilateral negotiation

If Brazil's mediation proposal has not met much success, its support to Palestinian demands had some impact. In particular, it made the Israeli-Palestinian conflict visible again at a time of impasse in negotiations, and when the issue had been displaced on the international agenda by the Arab uprisings, losing its strategic relevance vis-à-vis the situation in Libya, Egypt, and Syria.

It also shed light on a possible Brazilian regional leadership over this issue. Indeed, Brazil's announcement provided the impetus for the rest of South America to align with this decision. In just four months, all South Americans governments joined the movement, leaving only Colombia out of this regional trend (Baeza, 2011). This succession of endorsements gave momentum to the Palestinian Authority's campaign to gain membership in the United Nations for the State of Palestine. While the proposal presented in 2011 by Abbas to the UN Secretary General was at a deadlock, blocked in the Security Council by a predictable US veto, other

[29] Patriota, Antonio, "O tear remoto da paz", *O Estadão (São Paulo)*, September 23, 2012

[30] "Em Israel, Patriota põe Brasil à disposição para mediar a paz", *Terra Noticias*, October 14, 2012

efforts have moved forward. The Palestinian bid for full membership was first approved by UNESCO during the board's 187th session in September 2011[31]. This decision was fiercely opposed by the US government who cut off its annual funding to the organization. In spite of this strong position, South American leaders, along with their Arab counterparts, reaffirmed during the 3d ASPA Summit in Lima the centrality of the Palestinian issue for peace in the Middle East, and welcomed the admission of Palestine a State Member of the UNESCO (Lima Declaration, Paragraph 2.3 and 2.5). Finally, on November 2012, the UN General Assembly resolution 67/19 upgraded Palestine to UN non-member observer state status. The vote was 138 delegates in favor, 9 against and 41 abstentions.

All this process would not have been possible without the kick start given by the Brazilian recognition of the Palestinian state. Its influence on its South American neighbors and through the IBSA Forum[32], allowed the constitution of a large coalition of emerging countries that went beyond the circle of the Arab and Islamic States, traditional allies of the Palestinians[33].

The upgrading of Palestine's status in UN institutions will not solve by itself the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. No one ignores that a long lasting solution will need to be addressed through political negotiations between the parties. The United Stated is undoubtedly the central player. Not only is the superpower the sole state capable of really weighing on Israel, but it holds the key of who will or will not participate in the discussions. Whether it will lead the process alone, like for the Wye River (1998) and Camp David (2000) peace talks, or with a larger diplomatic group, following the examples of the Madrid (1991) and the Annapolis (2007) Conferences, will be determined by several variables. Detailing all of them would go beyond the scope of this article, but some preliminary remarks can be made.

Bertrand Badie rightly argues that "cooptation is the first link in the chain of connivance", as the most powerful tend to exclude those whose "dissenting attitudes" are anticipated (Badie, 2012:96). There is no doubt that the United States will not invite countries too hostile to Israel to contribute to a Middle East peace process. At the same time, newcomers could be needed for restoring the legitimacy of an international mediation which has been much questioned over the last decade.

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[31] "Latin American and Caribbean States Back Palestine UNESCO Vote", *Latin American News Dispatch*, November 5, 2011

[32] "IBSA backs Palestinian bid for UN membership", *Hindustan Times*, November 20, 2011

[33] For example, in 2010, the Foreign Minister of Indonesia called for a meeting with the IBSA countries plus Palestine in the context of the UN General Assembly.

Brazilian past experiences of mediation confirm that "while pursuing soft balancing, second-tier states [need to] engage the hegemon and develop institutional links with it to ward off possible retaliatory actions" (Paul, 2005:59). The Contadora experiment in Central America, used as a model by Amorim, actually failed because the US government had alternately ignored and criticized the process (Wehr and Lederach, 1991:89). Similarly, when Turkey and Brazil started to broke a nuclear deal with Iran, they believed that they were keeping the US fully in the loop and negotiating on their behalf, when in reality, they were not. If Brazil wants to be included in future Middle East peace talks for which it has made itself so publicly available, it will need to maintain with the United States a fluid communication based on trust and friendship.

Besides, the confirmation of the regional leadership of Brazil and an enduring readiness of IBSA to be active in the Middle East will also be indispensable assets. As noted by various authors (Flemes, 2007; Pape, 2005; Paul, 2005), soft balancing strategies "such as the formation of limited diplomatic coalitions or ententes, especially at the level of the United Nations", may constrain US power on mid-to-long term.

Conclusion

Many observers doubt the maturity and realism of Brazilian diplomacy to address Middle East conflicts (Maihold, 2010; Sotero, 2010; Seabra, 2010). The United States is the first to subscribe to this skepticism, and is not really eager at the moment to include Brazil into future and uncertain peace negotiations.

As it already happened in the deal brokered with the help of Turkey over Iran's nuclear program, Brazil's desire to mediate peace between Palestine and Israel raises for its diplomacy a strategic dilemma: on the one hand, Brazil must be the closest possible to the stronger players' position – i.e. Israel and the United States – to be conceivably co-opted as a broker. But on the other hand, it needs to differentiate itself from the statu quo and a highly criticized international mediation to add value with regard to the conflict's resolution. For now, Brazil seems to hesitate between a tepid equidistant foreign policy and a more explicit support to the Palestinians, structurally the weaker party of the conflict.

This chapter argues that Brazil should avoid positioning itself as a maverick broker. Alone, Brazil's capabilities vis-à-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are very low in view of the profound asymmetry between the parties. A moderate soft balancing approach, that

consolidates its regional influence and its entente with its IBSA partners, and engages a constructive although dissenting dialogue with the United States, probably is at this time Brazil's best option.

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