

# The Global South and Mediation between Israel and Palestine: The Conflict Needs a New Paradigm and Renewed Third Parties

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**Mariano Aguirre**

**Mabel González Bustelo**

**Abstract:** The Gaza War has revived interest in the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For over half a century, various actors have unsuccessfully conducted, promoted, or supported negotiations for its resolution. This article explores the current situation, the changes in the practice of international mediation, and the rise of the emerging powers to inquire about the prospects for a mediated solution to this conflict and the potential role of Brazil.

**Keywords:** Middle East; Israel-Palestine conflict; conflict resolution; international mediation; emerging powers; Brazil.

## **O Sul Global e a mediação entre Israel e Palestina: o conflito precisa de um novo paradigma e da renovação de terceiros**

**Resumo:** A Guerra de Gaza reavivou o interesse na resolução do conflito israelense-palestino. Por mais de meio século, vários atores conduziram, promoveram ou apoiaram negociações para sua resolução, sem sucesso. Este artigo explora a situação atual, as mudanças na prática da mediação internacional e a ascensão das potências emergentes para indagar sobre as perspectivas de uma solução mediada para esse conflito e o possível papel do Brasil.

**Palavras-chave:** Oriente Médio; conflito Israel-Palestina; resolução de conflitos; mediação internacional; potências emergentes; Brasil.

The Gaza War, which began with the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, 2023 and continued with the Israeli offensive in Gaza, has revived interest in the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As in the Ukraine war (2022 to present day), State positions have shifted greatly since the Cold War. The multipolar nature of the international system, the end of ideological loyalties, and transactional relations between States lead to unlikely alignments and diverse unconventional positions.

For over half a century, various actors in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—the United Nations, the United States, Norway, the Arab League, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), the European Union, and The Quartet—have conducted, promoted or supported negotiations for its resolution. Several Arab States are no longer in confrontation with Israel. Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Egypt, and Qatar are currently playing a key role in negotiations over Gaza.

Despite this constellation of actors, the violent dispute between Jews and Palestinians is in a serious state with no ongoing negotiations, except to try to broker a ceasefire in Gaza and release around one hundred Israeli hostages kidnapped by Hamas.

Since the 1970s, the U.S. has led conflict negotiations. Europe has been a secondary actor. The European Union's (EU) role since the Oslo Accords has been to support the creation of a Palestinian State, but differing positions towards Israel and the need for consensus among the 27 member States have led to cautious diplomacy. Neither Arab States nor Türkiye have played a significant diplomatic role, despite the Arab Peace Initiative.

The rise of the emerging powers in the international system, especially the India–Brazil–South Africa Dialogue Forum (IBSA) and the BRICS (China and

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**Mariano Aguirre** is an associate fellow of the International Security Program at Chatham House Institute (London). Former advisor to the UN in Colombia (2017-2019), he has been director of the Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution (Oslo), co-director of the FRIDE Institute (Madrid) and program coordinator at the Ford Foundation (New York). Author of *Guerra Fría 2.0. Guía para entender la nueva política internacional* (Icaria, Barcelona, 2023; Portuguese edition at Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa, 2023).

**Mabel González Bustelo** is an expert in mediation, negotiation and conflict resolution with experience in Track I and Track II mediation processes. She advises several governments and institutions in mediation and peace building, and is member of the Board of Directors of the Instituto de Estudios de Conflictos e Acción Humanitária (IECAH). From 2016 to 2021 she was senior advisor to NOREF, and member of the Norwegian MFA facilitation team for the Venezuelan dialogue processes. She has been a fellow of the Global South Unit for Mediation (BRICS Policy Center, Brazil).

Russia, considered great powers, are not included in this analysis), has generated expectations regarding the possibilities that Brazil or South Africa in particular could mediate or create spaces for political dialogue. To analyze whether Brazil has the capacity and possibilities to fulfil such a role, alone or with other States and multilateral organizations, it is necessary to consider several factors.

First, the complexity of a conflict with two components: between Israel and several Arab States, and between Israel and Palestine. In the first case, the relationship between the parties has evolved: some Arab States maintain diplomatic relations with Israel, and others are establishing them in the medium term. The tension has shifted towards the regional confrontation between Israel and Iran.

The second component is the confrontation over the same land between a State and a Stateless people or community with ethnic, religious and national identities, historical colonial components and deep power disparity. Israel considers Palestine to be its Holy Land, that it was fair to establish a State after the Holocaust, and that they won the 1948 and subsequent wars. For the Palestinians, the land is theirs, and it was taken by the Jews through British colonialism. Palestinians feel supported by International Law and UN resolutions.

