

# افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد  
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

[www.afgazad.com](http://www.afgazad.com)

[afgazad@gmail.com](mailto:afgazad@gmail.com)

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

BY ROGER HARRIS

16.12.2023

## Why Latin America and the Caribbean Stand With Palestine



Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair

The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, with a few notable exceptions, have been critical of Israel's ongoing campaign of genocide in Gaza. Perhaps more than any other region, they have expressed their solidarity with Palestine. Most recognize that the partnership between US imperialism and Israeli Zionism applies not only to Palestine, but also to Israel's role as attendant to US domination in this hemisphere.

President Gabriel Boric of Chile condemned Israel's attacks on Palestinians in Gaza. The largest Palestinian population outside of the Middle East (more properly West Asia) resides in Chile. Belize and Peru, likewise, joined the denunciation of Israel. Bolivia, meanwhile, has severed diplomatic relations with Israel, while Honduras and Colombia recalled their ambassadors.

Cuba had cut relations back in 1973 and Venezuela in 2009. Except for Panama, almost all of the region's states recognize Palestine. Brazil, Colombia, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, and Venezuela all have sent aid to Gaza. Even Argentina, with the largest Jewish population in the region, censured Israel over its violations of international law when hostilities first flared up.

Samuel Moncada, Venezuela's ambassador to the United Nations, addressed the General Assembly on November 23: "It is repugnant to see how, despite the cruelty...the government of the United States of America and its satellites aim to justify the unjustifiable."

Cuba and Iran called for a global coalition to protect the rights of Palestinians on December 4, noting that the world community has failed to stop the US-backed genocide.

A month before the October 7 offensive by Hamas, President Gustavo Petro of Colombia had presciently taken the occasion of the opening of the United Nations session to call for a united world effort at achieving peace in Israel-Palestine (along with Ukraine).

Nayib Bukele, president of El Salvador and ironically of Palestinian heritage, stood out in his support of Israel among the regional heads of state. That is until the militantly pro-Zionist Javier Milei assumed the presidency of Argentina two months after the most recent eruption of aggressions.

### **Henchman for the hegemon**

The head of Colombia publicly criticizing Israel would have been unthinkable until Gustavo Petro won the presidency in 2022. The former M19 guerilla turned center-left politician was the first president from the portside in the entire history of Colombia. Pre-Petro, Colombia was known as Washington's closest client in the region, the largest recipient of US military aid, and the only NATO global partner in Latin America.

Back in 2013, then-Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos reflected on his country's status as the regional equivalent to the US's proxy state in the Middle East. He proclaimed that he was proud that Colombia is considered the "Israel of Latin America." Indeed, Israel had an extensive role as a henchman for the US hegemon in Colombia. The right-

wing linked Colombian military and paramilitaries had long been closely intermeshed with the Zionist state.

The United Self-Defenses of Colombia (AUC in its Spanish initials), a drug trafficking cartel with a reputed 10,000-20,000 combatants at its peak, was one of the largest paramilitary groups in South America. The AUC was used by the US-allied official Colombian military to do its dirty work against left *campesino* and worker organizations. AUC militaries were trained by Israeli operatives. Some fifty of its most promising cadre received “scholarships” to Israel. Operating out of Guatemala, the Israeli arms supplier GIRSA sold Kalashnikov rifles and ammunition to the AUC paramilitaries in Colombia.

Another Latin American country with a closely intertwined relationship with Israel was Nicaragua before the Sandinista revolution. During the long US-backed Somoza dictatorship, Israel maintained a “special relationship” with this dynasty of ruthless autocrats. In the last days of the dictatorship, the US cut off arms supplies in response to public revulsion over atrocities committed by Somoza’s forces. Undaunted, Israel continued to supply them with military equipment. Then, when the US instigated the counterinsurgency after the successful Sandinista-led national liberation, Israel again served as supplier of the *contras*. Paralleling the Somoza-Israel bond were the Sandinista-Palestine ties, which continue to this day.

