
Trump's "Deal of the Century" and the Latin American response

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BRIEFING PAPER

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Title: *Trump's "Deal of the Century" and the Latin American response*

Published: April 2019

ISBN: 978-1-907433-39-9

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This report is available to download free of charge on the Middle East Monitor Website: www.middleeastmonitor.com



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The current conflicts in Yemen, Syria and Iraq, as well as tensions with Iran and the internal crisis in Lebanon, have favoured Israel's position in the Middle East. The Arab consensus against imperialist countries, namely the United States (US) and its European allies, has been weakened. In the wake of the so-called Arab Spring of 2011, the war in Syria - which aimed to overthrow President Bashar Al-Assad in order to boost the US agenda for a new Middle East - has failed overwhelmingly.

In this context the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has taken a back seat, demonstrating that resolving the conflict is not yet a priority. Any peace negotiations have been pushed to the verge of disappearance, suggesting a solution will continue to be delayed. Meanwhile, Israel has continued its expansionist policy by constructing new settlements in the occupied West Bank and the population of Gaza continues to be subjected to a blockade by land, air and sea, restricting freedom of movement and the delivery of humanitarian aid.

The failure to implement the various peace agreements ventured since the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) signed the Oslo Accords in 1993 has revealed Israel and the US' lack of commitment to apply them. Since signing the "Declaration of Principles" - the first formal commitment between Israel and the PLO - on 13 September 1993, only a few advances towards establishing Palestinian self-governance in Ramallah have been made. One example was the election of leaders to the Palestinian National Authority (PNA, later referred to simply as the Palestinian Authority or PA), who represent the Palestinians in international forums. The extent of the Palestinian authorities' control was also

determined, but the most important aspects - return to the 1967 borders, the right of return and the formation of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital - were left for successive agreements. Twenty-five years after Oslo, the Palestinians' situation continues to decline, yet without diminishing their capacity to resist the Israeli occupation.

However, the legal framework of the peace process has been reconfigured with the arrival of the new US administration under President Donald Trump in 2017. At the multilateral level, the negotiation process has been torpedoed by the US, which makes repeated use of its veto in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to oppose any resolution that threatens Israel's interests. As a result, dozens of resolutions passed by the UN have not been applied in practice.

A significant moment was the UN's recognition of Palestine as a "non-member observer state" at the end of 2012, making it possible for the Palestinian authorities to intervene in UN General Assembly (UNGA) debates, as well as to integrate into the organisation's various agencies. Almost 70 per cent of UNGA members (135 of 192) now recognise Palestine as a state, despite the obstinacy of the US and Israel.

The Trump-Netanyahu relationship: The US-Israel alliance strengthens

The election of Donald Trump to the US presidency - against the forecasts of the majority of analysts - drastically changed US foreign policy, ushering in the US' exit from the Iran nuclear deal, a trade war with China and increased rhetoric against progressive governments in Latin America. In the Middle East, significant policy shifts have included the strengthening of the US alliance with Israel, its position against the Syrian government, relations with Saudi Arabia and attacks against Iran - all within the framework of the War on Terror.

Undoubtedly, Israel is the nucleus of US policy in the Middle East: to contain the "enemies" of the United States and strengthen its "alliance" with economic

partners and regional allies. Israel continues to be one of the largest recipients of US aid, mainly in subsidies for advanced military weapons; annually, this military aid is worth about \$3.1 billion and, by 2019, is set to increase to \$3.8 billion.

In this context, the Trump administration presents itself as the fundamental actor responsible for finding a “solution” to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, imposing this precept so the Palestinians accept a peace plan which benefits only the US and Israel. The steps taken by the current administration aim to annihilate the Palestinian cause and ignore the rights and historical demands of the Palestinian people, even if doing so means ignoring dozens of UN resolutions and declarations by international leaders.

One of the first actions carried out by the US to strengthen its relations with Israel was its recognition of Jerusalem as the country’s capital. The announcement - made on 6 December 2017 - was strongly rejected by a good part of the international community but well-received by Israel, which expected dozen of other countries to follow Washington’s lead. However, no European government endorsed the decision - on the contrary, the move provoked criticism from the European Union (EU). Undeterred by this international rejection, the United States took the matter to the UN and, despite receiving an almost-unanimous rejection, on 14 May 2018 transferred its embassy to Jerusalem. The new embassy was to occupy the American consulate building in the Arnona neighbourhood of Jerusalem, with a large delegation headed by US Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin attending the opening ceremony. Occurring on the 70th anniversary of the founding of the State of Israel, the US government’s decision violated all resolutions and agreements maintaining the status quo in Jerusalem.

Since then, the US administration has continued to put pressure on Palestinian leaders. In May 2018, the PA denounced Israel to the International Criminal Court (ICC), citing Israel’s illegal settlements and the deaths of hundreds of Palestinians in the Great March of Return, which had been taking place in

Gaza since March.¹ In retaliation, US National Security Advisor John Bolton threatened sanctions against the ICC if it decided to investigate the United States or Israel on issues related to Palestine, promising to sanction ICC funds in the US and prohibit the court’s judges and prosecutors from entering the country.² These threats were also made against any company or state that cooperated in an ICC investigation against the US.