Third, the religious factor is increasingly strong, complicating the resolution of the conflict. For the past decade, the religious far-right in Israel (including sections of the armed forces) has been on the rise, while radical Islamist groups in Palestine (such as Hamas and the Islamic Jihad) became more powerful, with the consequent de-legitimation of the secular Fatah and the Palestinian Authority. As Smith points out, can “conflicting visions of what constitutes the identity of the State and its security, based on religion, ethnicity, or language, block efforts for peaceful resolution of differences?” (Smith 2024, 238).

Fourth, the conflict has generated International Law instruments that are indispensable references for future initiatives. This conflict also gave rise to Track II diplomacy, in which non-diplomatic individuals and civil society organizations acted from the margins, creating spaces for political dialogue that led to negotiations.

These instruments and negotiations have not resolved the conflict, but each generated dynamics, experiences and knowledge now necessary to explore new forms of negotiation. The path of negotiations, especially since the Camp David Accord (1978), the Oslo I (1993) and Oslo II (1995) agreements and subsequent attempts to salvage what was negotiated, had limitations and problems that made the two-State solution impossible. Any new actor (e.g. a government from the Global South) willing to enter the negotiations should review its viability.

Fifth: for decades, it was assumed that, given Israel's dependence on the U.S. (and the same assumption by the Palestinians), only Washington would be able to achieve a solution to the conflict. But the country's mediating capacity is severely compromised by its mistakes in Iraq and Afghanistan, erratic Middle East policy (Simon 2023), open alignment with Israel and its role in the Gaza war, vetoes in the UN Security Council, and double standards in judging Russia in Ukraine and Israel in Palestine from the perspective of International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

## **INITIATIVES AND ACTORS: DIPLOMACY AND MEDIATION**

Since its inception in the first half of the 20th century, the conflict between Jews and Palestinians over the territory of the then British Mandate of Palestine has been addressed in different ways. A series of actors have used a variety of negotiation instruments and formats, trying to adapt to the dynamics of the conflict and the often-unpredictable regional context. Attempts to achieve peace include: a partition plan; UN resolutions; official or semi-official agreements and meetings; and initiatives by States, regional organizations, multilaterals and civil society.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the conflict, and especially since last October, International Law has been of relevance. As Julia Grignon points (2023) out, "While the solution to any conflict is political, the fact remains that any armed conflict is covered by a specific branch of International Law, the law of armed conflict, also known as International Humanitarian Law". International lawyers and UN reports indicate that both Israel and Hamas have violated IHL.

The implications of Israel's and Hamas' violent actions (as those of the PLO, Fatah and other Palestinian groups in the past) have generated discussions on territorial occupation, violence against Israeli civilians, the separation wall built by Israel in the West Bank, the impact of the conflict on civilians and the situation of the blockaded population in Gaza, the limits of the right to self-defence, and whether infrastructure (e.g. hospitals or schools) can be so-called "dual-use objects" and therefore military objectives (Hathaway 2023).

The Gaza war has generated, among other initiatives: UN commissions of enquiry into the situation in the Occupied Territories, East Jerusalem and Gaza (United Nations 2024); Orders and Provisional Measures on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on January 26 and March 28, 2024 (ICJ 2024); applications for arrest warrants against the Israeli government's officials

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1. All UN Security Council Resolutions and Peace Agreements can be found at: <https://peacemaker.un.org/>.

and Hamas leaders in the State of Palestine by the International Criminal Court (ICC 2024); statements and allegations by UN agencies as well the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)<sup>2</sup>; the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories, and the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

## The British Mandate and Partition

Palestine (the territory comprising the present-day State of Israel, the West Bank and Gaza) was part of the Ottoman Empire and came under the control of the British Empire under the colonial mandate between 1917 and 1948. The mandate included the territory east of the Jordan River now constituting the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (Black 2018).

Palestine is considered a holy land by the Jewish, Christian and Muslim religions, generating a conflict between identities and religious nationalism (Galal Mostafa 2018). Since the 19th century, a Jewish migration flow towards the Palestine Mandate was encouraged by Zionism. Britain supported, through the Balfour Declaration (1917), the creation of a Jewish State and the preservation of the territory for the local Palestinian Arab population. The influx of Jews intensified from 1930 due to the rise of Nazism and the impact of the Holocaust.

