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Brazil — the global peacemaker?

From Gaza to Ukraine, Brazil's growing role in international mediation highlights the country's ambition to challenge Western-led norms

The so-called Global South is a heterogeneous set of states linked by their post-colonial identities and their varying degrees of institutional weakness, dependency and developmental problems, encompassing emerging powers and small countries threatened by climate change, all with different forms of government. They are neither a non-aligned group nor an anti-capitalist coalition; they seek to reform the international system. Its largest members cooperate and compete while forming flexible alliances. What all these countries have in common is a critical stance towards the so-called rules-based order, which they consider biased and only beneficial for the great powers, particularly the United States.

The rise of the Global South and its members' demands for reform of the international system give them an important weight in areas such as climate change, food security and conflict resolution. As such, Brazil stands out particularly for its pivotal role in international conflict mediation.

Brazil's ambitions

In the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, with fronts in the West Bank and Lebanon, governments in Africa, Asia and Latin America have refused to side with the United States and Europe against Russia or in favour of Israel. They criticised that the sanctions regimes and condemnations at the UN Security Council (UNSC) against Russia for invading Ukraine are not equivalent to those that Israel should receive for devastating Gaza and killing more than 40 000 Palestinians.

Within the Global South, Brazil has stood out in recent decades for its involvement in Ukraine, Palestine and in the political conflict in Venezuela when President Nicolás Maduro rejected the results of last July's elections. Although the US has disagreed with some of Lula da

Silva's positions on Ukraine and Israel, Washington has relied on Brazil and Colombia to try to persuade the Maduro government to accept a transition and power-sharing process. The initiative failed, but it demonstrated the limits of American diplomacy and Washington's acceptance that it will have to work with southern partners in the future.

Brazil's desire to mediate is not new.

Since the start of his third presidency in January 2023, Lula has launched an ambitious diplomacy based on multiple relations with the US, China, the EU and Russia, promoting regional unity in Latin America, restoring development aid-based relations with former Portuguese colonies in Africa and offering good offices of mediation based on alliances with other countries.

Brazil's desire to mediate is not new. Together with India and South Africa, the Lula government launched an initiative with Turkey regarding the Iranian nuclear programme in 2010 and another on the Syrian civil war in 2011.

For Lula and Celso Amorim, his special advisor on foreign policy, Brazil is an emerging global power in a multipolar world where the US is in decline and China is rising. This means that Brazil must seek new and flexible international alliances. As such, Brazil is part of the BRICS and IBSA alliances, holds the presidency of the BRICS ′ New Development Bank, and is part of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP).

The wars in Gaza and Ukraine

The Brazilian leadership is convinced that countries like Brazil, which are not directly involved in the conflict, can play a constructive role in promoting dialogue. Lula promoted the creation of a group of countries to help Russia and Ukraine negotiate. The Brazilian position was against imposing sanctions and isolating Russia. While Brasilia did not want to provide weapons to Ukraine, it did condemn Russia's invasion and territorial violation of a sovereign state and encouraged negotiations to restore Ukraine's territorial integrity, provide security guarantees for Ukraine and Russia and enhance strategic stability in Europe.

When the UN General Assembly approved a resolution in February 2023 calling for an immediate end to the war in Ukraine, Brazil was the only BRICS member state to vote in favour. A month earlier, the Brazilian government had rejected proposals by the US and Germany to

provide arms and ammunition to Ukraine.

When the Gaza war began in October 2023, Brazil initially condemned the Hamas attack, but as Israel proceeded with the destruction of Gaza, it sharply criticised Benjamin Netanyahu's government, causing a diplomatic crisis. This has had a strong effect on domestic politics, with the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers' Party) and the left supporting Palestine, and the right, part of the private sector and 30 million Brazilian evangelicals supporting Israel. At the same time, there are debates in diplomatic circles on whether the country should pursue a foreign policy in line with the economic and political interests of the state, or an ideological line that leads to confrontation with a major economic partner such as Israel.

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The clash with Israel has ruled out the possibility of Brazil playing a mediating role in the conflict. But the negotiations in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have two characteristics that could provide opportunities for the Global South more broadly.

First, so far, they have always been led by the United States. But the Gaza war shows the limits of Washington's ability to be both a party supporting Israel with weapons and diplomacy and a neutral mediator. The hostages and ceasefire negotiations involving Qatar and Egypt show that the United States cannot act alone.

Second, for almost 50 years, negotiations have been based on achieving the 'two-state solution'. At present, this solution is no longer viable, in part because of the depth of Israeli colonisation of the West Bank and the mutual rejection of Israelis and Palestinians. Other alternatives and negotiating paradigms must be considered.

In the long term, Brazil – alone or with other states and non-state actors – could promote support for Track II initiatives for intra- and cross-party dialogue, play a role in peace and security processes (when occupying a non-permanent seat in the UNSC), link South-South development cooperation (triangulated with northern countries) as an incentive for negotiations and peace- and state-building projects and support humanitarian assistance.



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