These were not the only punitive actions undertaken by the US. In order to strengthen its position vis-à-vis the Palestinians, the US also withdrew funds allocated to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). These funds were valued at some \$350 million and intended to offer humanitarian aid to the five million Palestinian refugees living in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the occupied West Bank and the besieged Gaza Strip.³ During a meeting of Arab League (AL) foreign ministers held in the Egyptian capital Cairo on 11 September 2018, Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Al-Maliki said that, by cancelling funds to UNRWA, the Trump administration had launched an attack on the Palestinian people.⁴ Once again the rhetoric referred to the fact that, as long as Hamas controlled the Gaza Strip, funding for UNRWA would not be resumed. Of course, the Israeli government supported and even actively lobbied for this move.

One of President Trump’s latest actions against the Palestinians was to close the PLO office in Washington in September 2018. According to the US

1 See: *Israel killed 253 Palestinians during Great March of Return. December 27, 2018. MEMO. Available in: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20181227-israel-killed-253-palestinians-during-great-march-of-return/>.*

2 See: *La Casa Blanca amenazará con sanciones a la CPI si investiga a EE.UU o Israel. Agencia EFE, 10 de septiembre de 2018. Available in: <https://es.noticias.yahoo.com/casa-blanca-amenazar%C3%A1-sanciones-cpi-investiga-ee-uu-161823957.html>.*

3 See: *US to end all funding for UNRWA. August 29, 2018. Available in: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180829-report-us-to-end-all-funding-for-unrwa/>.*

4 See: *US cuts to UN refugee agency an ‘attack on Palestinians & international law’. Palestinian FM, 11 de septiembre de 2018. Available in: <https://www.rt.com/news/438179-trump-attack-palestinians-funding/>.*

State Department, this was justified on the grounds that PLO leaders had condemned the peace plan proposed by the US - without having seen it - and that they refused to work with the US government. The Palestinian reaction was immediate, with Secretary General of the PLO Executive Committee, Saeb Erekat, describing the decision as a “deliberate escalation”.⁵ Then Palestinian Ambassador to Washington, Husam Zomlot, condemned the decision in the strongest terms while Hossam Badran, a member of Hamas’ Political Bureau, considered it evidence that the negotiation process had reached a dead end.⁶

All these measures against the Palestinian authorities and the Palestinian people have only reaffirmed the alignment of the US with Israel and confirmed that the Trump administration is committed to protecting Israel and its unlawful acts, not promoting the two-state solution. In doing so, it has eliminated any possibility of condemning Israel for violating Palestinian human rights.⁷ Collectively, these measures form part of the pressure the Trump administration is imposing on the Palestinian authorities to force them to accept its arbitrary peace agreement – dubbed the “Deal of the Century”.

5 See: *Washington Officially Announces the Closure of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Office*. September 11, 2018. Available in: <http://www.en.syria-scope.com/political-news/85848>.

6 See: *Hamas: The Closure of The Headquarters of The PLO in Washington Confirms The Failure of The Settlement Process*. September 11, 2018. Available in: <http://www.en.syria-scope.com/palestine-news/85843>.

7 See: *Rafael Mathus Ruiz. Nuevo golpe de Trump al proceso de paz en Medio Oriente: ordenó el cierre de la oficina de la OLP*. Washington, 11 de septiembre de 2018. Available in: <https://es.noticias.yahoo.com/golpe-trump-proceso-paz-medio-052330433.html>.

Donald Trump and his unilateral “Deal of the Century”

The agreements discussed, signed and ratified have thus far not been effective in solving the historic conflict between Israelis and Palestinians; rather, they have contributed to strengthening Israel’s position. In this sense, the new US proposal only introduces additional elements that seek an even-more-beneficial solution for Israel. This agreement comes in a regional context characterised by the failure of the West’s plan to use terrorist groups to divide and weaken the Middle East.

The “Deal of the Century”, which has its antecedents in old Israeli initiatives such as the Allon plan⁸ and the Yinon Plan⁹, seeks to divide the West Bank and unite what remains with Gaza and Jordan to create a Palestinian-Jordanian “state”. According to a dispatch by Spanish news agency EFE on 2 September 2018, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas revealed at a meeting with a group of Israeli politicians and peace activists that the US negotiating team had offered him a plan based on a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation.¹⁰

8 *The Allon plan was proposed by Israeli Minister of Labor Yigal Allon shortly after the Six Day War of 1967. The first version of the plan - introduced in July 1967 - called for the establishment of Palestinian autonomy with economic, cultural and military ties to Israel in the newly-occupied West Bank. The second version was introduced in February 1968 and substituted Jordan for the Palestinians as Israel’s strategic partner. The plan suggested the partition of the West Bank between Israel and Jordan: the former would retain control of the strategically important Jordan Valley, along with a corridor linking it to Jerusalem, while the latter would gain control of two non-contiguous areas in the western part of the West Bank. The plan was never officially adopted by Israel, but served as a guideline for Israeli policy in the West Bank for the next few years. See: Allon Plan (1967). The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: An Interactive Database. 2014-07-23. Available at: <https://ecf.org.il/issues/issue/148>.*

9 *For more details see: Israel Shahak and Prof Michel Chossudovsky. “Greater Israel”: The Zionist Plan for the Middle East. The Infamous “Oded Yinon Plan”. Global Research, October 23, 2018. Available in: <https://www.globalresearch.ca/greater-israel-the-zionist-plan-for-the-middle-east/5324815>.*

10 *See: Maya Siminovich. El presidente palestino revela que EE UU le propuso formar una confederación con Jordania*. EFE, 3 de septiembre de 2018. Available in: <https://www.20minutos.es/noticia/3429056/0/eeuu-propuso-abas-confederacion-jordania/#xtor=AD-15&xts=467263>.