The transition from British colonialism to U.S. hegemony was projected on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with the consequent tensions in the Cold War. Washington began to protect Israel militarily and diplomatically in the 1970s combining support for the State of Israel (with an emphasis on military assistance) with humanitarian assistance to Palestinians; and remained the sole mediator, strategically aligned with Israel, despite regular disagreements (Mitchell & Sachar 2016).

In parallel, Palestinian nationalism constituted one of the most complex cases of the fight for self-determination linked to decolonization (Neff 2014, 436). The creation of the PLO in 1964 generated debate on the possible legitimate use of force to achieve self-determination and its implications (Dixon 2000, 310-312). The political-military organization Hamas claims the right to resistance to Israeli colonization (Shah 2024).

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2. See: <https://www.unocha.org/occupied-palestinian-territory>

## Wars, UN Resolutions and Negotiations

The conflict has had two manifestations. On the one hand, between the State of Israel founded in 1948 and several Arab States that rejected it. On the other hand, between the State of Israel and the Palestinian people, a community dispossessed of its land for almost eight decades. Arab States have prioritized their national interests over Palestinian rights since the 1948 war (Shlaim 2007). From the 1970s to the present day, each prioritized its interests and established beneficial relations with Israel above the Palestinian issue.

The wars between local actors and possible solutions have evolved, including a series of negotiations between States in the region, and between the PLO and the Palestinian National Authority and Israel. Several Security Council and UN General Assembly resolutions are key references to a negotiation that has maintained the same paradigm for decades: Israel has occupied Cisjordan (the West Bank or Judea and Samaria for Jewish believers), East Jerusalem, and occupied or blockaded Gaza. The Palestinians have resisted peacefully (*Intifadas* in 1987 and 2000) and violently at different stages. In the first stage, from 1947 until the Camp David Agreement (1979), the Palestinian question was linked to the confrontation between Israel and Arab States. From the Oslo Accords (1993) until 2016, the two-State solution was negotiated. From then on, negotiations came to an end, the Arab States negotiated their relations with Israel, and the Palestinian question was marginalized. Then came October 7, 2023.

In November 1947, the General Assembly adopted UN Resolution 181 II Future Government of Palestine, proposing the partition of Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish State, with a separate administration for Jerusalem (*corpus separatum*). On May 14, 1948, the State of Israel was established, opposed by Egypt, Transjordan (Jordan), Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. In 1949, the first Arab-Israeli war was fought. For the Israelis it was the “war of independence”; for the Palestinians it was the *Nakhba* or catastrophe, due to which 750,000 Palestinians went into exile and 250,000 settled in Gaza (where 88,000 people lived). Only 150,000 Palestinian Arabs remained in the new State of Israel.<sup>3</sup>

In December 1948, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 194 (III) in favor of allowing Palestinian refugees to return. In that same year, armistices were agreed between Israel and the Arab States, establishing the internationally accepted

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3. The total Jewish population in May 2024 was 7.427.000 (73,2%), and 2.089.000 (21,1%) were Arabs. There are 7.45 million Jews and others (a figure that includes about 517.000 Jews living in illegal settlements in the Palestinian Occupied Territories and 250.000 in East Jerusalem) compared with 7.53 million Arab Israelis and Palestinians living in present-day Israel, the besieged Gaza Strip and the occupied-West Bank (Middle East Monitor 2022).



borders of the State of Israel. Israel and the Arab States did not discuss the creation of a separate State for the Arab Palestinians (Bunton 2013, 53).

Israel and Arab States have fought armed confrontations of varying magnitude: in 1948-49, 1956 (between Israel—with the collaboration of France and Britain—vs. Egypt over the Suez Canal); 1967 (Israel vs. Egypt, Syria and Jordan); 1973 (Israel vs. Syria and Egypt); 1982, 2006, and 2023-present. Since 2005, there have also been regular violent clashes between Israel and Hamas in Gaza.

In 1967, Israel defeated the coalition of Arab States and conquered the West Bank, Gaza, the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights. The West Bank and its Palestinian population were outside the partition plan but are highly coveted by Zionism. From then on the expansion of settlers to occupy it and control East Jerusalem began (Seidemann 2015).

