

'I Love Israel': Bolsonaro Nudged by Netanyahu to Recognize Embassy Move During Visit

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Brazil president Jair Bolsonaro was received warmly by Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu Sunday during his first visit to Israel, greeting Netanyahu with a Hebrew "I love Israel" at a welcoming ceremony in the Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv.

The Brazilian leader said that it was an "honor" visit "Israel," while "firmly" committing to "strengthen the partnership" between the two entities.

During the scheduled four day visit, the two far right politicians are expected to sign a number of economic and political agreements aimed at consolidating Brazil and Israel's alliance before the upcoming April 9 Israeli elections.

The proposed plans included increased military and security cooperation with Israel, having signed several agreements that would enable further cooperation between the two nations on defense, cyber security and joint police collaboration.

The agreements also entailed plans for Brazil's Petrobras to engage more closely with Israeli offshore oil and gas exploration. In recent years, Israel has been eyeing the oil reserves of the eastern Mediterranean, infringing upon Lebanon's territorial zone and providing one motivational actor for the occupation and US backed recognition of its claim to Syria's Golan.

The meeting will also anticipate the Brazilian leader's stance on moving the Brazilian embassy to Israel to Jerusalem, a step Bolsonaro promised in January yet failed to formalize.

According to reports, the move was vehemently opposed by military officers in his cabinet.

On Thursday, Palestinian news outlet Ma'an reported that the Brazilian president decided against opening an embassy in Jerusalem, yet agreed to open up a trade office in Jerusalem.

Thus far, the US and Guatemala are the only two countries to have officially moved their embassies to Jerusalem.

Yet the Bolsonaro's brief decision to backtrack on a formal embassy declaration was challenged by Sunday's visit.

The agreement to open up the trade office, in establishing diplomatic status between the two, is expected to ultimately pave the way for an official embassy move.

In December, Netanyahu said that this was a matter of “when, not if.”

According to a Sunday statement by Brazil’s Foreign Minister, Ernesto Araujo, the trade office was a decision made ‘as part of its embassy.’

The Palestinian foreign ministry responded Sunday with condemnations against the trade office between Brazil and Israel.

Stressing that the agreement was a “blatant violation of international legitimacy” the ministry constituted the establishment of the commercial office with diplomatic status a “direct aggression against the Palestinian people and their rights.”

The president also accompanied Netanyahu to the Noble Sanctuary, the holiest site in Jerusalem, where he joined the prime minister in prayers on the Western Wall Monday as the first head of state to do so. The plaza, containing al-Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock, has been the site of repeated violence and trespass by settlers, Israeli Occupying Forces (IOF) in their claims to east Jerusalem.

The visit was a political statement reaffirming Israel’s claim to the east Jerusalem territory it resides in, illegally annexed by the occupying entity in a post 1967 move not recognized by the international community.

The Second Intifada in 2000 launched with then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon made a provocative visit to Al-Aqsa, an action widely replicated by Zionists reinforcing Israeli hegemony over the territory.

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