This is not a new idea, but Abbas argued the administrative implications of the US plan were not precise, nor did they detail the level of autonomy the Palestinian state would have under such a confederation. Furthermore, Abbas insisted that he would reject the offer as long as Israel was not part of the confederation.

The plan was first announced by Donald Trump's main advisers on the Middle East, Senior Advisor to the President and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and Special Representative for International Negotiations Jason Greenblatt, who have been working on its contents since spring 2017. One of the objectives of Kushner's last trip to the region was to finalise the details of the peace plan with Saudi and Qatari leaders, though neither Kushner nor Greenblatt met with Abbas or other Palestinian officials. Despite this, US rhetoric continues to question the Palestinian president's ability to achieve peace, blaming him for the deterioration of the situation in the Gaza Strip.

Simultaneously, there has been a strong synergy between the steps taken by the US during the first year of Trump's term in office and the measures implemented by Israel. This indicates clear Israeli-American complicity in applying the main aspects of Trump's proposed plan prior to its official launch. Though at the time of writing details of the agreement remain imprecise and the formal revelation has been postponed until after the Israeli elections on 9 April, this has not prevented some of its key points being leaked to the press.¹¹ Among these are:

- **The annexation of the Gaza Strip to Egypt¹²:** This would be in exchange for substantial economic investments both in the Strip and the northern Sinai Peninsula, financed mainly by the Gulf states. Under this plan, the population of Gaza would work on infrastructure projects in northern Sinai such as solar plants, desalination plants and several industrial corridors, though the plan does not specify whether they could also live in this area. In this way, the Gaza Strip would be granted a "special status," before eventually being linked to Egypt.
- **The annexation of Jerusalem:** This would include recognition of Jerusalem's Palestinian neighbourhoods that remain outside the Separation Wall as the potential capital of a future Palestinian state. Those that remain inside the wall - including the Old City and its adjoining neighbourhoods, but also other peripheral enclaves - would remain under Israeli jurisdiction. In short, Jerusalem would be recognised as the capital of Israel, while a suburb of Jerusalem - most likely Abu Dis - would serve as the administrative capital of Palestine.

¹¹ See: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190123-us-pompeo-says-no-deal-of-the-century-until-after-israel-election/>.

¹² This idea of using the Egyptian Sinai is not new. The George W. Bush administration had raised with the Egyptian president, Hosni Mubarak, the cession of 1/3 of the North Sinai territory to Gaza, an idea which has been opposed by successive Egyptian governments.

That the indivisibility of Jerusalem was included in the Nation-State Law - which consecrated the Holy City as the capital of Israel and was approved by the Israeli Knesset in July 2018 - clearly indicates the partial implementation of the “Deal of the Century” prior to its revelation.

- **The annexation of the Jordan Valley:** Israel would unilaterally annex 50 per cent of the West Bank (including the fertile Jordan Valley and access routes to the Dead Sea) and grant citizenship to the Palestinians and Bedouins residing there. This explains why Israel repeatedly tries to evacuate Bedouin settlements in the area; the maximum possible territory would be annexed with the minimum population necessary. In this way, Israel would have military control over the Jordan Valley and would annex large portions of the settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. This stance is contrary to that followed by the Obama administration, which advocated for a progressive return of the Jordan Valley to the Palestinians and joint exploitation of the Dead Sea’s resources.
- **The return of Palestinian refugees:** The US proposal will advocate that those refugees who wish to “return” to the emerging Palestinian state should be allowed to do so. It will also call on host countries - including Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, but also the Gulf states – to naturalise Palestinians residing there in exchange for economic aid, meaning Palestinians would give up the prospect of returning to their land.
- **Borders:** The borders between what would be left of Palestine and Israel will be fixed at a later date, abandoning the possibility of returning to the 1967 borders.
- **Restrictions on movement:** Israel would have control over the movement of Palestinians between the Gaza Strip and those left in the reduced West Bank, with a corridor between the Palestinian territories and the sacred sites in Jerusalem.

According to Cengiz Tomar - Director of the Centre for Palestinian Studies at the University of Marmara in Istanbul, Turkey - there are two groups discernible in discussions of Palestine. The first is “the Southern Block”, composed of the United States, the Gulf states and Egypt. The Southern Block is in total disagreement with the second group, “the Northern Bloc”, consisting of Turkey, Russia and Iran. Tomar points out that those countries most hostile to Iran and which support US sanctions against it are the very same countries that approve of Trump’s “Deal of the Century”.

In line with this framework, four Arab countries have guaranteed support for the deal: Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Their reactions have been controversial, with Saudi Arabia’s King Salman attempting to save face by warning that he would withdraw his support if the Palestinians were not given East Jerusalem.¹³ Meanwhile Turkey - which opposes US sanctions on Iran and has always supported the Palestinian cause - continues to be a thorn in the side of the US and Israel, with other regional factors such as the status of the Kurds and the future of Syria playing a part in this acrimony.¹⁴ For their part, Palestinian leaders in the Muqata - the administrative headquarters of the PA in Ramallah - have opposed this “new” US initiative and discredited US mediation since its decision to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Abbas has therefore reiterated his rejection of Trump’s “Deal of the Century” because, in his opinion, “it is aimed at liquidating the Palestinian cause”.

