

The NATIONAL INTEREST FOUNDATION

[Brazil's Recall of Its Ambassador to Israel](#)

At the African Union Summit last Sunday, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva strongly criticized Israel's military offensive in the Gaza Strip, drawing parallels between it and Nazi actions during the Holocaust. A diplomatic rift has since emerged, with Brazil recalling its ambassador to Israel while the latter declared Brazil's president as "persona non grata." The comments by Lula are some of the latest in increasing denunciation regarding Israel's human rights violations in Gaza, which have killed more than 29,000 Palestinians – two-thirds of whom have been women and children, devastated the enclave, and forcibly displaced millions from their homes. In fact, leaders at the summit where Brazilian President Lula spoke also condemned Israel's offensive in Gaza and called for its immediate end. Moussa Faki, the chair of the African Union Commission, stated that it was the most flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, and others praised the case brought by South Africa against Israel at the International Court of Justice.

Additionally, both Colombia and Bolivia have backed Brazil's President Lula in the ongoing diplomatic row with Israel. Gustavo Petro and Luis Arce, the presidents of Colombia and Bolivia respectively, expressed solidarity with Lula. Petro stated that "In Gaza there is a genocide and thousands of children, women, and elderly civilians are cowardly murdered...Lula has only spoken the truth...the entire region must unite to immediately end the violence in Palestine." He also added that the decision of the International Court of Justice in the case brought by South Africa against Israel should bear actionable consequences on the diplomatic relations of countries around the world. Meanwhile, Arce remarked that "History will not forgive those who are indifferent to this barbarity...the Brazilian president told the truth about the genocide being committed against the brave Palestinian people." It was rightly pointed out by others that justifiable criticism of the Israeli government's abusive actions is not anti-Semitic, contrary to what biased defenders of Israel often like to try and claim. Lula's wife, the First Lady of Brazil Rosângela Lula da Silva, stated that the Brazilian president's speech referred to the Israeli government and not to the Jewish people, highlighting that had Lula been alive during World War II, he would have spoken up for persecuted Jews in the same manner. Labeling legitimate criticism of Israel's actions as anti-Semitic is inaccurate and dangerous, because it is used as a political tool aimed at shielding Israel from fair rebuke.

Even prior to Lula's remarks this past Sunday, Brazil had been vocal in recent months about the War on Gaza, condemning Israel for its indiscriminate attacks against Palestinian civilians and crucial infrastructure in the besieged enclave. Lula himself said in late 2023 that the killing of thousands of children is particularly shocking and concerning. Furthermore, at the United Nations Security Council, Brazil has supported every single resolution calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. Lula was also at the airport tarmac in Brasilia to welcome back Palestinian-Brazilians as they returned on repatriation flights in the preceding months. Brazil is far from the first and only country to see a souring of diplomatic relations with Israel in the aftermath of the War on Gaza. Dozens of countries have called out Israel for its abusive actions, and others have severed relations or made official diplomatic protests. This includes Belize, Chile, Colombia, Bolivia, Honduras, Turkey, and South Africa – to name some. Back in November, South African lawmakers voted in favor of a motion calling for the closure of the Israeli embassy and the cutting of diplomatic ties until Israel agrees to a ceasefire in Gaza. They also recalled their ambassador to Israel and withdrew all diplomatic staff. Notably, on the global stage, South Africa has put forth a landmark case against Israel at the International Court of Justice which has so far prompted the judicial body to issue a preliminary ruling stating that

Israel must take several concrete measures to prevent acts of genocide against Palestinians. There is also an ongoing separate case at the International Court of Justice whereby at least 52 countries will present arguments related to controversial Israeli policies in the illegally-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In recent days, Brazilian Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira relayed displeasure with Israel's reaction to Lula's remarks, accusing Israel of trying to create a smokescreen to cover up and divert attention away from what is taking place in Gaza. Vieira expressed that "The words from Netanyahu's government are deceiving in their content...they're putting up a smokescreen to hide the real problem which is the ongoing massacre in Gaza." He also added that it would be unacceptable for Lula to retract or deny the Israeli war crimes and human rights violations that are being perpetrated there.