

Colombia cuts ties with Israel over Gaza genocide

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Colombia's Foreign Ministry announced on Thursday the severing of diplomatic relations with Israel over the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

Bogota plans to remove all its diplomatic personnel from Israel, according to an official statement that cites the “indescribable human suffering” inflicted upon Palestinians since last October. The communiqué stresses that the measure is aimed not at Israeli citizens or the Jewish population, but strictly at the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The decision was first announced by President Gustavo Petro during a May Day speech on Wednesday, in front of tens of thousands of supporters in Bogota.

He said that one word summarizes “the necessity of life, rebellion, the raised flag and resistance. That word is called Gaza. It is called Palestine, the girls, the boys, the babies who have died dismembered by bombs... If Palestine dies, humanity dies, and we will not let it die.”

The breaking of relations with Tel Aviv, which predictably responded by calling Petro an “antisemite full of hatred,” takes place in the context of the massive crackdown against peaceful anti-genocide protests at universities across US and indications that Israel will proceed with a devastating invasion of Rafah in southern Gaza, which harbors over 1 million refugees.

Hundreds of millions around the world have watched for seven months images of the mass killings in Gaza and are now being further enraged by the brutal violence against students and faculty on US campuses.

The danger of a regional or even global conflict has also become increasingly apparent, with Petro himself responding to the exchange of air strikes between Israel and Iran by warning of an imminent “World War III.” At the time, he tweeted: “US support, in practice, for a

genocide, has set the world ablaze.”

With a few exceptions—most notably the fascist Argentine President Javier Milei—the biggest diplomatic backlash against Israel and the US for the slaughter in Palestine has taken place in Latin America, even more than among Muslim-majority countries.

Petro had recalled his ambassador from Israel hours after an Israeli airstrike flattened much of the Jabalia refugee camp in Gaza and killed dozens on October 31. On the same day, Bolivian President Luis Arce cut all diplomatic ties with Israel, while President Gabriel Boric recalled Chile's ambassador from Tel Aviv.

Days later, Honduras recalled its ambassador, and Belize suspended diplomatic relations with Israel. The Cuban and Venezuelan governments already had no diplomatic ties with Israel and have condemned the genocide in Gaza. Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua has not broken relations with Israel but did launch a case in the International Court of Justice against Germany's “complicity” in the genocide in Gaza as one of Israel's largest military suppliers. The ICJ responded in record time by rejecting emergency measures to block arms sales to Tel Aviv.

In February, Brazilian President Lula da Silva denounced Israel for carrying out a “genocide” in Gaza akin to “when Hitler decided to kill the Jews.” The Netanyahu administration responded by declaring Lula a “persona non grata,” meaning he is not welcome in Israel.

Finally, while Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has remained largely muted about the Israeli genocide, he denounced US hypocrisy for repressing pro-Palestinian students and providing weapons to kill “innocent people” across the world. “How are they going to pretend they're world judges on the defense of human rights?” he said.

Such positions reflect an enormous fear of the explosive popular opposition to the genocide.

In Latin America, it is a distorted expression of the instinctive hatred among the masses for the type of neo-colonial slaughter and oppression in Palestine, which closely resembles what Latin America has itself faced at the hands of US imperialism and its oligarchic partners.

Millions in the region see clearly that Israel is acting as a bludgeon for the US efforts to secure its hegemony in the Middle East.

For decades, Washington has sought to cultivate the Colombian ruling class as its closest military partner and bastion for political reaction in Latin America. Since the 1960s, the US has spent billions and sent countless military “advisors” to help crush left-wing guerrilla movements, working hand-in-hand with the landed oligarchy, their multinational partners, and fascist paramilitary gangs to continue robbing millions of hectares from peasants—territory several times the size of Israel and occupied Palestine.

The war in Colombia has resulted in between 450,000 and 800,000 deaths and 8 million displaced since 1985.

Israel and Colombia long maintained a strategic triangle with the US, with Israel providing much of the weapons to Colombia until Petro suspended military purchases in February. Both maintain special relations with NATO, and Colombia remains the Atlantic Alliance’s only “global partner” in Latin America.

Petro and the other “left” bourgeois nationalist leaders in the region represent sections of the ruling class that are particularly sensitive to the deep anti-imperialist sentiments among workers and other oppressed layers.

Since Hugo Chavez was elected at the turn of the century in Venezuela, his co-thinkers have sought to channel this opposition behind efforts to negotiate better terms for the national ruling elites in how profits are distributed with US imperialism. This has been combined with closer commercial and political relations with US geopolitical rivals like China and Russia, as well as promises of greater social spending and reforms that have largely dried up with the drop in commodity prices in 2014.

In the rest of his speech on May Day, Petro portrayed himself and his government as working class, and defended a healthcare bill that expands local clinics and

reduces the role of private insurers. “I do not belong to that ignorant pseudo-aristocracy, dressed as slavers who today do not know the reality of the world,” he said demagogically.

Besides Congress rejecting his limited social programs, Petro has faced very real and escalating threats from far-right and military circles to overthrow his elected government. On Wednesday, he explicitly warned that a “coup” against him would provoke a mass social eruption.

Described in the corporate media as Colombia’s “first left-wing President,” Petro was installed to channel the mass protests and general strikes against social inequality that erupted between 2019 and 2021 behind illusions in reforms within the capitalist set up. His power depends on his ability to suppress the class struggle, which has become increasingly limited.

Despite a recent uptick, his popularity hovers around 35 percent. His positions on Israel and recent promises of a “constituent assembly” are undoubtedly aimed at bolstering his base of support, which now largely rests on the discredited trade union bureaucracy and other sections of the middle class.

Independently of his personal revulsion toward the slaughter of Palestinians, which there is no reason to doubt, Petro and his government represent a section of the capitalist ruling class that depends on US imperialism for access to markets, capital, and above all, protection against any challenge from below.

Any serious struggle against imperialism and war requires a mass working class movement internationally to end capitalism. This threat will push all sections of the local ruling elites toward open dictatorship and back into the embrace of imperialism.

As the great Marxist revolutionary Leon Trotsky wrote as early as 1928: “A democratic or national liberation movement may offer the bourgeoisie an opportunity to deepen and broaden its possibilities for exploitation. Independent intervention of the proletariat on the revolutionary arena threatens to deprive the bourgeoisie of the possibility to exploit altogether.”



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