### **Israel’s partnership with US imperialism in the region**

For the 31<sup>st</sup> time in November, the UN nearly unanimously condemned the US blockade of Cuba for its devastating effects on civilians and as a violation of the UN Charter. The vote would have been unanimous except for “no” votes cast by the US and Israel along with an abstention from Ukraine. The latter, which is now essentially a US dependency, is a newcomer. But Tel Aviv, on the other hand, has consistently stood with Washington in support of its coercive and illegal economic measures that have created a dire crisis in Cuba.

In fact, Israel has served as Washington’s partner in training reactionary death squads and supplying repressive militaries throughout the region for decades. *Al Jazeera* reported that Israel has trained, supplied, and advised militaries in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela in addition to Colombia and Nicaragua.

Not only was Israel entangled with the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua, but it had a similar relationship to the 29-year Duvalier dynasty in Haiti, selling arms for the dictators’

repressive forces. Ditto for the 35-year dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner in Paraguay, the 17-year Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, and the military dictatorships in Argentina and Brazil. Likewise, Israel was the supplier of arms and trainer of death squads in the “dirty” wars in Guatemala and El Salvador. In all these grisly ventures, Tel Aviv was joined at the hip with Washington.

The Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) explains that many right-leaning Latin American countries see a “close military relationship with Israel as a political asset in restoring or maintaining military and political ties with Washington.”

When reactionary regimes in the region need coercive muscle for hire, Israel is a prime choice. After right-winger David Noboa won the Ecuadorian presidency last month, he called in Israel to help restore government control of its prison system, which had been taken over by criminal gangs. Israel is also being tapped to design maximum security prisons in Ecuador.

According to Israeli psychologist Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi’s *The Israeli Connection*, “Israel is generally admired in Latin American military circles for its macho image of firmness, ruthlessness, and efficiency...Latin American military establishment is where most of Israel’s friends are found and where Israel continues to cultivate support.”

A case in point is the far-right Javier Milei, who assumed the presidency of Argentina on December 10. He campaigned on the promise to realign the second-largest economy in South America with the US and Israel and away from its largest trading partners Brazil and China. On his first trip abroad after his election victory, Milei went to the US where he made what was described as a pilgrimage to the grave of an ultra-orthodox Jewish rabbi and announced his intention to convert from Catholicism to Judaism. The self-described anarcho-capitalist had accused the Argentina-born pope of being a communist and a false prophet.

### **Palestine’s friends and foes**

Support of Israeli Zionism is a unifying issue for the fractious far right in the region, where virulent antisemites buddy up with Jewish nationalists, wrapping themselves – literally as in the case of former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro – in the Israeli flag.

When the now disgraced and exiled Juan Guaidó first got the nod from the US to self-declare himself “interim president” of Venezuela in 2019, he staged the announcement on a street corner in Caracas with an Israeli flag flying behind him. Just as the red flag has been adopted as the banner for the left, the pennant of Israel has become the insignia of the

right. That blue and white banner can be seen at right-wing political rallies and at market stands owned by evangelicals throughout the region.

A growing evangelical Christian movement views Israel as a crucial part of their theology of the “end times” and is becoming an influential political force in the electorates of Guatemala (42%), Costa Rica (26%), Brazil (25%), Venezuela (22%), and elsewhere. The evangelicals have yet to exert a significant pro-Zionist political influence in the region. But that potential should not be discounted as events unfold.

On December 12, the United Nations General Assembly voted on a ceasefire in Gaza. Only Guatemala and Paraguay in Latin America voted “nay,” joining the US and Israel, while Uruguay, Argentina, and Panama abstained. The rest of the region united with the world supermajority of 153 nations supporting the resolution.

For now, Latin America and the Caribbean remain a bastion of support for Palestinian freedom. Palestine’s cause is popular with countries striving for independence from the US. Factors contributing to that stance are large Arab diasporas in the region, small pro-Zionist Jewish populations, and no powerful lobbies like AIPAC. For many, the struggle to assert national self-determination under US hegemony finds a kindred affinity with the cause of Palestine.

*Roger Harris is on the board of the [Task Force on the Americas](#), a 32-year-old anti-imperialist human rights organization.*

CounterPunch 15.12.2023