On November 22, 1967, the UN Security Council adopted United Nations Resolution 242, calling on the Arab States to accept Israel's right "to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force." But emphasized "the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and the need to work for a just and lasting peace in which every State in the area can live in security" and urged Israel to withdraw from "territories occupied in the recent conflict." The resolution does not mention that the Palestinians have the right to a State. "Land for peace" became the cornerstone formula for future negotiations.

In October 1973, the Security Council passed Resolution 338 in favor of an immediate ceasefire between Israel, Egypt and Syria. In 1978, Egypt and Israel reached a peace agreement at Camp David in the U.S. to establish diplomatic relations, return the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt, Israeli withdrawal from several areas of the West Bank and Gaza, and the gradual administrative and electoral settlement of the Palestinians.

In 1988, the PLO's National Council renounced armed struggle and accepted the Partition Plan and Resolution 181. Joined by Israel, Moscow, Europe, and the Arab States (and a PLO delegation represented by Jordan), the U.S. promoted the Madrid Conference (1991).

The Oslo Accords (Oslo I 1993; Oslo II 1995) addressed Jerusalem, refugees, Jewish settlements, security and borders. Negotiations were to establish a *Palestinian Interim Self-Governing Authority* for a "transitional period not exceeding five years." But an end to the occupation and the creation of a Palestinian State was not specified. At the same time, "the mutual recognition" between the parties was uneven: the PLO recognized the State of Israel and its right "to exist in peace and security." But the latter only recognized the PLO "as the representative of the Palestinian people". The

Oslo Accords failed due to the asymmetry between a constituted State and a non-State actor. They did not bring about Statehood, the return of refugees or the end of the occupation (O'Malley 2015, 82-88; Kurtzer & Lasensky 2008; Shehadeh 2024, 33-36; Barnett et al. 2023, 102-128; Smith 2024, 251-252; Black 2017, 321-360).

## **The End of the Negotiations**

After the failed negotiations at Camp David II (2000) in September 2001, President Bill Clinton presented his Parameters based on Oslo and Resolutions 242 and 338 (White House 2000). The key contribution was that Palestinians would give up their right to return of refugees in exchange for Israel relinquishing sovereignty over the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif holy sites but maintaining access to them.

Various proposals were suggested after the Clinton Parameters, without results, such as the Arab Peace Initiative (2002). The Geneva Accords (2003), based on previous negotiations, international resolutions, the Clinton Parameters, and the Arab Peace Initiative, involved civil society.<sup>4</sup>

President Barack Obama (2009-2017) prioritized the Israeli-Palestinian issue. But the Netanyahu government's staunch opposition, its alliance with the Republican Party, and Obama's concessions made to Israel (e.g. increasing the volume of military aid to gain its trust and not pushing for a settlement freeze) led to failure.

The Trump administration (2017-2021) presented a plan to boost the economy of Palestinian areas of the West Bank without Statehood. Trump pushed for the Abraham Accords, or the establishment of diplomatic, economic and security relations between Israel, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco and Sudan.

Since the Gaza War, the U.S., the EU and the UN have relaunched this idea for the "day after—a permanent ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and the release of Israeli hostages. However, there is a growing consensus among experts that a two-State solution is an unfeasible goal, and that new negotiating paradigms are needed (Aguirre & Morales Bertrand 2024).

## **THE BRICS IN THE FACE OF THE CONFLICT**

The positions of the emerging BRICS (i.e. Brazil, India, and South Africa) on the conflict oscillate between solidarity and pragmatism, rhetorically supporting a long-term diplomatic solution, with little political and financial support. Their

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4. Information on the Initiative and its documents available at: <https://geneva-accord.org/>.



positions are not coordinated, and depend on multiple factors, particularly each country's relations with Israel.

Since their inception, the BRICS have used development assistance to southern countries as part of their foreign policy. A step in the direction of creating financial alternatives to the Bretton Woods system is the New Development Bank. Despite being an example of the multipolar world, these emerging countries' foreign and defense policy interests do not coincide and have no coordination beyond calling for reforms in the international order (Aguirre 2023, 6-15).

The BRICS have contributed to keeping the Palestinian issue in the international agenda. In 2011, when the PLO called for recognition of Palestine as a UN member State, Russia and China (permanent members of the UNSC), and India, Brazil and South Africa (non-permanent members) voted in favor. The Johannesburg Summit (2023) called for direct negotiations, a two-State solution and the Arab Peace Initiative (Alqarout 2023). The Palestinian-Chinese Strategic Partnership of June of the same year made the same pronouncement.