Yet, despite Palestinian opposition and Saudi conditions, in promoting this deal the US has managed to reduce Palestine to “Autonomy Plus” - an entity without territorial contiguity, economic viability or the minimum level of

¹³ This position is in line with the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, which demanded a return to the 1967 borders and the preservation East Jerusalem’s Palestinian character.

¹⁴ Cengiz Tomar. “El Acuerdo del Siglo” de Trump y el fin de los días. Agencia Anadolu, 4 de agosto de 2018. Available in: <https://www.aa.com.tr/es/an%C3%A1lisis/el-acuerdo-del-siglo-de-trump-y-el-fin-de-los-22731>; See: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190124-will-the-us-actually-withdraw-from-syria/>.

sovereignty necessary to be considered a state.¹⁵ The “Deal of the Century” therefore promises to finally bury the two-state model defended by all previous US administrations. It is not a peace plan for the Palestinians, nor is its primary objective to improve their socio-economic situation. Rather, the plan is an integral part of a much more ambitious project which, together with the division of Syria as part of the Balkanization of the Middle East, aims to secure the conditions for Israel to entrench itself as a regional power.¹⁶

Latin America and Palestine: Between US pressure and relations with Israel

The Palestinian cause has long had an important support base in Latin America, particularly through the work of dozens of civil society organisations, Palestine solidarity groups and even some Latin American governments. In this, several milestones can be mentioned, one of which was the “Meeting of the United Nations for Latin America and the Caribbean in support of the Israeli-Palestinian peace” in March 2011 in Uruguayan capital Montevideo. One of the meeting’s objectives was to define how Latin American countries could contribute to solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The event coincided with the PA’s diplomatic campaign to gain recognition of the State of Palestine along 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. This process, which began in 2009, culminated in the formalisation of Palestine’s membership in the UN on 23 September 2011.

In January 2011, Paraguay’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a written reaffirmation of its government’s recognition of the State of Palestine, which had originally been signed in 2005.

¹⁵ See: Ana Garralda. *El inaceptable “acuerdo del siglo” de Donald Trump. Estudios de Política Exterior*, 3 de agosto de 2018. Available in: <http://cpalsocial.org/el-inaceptable-acuerdo-del-siglo-de-donald-trump-2444>.

¹⁶ See: Nicola Hadwa y Silvia Domenech. *El acuerdo del siglo, máxima hipocresía y mínimo de vergüenza*. 3 de julio de 2018. Available in: <https://www.hispantv.com/noticias/opinion/381598/acuerdo-siglo-eeuu-paz-israel-palestina>.

Following Paraguay’s lead, a dozen countries from the region recognised the State of Palestine over the course of 2011. Four countries - Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia and Ecuador - had already done so in 2010. All four countries specified that this recognition pertained to the 1967 borders, while Chile, Peru and Uruguay did not include details of the borders. In total, more than 100 countries have recognised Palestine as a state.¹⁷

In September 2012, the Palestinian authorities requested a change of status at the UN from an “observer entity” to “non-member observer State”. In November of the same year, the UNGA adopted Resolution 67/19, upgrading Palestine’s status with 138 votes in favour, 9 against and 41 abstentions.¹⁸ The move was seen as a victory for the Palestinians in

¹⁷ See: *Debatirán papel de América Latina en conflicto entre Israel y Palestina*. Available in: <https://www.americaeconomia.com/politica-sociedad/debatiran-papel-america-latina-conflicto-israel-y-palestina>.

¹⁸ See: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/67/19.

| Country | Recognition date |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|
| Cuba | 16 November 1988 |
| Nicaragua | 16 November 1988 |
| Paraguay | 25 March 2005 |
| Costa Rica | 5 February 2008 |
| Venezuela | 27 April 2009 |
| Dominican Republic | 14 July 2009 |
| Brazil | 1 December 2010 |
| Argentina | 6 December 2010 |
| Bolivia | 17 December 2010 |
| Ecuador | 24 December 2010 |
| Chile | 7 January 2011 |
| Guyana | 13 January 2011 |
| Peru | 24 January 2011 |
| Suriname | 1 February 2011 |
| Uruguay | 15 March 2011 |
| El Salvador | 25 August 2011 |
| Honduras | 26 August 2011 |
| Saint Vincent and the Grenadines | 29 August 2011 |
| Belize | 9 September 2011 |
| Dominica | 19 September 2011 |
| Antigua and Barbuda | 22 September 2011 |
| Grenada | 25 September 2011 |
| Guatemala | 9 April 2013 |
| Colombia | 3 August 2018 |

Latin American countries which recognise the State of Palestine

that it gave them the right to speak - albeit without the possibility of voting - at the UN.

With the arrival of the Trump administration, however, the US' interventionist policy in Latin America was strengthened. To this end, former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson toured the region, the US increased economic sanctions on Venezuela and the Lima Group – a multilateral body which aims to end the ongoing crisis in Venezuela - was reactivated. This period has also seen the strengthening of the right-wing in Brazil, Argentina and Ecuador, as well as attempts to undermine regional mechanisms of consensus such as the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) while strengthening the Organisation of American States (OAS).

