

A photograph of Dr. Guillaume Long, a man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a dark suit, light blue shirt, and patterned tie. He is standing at a podium, speaking into a microphone. The background is a red wall with white text. In the foreground, the back of a person's head and shoulders is visible, looking towards the speaker. The overall lighting is warm and slightly dim.

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Minister of Culture and

MEMO International Conference

Latin America, neo- imperialism and Palestine

Address by Dr Guillaume Long

MIDDLE EAST M●NITOR

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Title: *Latin America, neo-imperialism and Palestine*

Address delivered: August 22nd 2015; London

First Published: August 2015

ISBN: 978-1-907433-24-5

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Latin America, neo-imperialism and Palestine

Dr Guillaume Long



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Address: Latin America, neo-imperialism and Palestine

Latin American solidarity with Palestine has a long history, particularly in the political left. This is not something new. What is new is that the political left is suddenly in power in a number of countries in Latin America, whereas it wasn't for - with violence in exceptional cases - most of the history of the Cold War.

Cuba obviously was the precursor in - I would say - south-south relations in general, not just relations with Palestine, from a Latin American perspective and kind of carried on the spirit of the London conference. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s Cuba had a foreign policy that was that of a giant including military intervention and a number of extra-continental scenarios in Africa. In fact in the case of the Middle East, Cuba participated in the Yom Kippur war in 1973 on the Syrian side and Cuba led the way for the Latin American left, for many years, on its position on Palestine.

Nicaragua then played an important role in the 1980s also with a strong internationalist position. We are today with the Bolivian ambassador who proudly explained to you all what Bolivia has done, it's been one of the most radical countries in opposing what we've all called the Israeli genocide in Gaza. We are the proud heirs of this left-wing, Latin American, internationalist south-south tradition of standing by Palestine.

Conversely, Israel has played a very conservative, pro-status quo in Latin America since the birth of the Israeli state. So there's a direct correlation there. If you look at the role of Israel in Latin America, particularly in the 1980s, which is when it really gets involved, it was basically doing the dirty work that the Americans really didn't want to do. Specifically in Colombia, they were very

strong in Colombia in the army and training the paramilitary force and we're talking really bad paramilitary forces – drug cartels involved in genocide and killing anything not just the guerrilla forces, killing anybody that they suspect of remotely progressive ideas. People like Yair Klein, this is very documented now, and Isaac Shoshani, the Mossad basically were very heavily involved in arming paramilitary groups in Colombia. Paramilitary groups are still a part of the problem today, in fact they are one of the major hurdles to reaching sustainable peace in Colombia and we're all very enthusiastic in Latin America, especially the neighbouring countries such as Ecuador, with Colombian peacekeepers because the Colombian war has affected all of us and yet paramilitary groups trained and armed for a long time by Israel are a major obstacle in reaching that peace.

The same situations in the Central American conflicts. Israel played a really nefarious role in the Central American conflicts supporting some of the most aggressive, genocidal dictatorships. Playing a role in the Contras and Sandinistas war; obviously on the side of the Contras. And in the south coast also we find traces of Israeli intervention in the Argentine dictatorship etc., etc.

So again for the Latin American left the scenario is pretty simple. We all believe in the right for the Jewish and Israeli people to live in peace but we're very clear about the role that Israel's playing in Latin America and the role Israel's playing through its colonial policies and its policies of apartheid in the Middle East. So finally of course in the 20th century we see the arrival of western governments. Why do we see the arrival of western governments would be a talk by itself.

Broadly speaking there's a backlash against neo-liberalism in the 1980s and the 1990s. Latin America was a real laboratory for extremely radical and fundamentalist neo-liberal austerity policies in the 1980s and 1990s starting with of course Chile during the Pinochet years but all of us were really very much affected by Reaganomics applied to Latin America which isn't Reaganomics or Thatcherism applied to the welfare state.