However, support for Palestine is more rhetorical and symbolic than real, whether considering the institution or its members. None has increased its support for the Palestinian Authority, nor have they offered Israel incentives to enter negotiations, nor have they moved beyond generic two-State support. While the BRICS criticize Israel on the Palestinian issue, they are careful not to jeopardize relations with Israel. The only member that has

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At the bilateral level, Israel has diversified its diplomacy and economic relations to improve its relations with China, India and Russia, though not with the BRICS as an institution. Israel is pursuing this strategy to counter possible international sanctions over the Palestinian issue.

India and Israel maintain close intelligence cooperation on radical Islamism. Israel is India's second largest arms supplier. Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist and anti-Muslim government has strengthened these ties (Chaudhuri 2023), while Hindu communities in the U.S. copy American Jewish schemes to influence U.S. political power.

In South Africa, Israel's collaboration with the apartheid regime is recalled. Economic ties are minor, and South Africa denounces the illegal occupation of Palestinian territories as tantamount to an apartheid regime. It launched the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign at the Durban Summit on Racism in 2001 and has raised this issue at BRICS summits. Its recent appeal to the ICJ is to implement the new concept of "non-indifference" embedded in peace and security structures in Africa.

China maintains strong cooperation in security and defense industries, and Israel advises Beijing on Islamist-inspired Uighur dissidents in Xinjiang. Russia is a special case because of the one million Russian immigrants living in Israel, the largest Russian community outside the country. Both countries have a problem with Islamist-rooted terrorism, and the discovery of gas off Israel's Mediterranean coast may be of interest to Russian companies based in Cyprus.

## **The Brazilian Case**

Brazilian diplomacy seems to want to play a role in this conflict, maintaining a delegation for cooperation with Palestine in Ramallah, where projects are coordinated with India and South Africa. Brazil has a historic position in favor of a two-State solution. In the context of the ongoing Gaza war, in October, as President of the UN Security Council, Brazil condemned the Hamas attack and called for an emergency meeting of the Council. In January, Itamaraty supported the South African initiative before the ICJ. In February, President da Silva criticized Israel's attacks on the UNRWA and called Israel's campaign in Gaza "genocide," comparing the war to the Holocaust. Israel subsequently declared him *persona non grata*.

In May 2024, the Brazilian government withdrew its ambassador to Israel and in June condemned attacks on civilian populations and infrastructure, accusing Israel of violating the rules of IHL. It also insisted on compliance with the demand for a permanent ceasefire contained in UNSC Resolution 2728 (25 March 2024).

Brazil and Israel have cooperation in three priority areas: science, technology and innovation; economy and trade; and defense. There is also potential cooperation in the fields of water resources, energy, space and education. In December 2007, the MERCOSUR-Israel Free Trade Agreement was signed, coming into effect in 2010. Israel was the first country outside Latin America to sign a free trade agreement with the South American bloc (MRE 2014). In the last decade, Israel was among Brazil's six main trading partners in the Middle East.

Brazil and Israel also have a solid arms trade. However, Brazilian Defense Minister, José Múcio Monteiro, has postponed signing a contract for 36 armoured vehicles with 155 mm howitzers following pressure from political figures and human rights organizations (Abusidu 2024). President Lula da Silva has been severely criticized by the media, academia and business for his positions, and has been called upon to help de-escalate tensions with Israel and reduce polarization around the conflict.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has a domestic dimension: Brazil has eight million citizens of Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian origin, and more than 110,000 of Jewish origin. On the other hand, the strongest criticism has come from Brazilian evangelicals who, like their counterparts in the U.S., have strong links with the far-right, the settler movement in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. According to various sources, around thirty million evangelicals will vote in the next general elections in Brazil (Arias 2024).

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## CURRENT MEDIATION TRENDS

Peace mediation is the set of experiences, techniques and theories that can lead to negotiation and eventually a peace agreement between violently conflicting parties. A third party assists two or more consenting parties to prevent, manage or resolve a conflict by helping them to develop a mutually acceptable agreement (UN

2012). Actors involved include intergovernmental organizations—particularly the UN, regional organizations, States, religious and non-governmental organizations.<sup>5</sup>

Mediation has been implemented through three “tracks”: Track I, exercised by States or intergovernmental organizations; Track II, conducted by civil society (individuals or organizations) to open spaces for dialogue in direct or indirect coordination with conflicting actors, or with third parties; Track III initiatives involve grassroots actors at the local and community level.