Radical changes in US foreign policy elsewhere - including the abandonment of multilateralism, the rupture of the Iran nuclear deal and the adoption of increasingly-belligerent positions at the UN with respect to Israel - also had repercussions in Latin America. These were particularly acute given Washington's threat to monitor which countries voted against it at the UN. Simultaneously 2017 - the centenary of the Balfour Declaration - was marked by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's first Latin American tour.

This Israeli-American offensive reactivated the role of the Palestinian diaspora in Latin America. In January 2017 the Palestinian Club of Chile, together with other local organisations, convened a meeting of Palestinian communities in Latin America to condemn Israel's attack on the Gaza Strip.¹⁹ However, Chile's call provoked differences with the Palestinian Confederation of Latin America and the Caribbean (COPLAC), which some argue had been deactivated after the Oslo Accords along with other popular PLO organisations. With the support of the PA, COPLAC called for a conference of Palestinian communities

19 See: *Comunidades Palestinas de América Latina, condenan el crimen israelí de hoy en Gaza. Resumen Latinoamericano, Palestina Libre, 30 de octubre de 2017. Available in: <http://www.resumenlatinoamericano.org/2017/10/30/comunidades-palestinas-de-america-latina-condenan-el-crimen-israeli-de-hoy-en-gaza/>.*

on the continent to be held in Nicaraguan capital Managua on 19 October 2017. Present at this meeting were Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Al-Maliki and representatives of President Mahmoud Abbas.²⁰

This episode generated internal frictions within the Palestinian diaspora in Latin America because, since November 2014, Chilean organisations had called on communities to resume COPLAC's historic role. For its part, the Palestinian Club of Chile held its meeting on 30 October 2017, calling for the formation of a Palestinian institution at the continental level, always respecting and coordinating with the PLO and its various divisions. At the same time, the Palestinian Club of Chile urged Latin America to avoid reproducing, directly or indirectly, the factions that exist within Palestine.²¹

20 See: *Defensores de palestinos en Latinoamérica se reunirán en Nicaragua. 16 de octubre de 2017. Available in: <https://www.hispantv.com/noticias/sudamerica/356649/america-latina-caribe-comunidad-causa-palestina>.*

21 See: *Comunidades palestinas de América Latina realizarán Congreso Preparatorio en Chile. 21 de octubre de 2017, Palestina Libre. Available in: <http://www.palestinalibre.org/articulo.php?a=66064>.*

Latin America and the Caribbean in the UN vote against the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel

| Vote | | In Favour | Against | Absentation | Total (193) |
|---------------|----------------------------|---|-----------------------|---|--------------|
| Countries | Central America | Nicaragua Belize Costa Rica | Guatemala Honduras | Mexico Panama | |
| | <i>Subtotal</i> | 3 | 2 | 2 | 7 |
| | Caribbean | Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Barbados Suriname Cuba Dominica Grenada | - | Trinidad and Tobago Haiti Jamaica Antigua and Barbuda Bahamas Dominican Republic | |
| | <i>Subtotal</i> | 6 | 0 | 6 | 12 |
| | South America | Chile Ecuador Bolivia Brazil Guyana Peru Uruguay Venezuela | - | Argentina Colombia Paraguay | |
| | <i>Subtotal</i> | 8 | 0 | 3 | 11 |
| | Total in the region | 17 (13.28%) | 2 (22.22%) | 11 (31.42%) | 30 |
| | General Total | 128 | 9 | 35 | 172 (89.11%) |
| Absent | | | | 21 | |

Another factor that influenced the position of Latin American governments with respect to Palestine was the voting process in the UNGA at the end of 2017.²² The resolution presented - which condemned the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel - was characterised by a divided vote. Of the total of 193 member states, 128 voted in favour of rejecting the United States' decision; there were 35 abstentions, nine against and 21 absentees. Among those who voted against were the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Togo, the United States and Israel.

As shown in the above table, despite the fact that there were 17 countries in Latin America which opposed the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, the rest abstained or were absent. The position of the Argentinian government - which has a marked right-wing tendency - is contradictory. As noted by HispanTV:

"The Argentine Foreign Ministry lamented the unilateral US measures on Jerusalem and reiterated its support for rounds of dialogue between the Palestinians and Israelis to reach a political agreement. In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, Argentina expressed its support for the status of Jerusalem as established by Resolution 181 (1947) of the General Assembly of the United Nations, which leaves the governance of the city under a special international regime."²³

²² See: La Asamblea General de la ONU aprueba una moción contra la decisión de Estados Unidos de reconocer a Jerusalén como la capital de Israel. BBC Mundo, 21 diciembre 2017. Available in: <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-internacional-42446206>.

²³ See: Argentina lamenta 'medidas unilaterales' de EEUU sobre Jerusalén. 7 de diciembre de 2017. Available in: <https://www.hispanTV.com/noticias/argentina/361835/trump-jerusalen-capital-israel-embajada-eeuu-palestina>.

Guatemala, Honduras and Paraguay recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel

As a result of pressure from the US, just two days after the opening of its embassy in Jerusalem, other Latin American countries seconded the initiative. The first to do so were precisely those countries which had backed Washington's decision at the UN.