Reaganomics applied largely to pre-modern feudal context where there is already an absence of state is terrible and it meant the

abolishment of large parts of our population, the dramatic rise of inequality and that dramatic rise of inequality caused a political backlash. First it caused during the 1990s a lot of political instability, a lot of uprisings, a lot of - well in the case of Ecuador we were one of the greatest victims of that instability between 1996 and 2006. That decade we had seven presidents and I'm not even counting overnight juntas and presidents for a few hours. It was chaos caused by massive impoverishment of the population and the rise of inequality and austerity and so on and so on, negative growth rates of course and the major banking crisis because all of the money was offshore in 1999 and the migrants crisis and so on and so forth.

So all this created a backlash with the election of in the case of Ecuador the President Correa in 2006 came to power in 2007 but the largely the allegiance started officially with the election of Hugo Chavez in 1998 or 1999 and *[inaudible]* then the return of the Sandinistas and *[inaudible]* etc. etc. etc. creates now a scenario where we can talk of a very progressive, an important number of countries in Latin America that are on the political left that have adopted progressive redistributive policies for their populations and are basically asserting very sovereign foreign policies and this sovereign foreign policy is anti-imperialism and it has obvious consequences in our relation with the Middle East and in our condemnation of Israeli colonialism. Colonialism is also a sensitive issue in the Americas and Latin America, we still have colonial outlets one of them on the Falkland islands of course, which we all consider a colony, all of Latin America has a unified position on that nowadays. And Puerto Rico, which is a US colony of course amongst others. So this is something we feel very strongly about and Israeli colonialism and apartheid politics is no exception.

Finally, I think one of the most remarkable things of what's taking place in Latin America is that we maybe, this is taking a risk here, that we may be the first real true experiment of consolidating the nation state in the traditional *[inaudible]* sense, the capitalist nation state, although we try to take it as close as we can to a more socialist model, that's not violent and that's democratic. If you think about it, the construction of a modern state is always violent,

and in pretty much every case is always authoritarian. Even in the case of the United States which was one of the most democratic experiments at creating the modern capitalist state. Even in the case of the United States the tension between capitalism and feudalism was eventually solved through civil war.

We're dealing with that tension now, that same tension between the plantation state that we inherited, with all the inequalities and all the exploitation and all the traumas and a modern state that gives rights to its citizens through absolutely peaceful and non-authoritarian means. In Ecuador we've had ten elections in the last eight years. Local media - local as in UK and European call populism, we believe the name for that is democracy. Now this is not easy to do; to assert sovereignty in a vivarium sense, the *[inaudible]* don't exist, the state legitimacies don't exist without being authoritarian. And I think this is an example, especially in the early years. Once you've institutionalised people's minds then you can, you know, countries that are highly institutionalised can call themselves highly democratic. But in the early years it's very difficult. And I think that is the great south-south example Ecuador and its neighbours and Latin America have to give. And I would include the Middle East. This kind of tension that we've seen in the Middle East and in the south in general, in the third world in general between sovereignty on the one hand and democracy on the other has to be resolved.

I said in Ecuador, ten elections in eight years. We can't fear democracy, whatever the outcome may be. And this is also a debate that has to do with the Middle East and it's a very worrying debate in the context of Europe. We cannot fear democracy, whatever the result may be, whether we like it or we don't approve of the result. But at the same time we have to articulate nationalist and sovereign policies that enable our states to be viable, to be independent, and to be equal leaders in the international system. And I think that if you look back on the Latin American experience, 100 years from now from a historians' point of view, that will be the single most novel thing about Latin America, how we've managed in the case of Ecuador to chuck the US military base out of Ecuador and say thank you but no thank you, go

home. How we've managed to redistribute land and wealth and income [*inaudible*] reducing by 20 per cent, reducing the GDP coefficient from 0.55 to 0.36 which is a huge reduction of inequality that's how inequality is measured internationally, without violence, through democracy, through elections, I think that's the great without empire - other democracies have been constructed through our empire - without outside interference. And that's something we have to reflect in the context of the political staff, in the context of precarious institutionalisation, in the context of nation states that are still not consolidated which is the case of the so-called third world.