The Oslo peace process between Israel and Palestine began with an informal dialogue between Norwegian diplomats and Palestinian and Israeli academics. These talks evolved into secret dialogues between the PLO and Israeli government representatives.

After decades of policy, practice and regulatory consolidation, peace mediation has become an increasingly challenging practice. An international system in flux overlaps with existing negative trends for mediation and peacebuilding. The rise of hard Realist foreign policies and the complex characteristics of current armed conflict caused a profound transformation of the peace mediation landscape.

The liberal global hegemony is increasingly contested amidst a return to geopolitical competition, a system of powers in flux, interference by global and regional actors in conflicts that become proxy wars and a lack of diplomatic cooperation between the great powers. This competition leads to blockades in the UN Security Council (UNSC) and fewer peace agreements. Simultaneously, emerging middle powers (such as the BRICS, Indonesia, Kenya, Türkiye, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Iran) seek more influence, play more assertive foreign policies, and seek opportunities to diversify their international alliances.

A second trend is the deregulation of the use of force worldwide in a context of more (increasingly internationalized) conflicts, with more civilian victims. Conflicts are more complex, non-linear and unpredictable, with a fragmentation of State and non-State actors. These trends

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5. For a look at the “traditional” system of actors, see González Bustelo et al. (2022).

spread globally after 9/11 and the “global war on terrorism” (Hazan 2024), with high turning points in Libya and Syria, and later accentuated with Ukraine and Gaza. The global war on terror focused on militarized responses to armed conflict and the proscription of groups qualified as terrorists. The third trend is the weakening of the norm of seeking political solutions to violent conflicts. Many actors have been raising their voices against negotiation or mediation, for example, with jihadist groups. There is a preference for military campaigns above or instead of political processes.

Conflicts often involve a mix of political, economic, ideological and criminal agendas. The atomization means that in the same country or region, different conflicts can coexist at the national, subnational, and local levels. State capacity and legitimacy deteriorate, and the groups compete not only with the State but also among themselves.

These issues undermine fundamental aspects of mediation. In consequence, it may be necessary to work at multiple levels, many of them “beyond and below the State” (Whitfield 2024). The old scheme of having two cohesive parties, with opposite ideologies or models for the State and society, is not so frequent nowadays. Large peace conferences and comprehensive peace agreements are in decline. Actors and mediators seek agreements on a specific issue, or sometimes between the State and a conflict actor, or between non-State actors, in specific areas rather than in the whole of a national territory.

## Mediation in Flux, and Fragmented

Facing this complex environment is a growing diversification of mediation actors. Peace mediation no longer belongs only to one actor or group of actors. An increasing number of conflict mediators come from the East rather than the West, and the South rather than the North. The landscape includes the traditional (UN, regional multilateral organizations, Norway, Switzerland and the so-called “small democracies”), as well as Qatar, intermediate powers such as South Africa, Türkiye, Mexico, Kenya, China, private actors and insider mediators (González Bustelo et al. 2022).

Data from the 2024 PA-X Peace Agreements Database and Dataset (Badanjak & Peter 2024) show changes and diversification of third parties in peace processes.<sup>6</sup> Between 1990 and 2022, the most frequent third parties were the UN, Russia, the U.S., the African Union and the EU. The role of Western States is declining,

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6. The database includes formal, written agreements signed since 1990 and shows that half of them has third parties as signatories (States, international and regional organizations, non-State actors, and individuals).

especially France, Norway, the United Kingdom and, above all, the U.S., while other third parties, such as Qatar, Türkiye, and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), are on the rise. China's international expansion has led it to invest in many countries in conflict. Peacemaking is a source of leadership, credibility and influence, with a focus on facilitation rather than mediation. Among other interventions, China was the central actor in the Iran-Saudi Arabia deal, in 2023.

## **New Mediators**

There is a series of interesting examples of new mediators. Qatar's diplomacy is deft and pragmatic, playing a mediator role. It was the first Arab country to open a trade office in Israel. Qatar did not support the October 7 attack, but blamed Israel for the occupation, for violating the Geneva Conventions and perhaps for genocide. Moreover, in 18 years it has provided US\$1 billion in aid to Gaza through Israel's banking system, under its supervision.