There were only two votes against - Guatemala and Honduras - meaning these countries were the only ones in the region which supported the United States. Accordingly, the first to make the transfer was Guatemala, due namely to a clear warning from the US that those who opposed its decision would have any financial aid eliminated. Guatemala, which had been the second in the world (behind the US) to recognise the existence of Israel in 1948, was also one of the last in the region to recognise Palestine in 2013. During the opening of the Guatemalan embassy in Jerusalem, Guatemalan President Jimmy Morales described the event as an "important moment" and a "courageous decision".²⁴

Meanwhile, the Honduran parliament passed a non-binding resolution to approve the transfer of the country's embassy to Jerusalem. As indicated by Honduran media, the decision was rooted in Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez' desire to seek better relations with the US. The motion, promoted by parliamentarian Tomás Zambrano, was finally approved in April 2018 by the Honduran National Congress with 59 votes in favour and 33 against.²⁵ The news was well received by Israel, which declared it would expand its cooperation with Honduras.

²⁴ See: *Guatemala, Honduras y Paraguay, los países latinoamericanos que siguen a Estados Unidos en la apertura de sus embajadas en Jerusalén*. Redacción BBC Mundo, 16 mayo 2018. Available in: <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-44112856>.

²⁵ See: *Aprueban moción para trasladar embajada de Honduras en Israel a Jerusalén*. La Prensa, 12 de abril de 2018. Available in: https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1168432-410/trasladar-embajada-honduras-jerusalen-tel_aviv-israel-congreso-.

These actions paved the way for Paraguay - which for decades has been one of the US' closest allies in Latin America and abstained in the UN vote on Jerusalem - to take a stance. The Paraguayan government had announced on 7 May 2018 that it would relocate its embassy by the end of that month and, as such, President Horacio Cartes travelled to Israel on 21 May. For its part, the Israeli government claimed at least half a dozen countries planned to do the same, promising "preferential treatment" for the first ten to do so.²⁶

Mahmoud Abbas' Latin American tour

Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas toured Latin America in May 2018, visiting Venezuela, Chile and Cuba. The tour took place against the backdrop of the Great March of Return protests in the Gaza Strip, just a few days before the US moved its embassy to Jerusalem. In this context, Abbas called on Latin America to continue supporting the Palestinian cause instead of backing Washington.²⁷

During his meeting with President of Venezuela Nicolás Maduro, Abbas mentioned that the US' decision to move the embassy violated international law. For his part, Maduro expressed his support for the Palestinian cause, signing several agreements on bilateral cooperation in the tourism, business and trade sectors.²⁸

A fundamental stop on Abbas' Latin American tour was Chile. Chile was one of the first to open an Office of Representation for the PA in 1998 and has recognised the State of Palestine since 7 January 2011. Chile also has the

²⁶ *Around 25 states have at least consular representation in Jerusalem and the Vatican has an apostolic delegation in this city.*

²⁷ See: *Abbas urges Latin America not to follow US example on embassy*. AFP and Time of Israel, 8 May 2018. Available in: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/abbas-urges-latin-america-not-to-follow-us-example-on-embassy/>.

²⁸ See: *Venezuela y Palestina firman acuerdos de cooperación*. Telesur, 7 de mayo de 2018. Available in: <https://www.telesurtv.net/news/venezuela-palestina-firman-acuerdos-cooperacion--20180507-0032.html>.

largest Palestinian community in the world outside the Middle East, amounting to around half a million people. During the tour, Abbas held bilateral talks with his counterpart Sebastián Piñera in the Chilean capital Santiago. In 2011, Piñera had made a visit to the occupied Palestinian territories and, when he was re-elected in December 2017, received the congratulations of Abbas.²⁹

Colombia: the last Latin American country to recognise Palestine

Colombia - which has been one of the strongest US allies in Latin America and where there is a strong US military presence - decided to make a radical change in its foreign policy towards the Middle East: the recognition of the State of Palestine. This occurred in the final stage of Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos' mandate in 2018.³⁰ That year, the government in Colombia changed, but Santos' contradictory legacy was not made public until after the inauguration of new president Iván Duque on 7 August.

The decision was confirmed by then-Minister of Foreign Affairs María Ángela Holguín. Holguín indicated in a letter addressed to her Palestinian counterpart that Colombia had ratified the decision to recognise the Palestinian territories "as a free, independent and sovereign state". Meanwhile, Israel was "surprised and disappointed" by the decision because, in the 2012 UNGA vote which granted Palestine "observer status", Colombia was the only country in the region to abstain.

Despite Colombia's new stance, acting-Chancellor Carlos Holmes Trujillo affirmed that the matter would be subject to an evaluation, without it being clear whether or not this implied a suspension of recognition. The

²⁹ See: *Presidente de Palestina realiza visita oficial a Chile. Prensa Latina, 9 de mayo de 2018. Disponible en: <http://www.palestinalibre.org/articulo.php?a=68451>.*

³⁰ See: *El Gobierno de Santos reconoce a Palestina como Estado antes de entregar el poder. Bogotá, 9 de agosto de 2018. Available in: https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/08/08/colombia/1533761934_031445.html.*

contradictions were clear, since during his election campaign Duque had expressed his intention to follow in the footsteps of the United States and recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. On the other hand, some 60 Colombian academics, journalists and specialists in international relations asked the government to maintain its recognition of Palestine.³¹ Although the Palestinian embassy in Colombian capital Bogotá thanked Colombia for its decision, it still remained to be seen if this was a consolidated position.

However, Duque affirmed that the recognition of the State of Palestine made by Santos was irreversible, arguing that, since the Oslo Accords, he had always believed the two-state solution was preferable.³² This statement was received poorly by Israel, which continued to demand that Colombia reverse its recognition of Palestine.