President Correa headed one of the governments that last year condemned what we called an Israeli genocide in Gaza. We recalled our ambassador and we opened our newly inaugurated embassy in Ramallah. And we believe that our struggle against the injustices of the [*inaudible*] system, including it's been mentioned here global governance through the UN Security Council including many unfair aspects of international financial architecture. The Fed, Wall Street, IMF, world bank, so on and so forth that broker our struggle against financial governance as well and our struggle against remnants of colonialism have to be one and integrated and that necessarily includes one of the great paradoxes of the 21st century which is the plight of the Palestinian people. So we have to understand the plight of the Palestinian people that's how we're treating it in Latin America as part of a much broader pattern of symmetry, injustice, colonialism and neo-colonialism and imperialism. As such, the people of Palestine can count on the solidarity of the people of Ecuador.

Contribution during the Q&A:

I think one of the major lessons of the Cold War, certainly for the Latin American left, was that armed struggle could be no more. The first reaction was resistance to neo-liberalism and I would say neo-colonial resistance more than anything else. Throughout the 1990s you see a lot of NGOs, you see a lot of community grassroots movements. You see the rise of the indigenous movements, certainly in Ecuador that was one of the greatest achievements of the 1990s, was the creation of strong, viable social movements including the indigenous movement and the kind of resistance to neo-liberalism. But of course resistance, it creates a broad platform if you have a common enemy, but you can get stuck in resistance for decades and decades and decades and get used to resistance and not really aspire to take political power. So I think one of the great changes at the beginning of the 21st century was to generate these left-wing governments that had legitimate power aspirations and actually said we don't have to be this kind of pure, sometimes fundamentalist political left that only gets two or three per cent of the electorate every time you go into the box. We can win. That means creating broader platforms; it means being 80 per cent in agreement and not 100 per cent in agreement within those platforms. It means looking for charismatic leadership, and it means unity. And I think that's one of the great lessons of the recent Latin American progressive and democratic processes. Unity. And it's difficult to achieve. The Middle East knows it well. It's difficult.

I definitely agree that much more should be done not just in the political, diplomatic and symbolic level. I think that's a start, especially given the context where Latin America was pretty much doing for decades, I mean something a bit more complicated than that, but by and large doing for decades what the US hegemon was telling it to do and to dare have an extra regional policy at all you were merely allowed to solve a few problems with your neighbours and you have to tow the American line on every other matter and to vote in such a decisive way and to have an impact on right wing governments that are your neighbours but then their voters, their constituents see that we, or others, take a stand and that forces not necessarily pro-Palestinian governments or

Palestinians that have been closer to Israel, there's a complex intricate balance of power that's been shifting in Latin America and I think we've played a big role there and I think that's important. And we're not wealthy states we're third world states with our own economic issues and the fact that we've taken a stand I think is brave. What can we do economically? I think different governments have done different things, I personally think more steps could be taken with regard to boycotting certain aspects of Israeli colonialism. I'm speaking more as the president of international relations of my party than as a government member for obvious reasons. But I think we're on the way we're growing bolder and bolder and yes it wasn't *[inaudible]* to take those first steps and build an embassy in Ramallah and it may seem secondary but believe me it doesn't go unnoticed by the United States.

My trip here was really lobbied against. I went via the United States, it wasn't a pleasant experience. These are small things that are part of the solidarity. Of course we could have more economic muscle and the start of a closer solidarity as opposed to the end point *[inaudible]*.

I think Israel is the principle campaigner for a one state solution. I really believe Israel's policies over the last few years are paramount to geo-political suicide. It makes no sense whatsoever. So regardless of whether the consensus globally at least the diplomatic consensus, maybe not the academic consensus, but the diplomatic consensus globally - is for the countries to sustain a two-state solution. The actions of Israel are making this more and more difficult.

** This transcript has been edited for clarity*

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