Qatar was a signatory to an agreement between Eritrea and Sudan in 1999. Since then it has been present in twenty-one conflicts, from Darfur to Afghanistan, Syria, and Libya. In 2006 it played a major role in the war between Hezbollah and Israel in Lebanon. Its opposition to Israel's actions raised its legitimacy among Shia and Sunni communities. Qatar hosts the political offices of the Taliban and Hamas, has mediated between Washington and the Taliban, and in Chad succeeded in getting forty opposition groups to agree to a national dialogue in 2022. The country's approach is global (acting in both Afghanistan and Venezuela). Its diplomacy has conducted Track I in Yemen, Lebanon and Chad, and a combination of Track I and Track II in Afghanistan and Chad. It works alone, but has cooperated with the African Union, the Arab League and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

South Africa has mediated conflicts in Africa, like Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo. For Pretoria, mediation is an avenue for influencing regional and global affairs. President Cyril Ramaphosa was part of a group of seven African leaders who travelled on mediation missions to Russia and Ukraine. South Africa also provided its contacts and backchannels to open negotiations between Israel and Hamas in October 2023 (Agency for Peacebuilding 2024). Kenya has been a mediator in neighbouring countries (Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, Burundi, Ethiopia, Somalia, Great Lakes). It recently took the lead in a multinational police mission in Haiti.

Türkiye has been involved in numerous peace processes since Iraq in 2003, and Somalia. Brazil, together with Türkiye, attempted to conclude a confidence-



building agreement on Iran's controversial nuclear programme in 2010. Iran would export half of its enriched uranium to Türkiye in exchange for receiving fuel for a medical research reactor (Crail 2010).

## **Gaza War Initiatives**

The above changes occur in parallel with rising scepticism about the role of norms and institutions in the international order. Many countries and peoples of the South perceive double standards, and an “international rules-based order” always selectively applied by the West. Brazil, China, India, Kenya, Indonesia, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and the UAE have shown their willingness to provide ideas that could support eventual negotiations between Russia and Ukraine. Brazilian President Lula da Silva proposed that Moscow give up its gains in Donbass in exchange for accepting Russia's sovereignty over Crimea.

In the ongoing Gaza war, Qatar, Egypt, the U.S. and Israel are negotiating over humanitarian access, ceasefires, hostage and Palestinians political prisoners' releases, and reconstruction of Gaza. More strategically, Washington, Brussels and others are proposing a return to the two-State solution and strengthening the Palestinian Authority. It is thus a constellation of actors with some common interests and different international alliances. This constellation has little similarity with past initiatives such as The Quartet (Whitfield 2024). For their part, Russia and China have welcomed talks between Hamas and the PNA to promote a dialogue to rebuild Palestinian political unity and face negotiations with Israel with one voice.

## **Innovative Collaboration**

A key issue that applies to Israel and Palestine is to distinguish between mediation that can halt or end, through an agreement, the war unleashed on Gaza following Hamas' attacks in October 2023, and mediation of a political agreement that can resolve the big issues and end the conflict in the long run.

This relates with the trends in mediation. Progress towards peace will, in many cases, be slower and consist of continually negotiated and renegotiated iterative processes. Peacemaking today “is mostly about stopping the worst, and this means accepting flawed bargains between belligerents as better than protracted war-making and working with those involved to make agreements more likely to endure” (ICG 2023).

Christine Bell (2024) proposes multi-mediation:

*Third parties, diplomats, regional organizations, private mediators can work in different parts of these patchworks: to help de-escalate violence, solve localized conflicts, community level actions, all the way up to providing high level advice on constitutional processes. Actions might be limited to one actor (promote intra group dialogue), one region, or one issue.*

Altogether, the different initiatives may be connected in an iterative process that incrementally allows to put an agenda for change into practice. This requires coordination between mediators, and innovative collaboration between multilateral, State, private and insider mediators. Western mediators no longer have a monopoly and must look to the rest of the world. Mediators from western backgrounds will have to explore how to work with others and create networks beyond their usual spaces.

In this conflict, States, whether powers, neutral or in-between, as well as non-State actors, could play various roles in establishing and maintaining channels with all actors; providing incentives; developing options on negotiating issues; and promoting Track II initiatives for intra- and cross-party dialogue. A State offering to mediate must have legitimacy, effectiveness and capacity. Legitimacy comes from the parties' consent. In addition, it must have the political capital, broad international support, determination (strategic patience) and instruments (diplomatic, human and financial resources) to follow through, and remain in the role of a third party for a long time, including eventual implementation.