Paraguay modifies its position towards Jerusalem

The change of government in Paraguay in August 2018 produced a sharp turn away from previous governments' positions on Jerusalem. The Paraguayan president, Mario Abdo Benítez, announced his decision to move Paraguay's diplomatic headquarters back to Tel Aviv due to the criticism the decision had generated. Israel was quick to react, withdrawing its ambassador from Paraguay and closing the embassy in Paraguayan capital Asunción. Israel described Paraguay's decision as "serious" and stressed that the situation strained the relationship between the two countries. In the wake of these events, US Vice President Mike Pence contacted Benítez to press the issue, but to no avail. This victory was part of the diplomatic efforts that PA leaders

³¹ To access the complete list of signatures in the letter see: *Académicos colombianos le pidieron a Duque respaldo en reconocimiento de Palestina. El Espectador, 10 de agosto de 2018. Available in: <http://www.palestinalibre.org/articulo.php?a=69805>.*

³² See: *Reconocimiento a Palestina como Estado 'es irreversible': Iván Duque. El Tiempo, 3 de septiembre de 2018. Available in: <https://www.eltiempo.com/mundo/latinoamerica/colombiano-anulara-reconocimiento-a-palestina-como-estado-263666>.*

had been making, denouncing the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital as a violation of international law.³³

The only two Latin American countries that do not recognise Palestine are Panama and Mexico. With respect to the first, it should be remembered that Panama was one of nine countries which voted against granting UN “observer status” to Palestine in 2012, along with Canada, the Czech Republic, the USA, Israel, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru and Palau. As for Mexico, although it voted in favour of granting Palestine observer status, it still did not recognise it as a state despite the fact that, since 2005, it had held a representative office in Ramallah.³⁴ It remains to be seen whether the change of government in Mexico will cause this situation to be reversed.³⁵

At the XXIV Annual Meeting of the Forum of Sao Paulo - which was held in July 2018 and attended by 479 delegates from political parties and left-wing groups in Latin America and the Caribbean - support for the Palestinian cause was ratified. This was expressed during the meeting by Samer Manaa, member of the Central Committee of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP).

Cuba's historic support for the Palestinian cause

Unlike the oscillations that have occurred in the policies of many Latin American countries, Cuba's position on the Israel-Palestine conflict has remained almost constant. Ties between the two countries go back to 1947,

33 See: *Tras el regreso de la embajada a Tel Aviv: Mike Pence habló con presidente de Paraguay*. Agencia AJN, 6 septiembre de 2018. Available in: <https://agenciaajn.com/noticia/tras-el-regreso-de-la-embajada-a-tel-aviv-mike-pence-hablo-con-presidente-de-paraguay-103644>.

34 See: *Colombia: ¿podrá Iván Duque revertir el reconocimiento de Palestina? Palestina Libre*, 10 de agosto de 2018. Available in: <http://www.palestinalibre.org/articulo.php?a=69806>.

35 See: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/amlo-will-be-inaugurated-as-mexicos-president-vowing-to-transform-the-country/2018/11/30/d3014f4c-f267-11e8-99c2-cfa6fcf610c_story.html?utm_term=.6895eedc870f.

when Cuba was the only country in Latin America to oppose the partition of Palestine into an Arab and Jewish state. Support for the Palestinian cause took on a new dimension after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, which began Cuba's backing of progressive and anti-colonialist movements in the so-called Third World. It was in this context that ties between then Cuban leader Fidel Castro and the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat began. On 17 November 1974 both countries established diplomatic relations.

Since then, the Cuban position has been constant with respect to the settlement of the conflict, Palestinians' right to self-determination, the creation of a Palestinian state within 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital and the right of return. Cuba has also condemned Israel's systematic aggression against the civilian population in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In light of this, we can better understand Cuba's position against the US decision to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. According to the Cuban Foreign Ministry, modifying the “historic status” of Jerusalem would “further increase tensions” in the Middle East and impede any efforts aimed at resuming peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians. Therefore, Cuba demanded Israel's immediate end to the occupation of the Palestinian territories. In 2016, Miguel Díaz-Canel, who at that time was First Vice President of the Council of State, received the Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Al-Maliki and, in 2018, Palestinian Minister of Education Sabri Saidam.

Cuba's Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations, Anayansi Rodríguez Camejo, addressed the tenth emergency special session of the UNGA on the “illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territories”. During this address she “expressed the overwhelming rejection of Cuba to the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel”. The delegation co-sponsored and voted in favour of the draft resolution entitled “Statute of Jerusalem”, which stated that any decision or action whose meaning is to alter the character, status or demographic composition of Jerusalem has no legal effect, is considered null and must be

repealed in compliance with the relevant resolutions of the UNSC. The adopted text therefore called on all states to refrain from establishing diplomatic missions in Jerusalem.

The declaration of Cuba's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, issued on 6 December 2017, stated:

*“The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba expresses its deepest concern about and rejection of the unilateral declaration by the President of the United States [pronouncing] the city of Jerusalem the capital of Israel, which constitutes a serious and flagrant violation of the UN Charter, international law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.”*³⁶

Cuban diplomat Rodriguez Camejo also called on the UNSC to demand that Israel immediately end its occupation of the Palestinian territories and fulfil those resolutions approved by the UNSC on the question of Palestine.³⁷

On his 2018 tour of Latin America, Abbas also visited Cuba in a show of solidarity between the two countries. Abbas and the PLO Executive Committee were in Havana from 10-12 May 2018 to carry out a broad program of activities, including official talks with by now Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel, who ratified Cuba's support for Palestine and repudiated President Trump's unilateral declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.³⁸ Díaz-Canel

36 Cuba rechaza declaración unilateral de Trump sobre Jerusalén como capital de Israel. *Cubaminrex*, 6 de diciembre de 2017. Available in: <http://www.cubadebate.cu/noticias/2017/12/06/cuba-rechaza-declaracion-unilateral-de-trump-sobre-jerusalen-como-capital-de-israel/#.W7PBezWQx1s>.

37 See: *Rechaza Cuba declaración de Jerusalén como capital de Israel ante la ONU*. *Cuba Debate*, 22 diciembre 2017. Available in: <http://www.cubadebate.cu/noticias/2017/12/22/rechaza-cuba-declaracion-de-jerusalen-como-capital-de-israel-ante-la-onu/#.W7PAIjWQx1s>.

38 His last stay in Cuba occurred in September 2009. On this occasion he met with the President Raul Castro and attended the signing of three agreements in the areas of education, culture and sports.

also advocated for the creation of an independent Palestinian state along 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. For his part, Abbas thanked Havana for its support and granted his Cuban counterpart the “Grand Collar of the State of Palestine”, the highest decoration granted to foreign dignitaries.³⁹ This visit was seen as evidence of the excellent bilateral relations between the two countries.⁴⁰

With regard to Israel's crackdown on the Great March of Return in the Gaza Strip, the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MINREX) demanded that the UNSC stop Israel's aggression against Palestinians. MINREX' Director General of Bilateral Affairs, Emilio Lozada García, said of Israel's actions: “We express the strongest condemnation of the new and criminal aggression by the Israeli army against the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip.” According to the official, Israel's brutal actions constituted a serious and flagrant violation of the UN Charter and international humanitarian law.⁴¹

39 See: *Visitará Cuba Presidente de Palestina*. *La Habana, Cuba*, 7 de mayo de 2018. Available in: <https://www.hispantv.com/noticias/cuba/376890/palestina-jerusalen-eeuu-capital-canel-abbas>.

40 See: *El líder palestino Mahmud Abbas llega a Cuba para reunirse con Díaz-Canel*. *EFE, La Habana*, 11 de mayo de 2018. Available in: <https://www.efe.com/efe/america/politica/el-lider-palestino-mahmud-abbas-llega-a-cuba-para-reunirse-con-diaz-canel/20000035-3612440>.

41 See: *Cuba se pronuncia contra la nueva escalada de violencia de Israel en Gaza*. *Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores (MINREX)*, 3 abril 2018. Available in: <http://www.cubadebate.cu/noticias/2018/04/03/cuba-se-pronuncia-contra-la-nueva-escalada-de-violencia-de-israel-en-gaza/#.W7PB4TWQx1s>.

Conclusions

Israel has maintained its position against the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, encouraged the construction of illegal settlements in the West Bank, opposed the return of Palestinian refugees and violated all resolutions adopted in the UNGA in favour of Palestine. Therefore, the conflict continues. The future of Jerusalem, the definition of borders, the land upon which any future Palestinian state would be established, the illegality of Israeli settlements situated on land systematically expropriated by Israel, the situation of Palestinian refugees and the right of return all remain questions to be answered.

In this context, the so-called “Deal of the Century” proposed by the Trump administration consolidates the Israeli position and buries the possibility of creating a Palestinian state. This has caused relations between the Palestinian authorities and the US government to reach an all-time low.

At the same time, tensions with Israel and repressive actions by the Israeli military in the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip have increased substantially. The Israeli army has continually used snipers along the Gaza border fence to suppress demonstrations by Palestinian civilians. The violence with which Israel has acted violates international norms and human rights, supported by the complicity of the United States and its European allies.

Therefore, the death of civilians without cause, the expulsion of Palestinians from the occupied territories, the illegal appropriation of their lands, the demolition of their homes and Israel’s policy of “arbitrary arrests” have continued. Palestinian denunciations of Israel before the ICC have not generated convincing condemnation of these facts. Palestinian leaders have made it clear that they no longer see the US as a neutral mediator in the conflict with Israel.

In spite of these facts, the positions of Latin American governments continue to fluctuate due to the changes taking place in the region. The change of political

forces in Latin America in favour of right-wing and pro-US governments could generate greater uncertainty in the future, despite the progress that the PLO has made in this region in previous years. For its part, the new right-wing government in Brazil is threatening to move its embassy to Jerusalem and even to break off diplomatic relations with Palestine. However, the victory of a leftist candidate in Mexico favours a greater balance of progressive forces in the region and, therefore, the consolidation of support for the Palestinian cause. The most consistent positions in favour of the Palestinian cause come from the governments of Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia and Nicaragua.

Undoubtedly, the “peace” initiative led by the United States will be frustrated by the commitment of the PA to demanding the creation of a Palestinian state, as foreseen in the Oslo Accords. It is essential to continue demanding that Israel freeze its settlement policy as a precondition for resuming peace talks, free Palestinian prisoners jailed prior to the Oslo process and offer guarantees on the right of Palestinians to return to their lands and preserve their history and national identity.

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