*A key issue that applies to Israel and Palestine is to distinguish between mediation that can halt or end, through an agreement, the war unleashed on Gaza following Hamas' attacks in October 2023, and mediation of a political agreement that can resolve the big issues and end the conflict in the long run.*

## **CONCLUSIONS: A NEW NEGOTIATING PARADIGM**

The Gaza war evidences a series of changes and perceptions towards this conflict. Eight decades of international initiatives have not yielded results. Palestinians feel they live worse than before the Oslo Accords, and Israelis feel

they are more insecure. Despite an incremental logic between UN resolutions, agreements, and various international initiatives, most Israeli governments have obstructed negotiations while expanding occupation. On the Palestinian side, there is controversy over whether their negotiators missed opportunities, and if violence particularly used by Hamas alienated Israeli society from negotiations, or if Arafat gave up too much in Oslo. This side has always been in an inferior position, especially lacking an actor (which could have been the EU if it had emerged from its secondary role) to provide the support that the U.S. provides to Israel (Costello 2024).

Until the current offensive in Gaza, Israel had enjoyed widespread support around the world. The memory of the Holocaust and the use of violence by Palestinian organizations functioned as a protective shield for Israel against its violations of human rights, IHL and UN resolutions. The Gaza war is changing this exceptionality, notably in the South.

This war has also called into question the legitimacy of the U.S. as mediator and leader of the international rules-based order. The dual response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine with sanctions and the financial and military support for Israel's offensive against the civilian population in Gaza have provoked critical reactions in the U.S. and other countries. For its part, the so-called Global South has condemned Russia for the invasion but voted in the UN against imposing sanctions, while distancing itself from the "West" over the Gaza war.

The rise of emerging States, their growing weight in regional and global arenas, and their demands for reform of the multilateral and international financial system give them an important weight that could materialize in other fields, such as peace and security.

Within the emerging States of the Global South, Brazil could play a role in peace and security processes, both in decision-making (for example, when occupying a non-permanent seat in the UNSC), being part of peacekeeping operations, and linking South-South development cooperation (triangulated with northern countries) as a stimulus to negotiations and peace and State building projects, supporting humanitarian assistance and assisting Track II initiatives.

*Studies elaborated in the last decade affirm that the two-State option is impossible. (...) [Israel] has no incentive to do so and most of its society does not want a Palestinian State. Nor is there a third party pressuring it to negotiate.*

Being part of IBSA and BRICS, holding the Presidency of the New Development Bank, and having started development aid projects in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Occupied Palestinian Territories in the 2000s, Brazil has possibilities. In the medium and long term, it could promote, alone or with other States and non-State actors, dialogue initiatives between conflicting parties and negotiations. To do so would require analyzing the political, economic and diplomatic relations with the opponents, and the characteristics of the actors in confrontation, as well as the relations between sectors and interests of Brazilian society and the conflicting parties.

In the Israeli-Palestinian case, it is important to understand diplomacy since 1947, why it failed, what possibilities and obstacles exist, and whether a different model is necessary. Studies elaborated in the last decade affirm that the two-State option is impossible. The Israeli occupation with its settlements, road networks, fragmentation of Palestinian enclaves and its suffocation of and economic dependence on Israel, control of their daily lives by force, laws and dispossession, plus police control by the weak Palestinian Authority, make it hard to believe that Israel will give up the West Bank and East Jerusalem (and now Gaza) through negotiation. It has no incentive to do so and most of its society does not want a Palestinian State. Nor is there a third party pressuring it to negotiate.

The risk is assuming that, in the absence of alternatives, a two-State solution is inevitable.

*The prospects for a two-State solution have become vanishingly small. Israelis and Palestinians today exist in an unacknowledged one State reality defined by systematic structures of domination and control imposed by one identity group over another in varying degrees based on location and legal status. These systems of control have deeply shaped every institution within both Israel and the Palestinian territories in ways that defy any possibility of easy partition. But recognition of that reality has been stymied by the inability to formulate any workable alternative political formula (Lynch 2023, 294).*

In both Israeli and Palestinian societies, the profound changes and diverse perceptions of the other side widen the gulf. The situation shows that the time has come for “a gestalt shift so that the area between the sea and the river can be seen for what it is, rather than how it must be imagined, justifying continued work on behalf of a negotiated two-State solution (TSS)” (Lustick 2023, 34). A new paradigm needs to be sought in the context of new trends in mediation, looking pragmatically at the possibilities for political intervention by, among others, States in the Global South. ▬

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