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Two State Solution Summit:

Symbolic Recognition Under the Reality of Occupation

Unit for Political Studies

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Series: **Situation Assessment**

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A high-level international conference on the two-state solution was resumed at the United Nations headquarters in New York on 23 September 2025. The summit was held as a late response to international pressures and a popular civil movement that has been steadily gaining traction in several Western countries demanding an end to Israel's genocide in Gaza, which is nearing the end of its second year. In its attempt to open a new political horizon for resolving the Palestine question, the conference seeks to cover up the international community's failure to halt the atrocities in Gaza, which have been livestreamed for the world to see. It also appeared to be an attempt to compensate for the unwillingness to take effective action against Israel. The conference, jointly organized by France and Saudi Arabia, was attended by 160 member states, as well as representatives from the European Union and the Arab League. The United States, as expected, boycotted the conference. The final statement called for the unification of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank under the umbrella of the Palestinian Authority, welcoming the PA's "One State, One Government, One Law, One Gun" policy. This, according to the conference participants, means " Hamas must end its rule in Gaza, disarm and hand over its weapons to the Palestinian Authority, with international engagement and support, in line with the objective of a sovereign Palestinian State."¹

Preparation for the New York Declaration

On 3 December 2024, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution calling for a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, reaffirming the international community's commitment to the two-state solution as the only path to achieving a "just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East". The resolution set out a practical framework for convening a high-level international conference on resolving the Palestine question, with the aim of implementing all relevant UN resolutions on Palestine. It also stipulated that France and Saudi Arabia would jointly chair the conference, scheduled for June 2025 at the UN headquarters in New York, to be preceded by one or more preparatory meetings.²

However, the outbreak of the Israel-Iran war between 13 and 25 June 2025 prevented the conference from taking place as planned. The US administration also exerted heavy pressure to derail it, sending a diplomatic note to states urging them not to participate, arguing that the conference undermined genuine efforts to end the war.³ Washington went so far as to warn explicitly that any "anti-Israel actions" emerging from the meeting would be considered contrary to US interests and could incur diplomatic consequences, insisting that recognition of a Palestinian state during wartime would amount to a "reward" for Hamas that would only embolden it to obstruct peace. This prompted the two sponsors, France and Saudi Arabia, to reschedule the conference and divide it into two phases. In truth, the Trump administration had already abandoned the two-state solution, reducing it to what was put forward in the "Deal of the Century", a plan portrayed as a Palestinian state but falling far short of one.

¹ "Joint Statement of Co-Chairs of High-Level International Conference on Peaceful Settlement of Question of Palestine and Implementation of Two-State Solution", Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 23/9/2025, accessed on 25/9/2025 at: <https://acr.ps/1L9BPFR>

² United Nations, *Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine: General Assembly Resolution A/RES/79/81* (New York: 3/12/2024), accessed on 25/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9BPgO>

³ John Irish and Humeysa Pamuk, "Exclusive: US slams UN conference on Israel-Palestinian issue, warns of consequences", 11/6/2025, accessed on 25/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9BPgR>



The first session was held at the end of July 2025 at the UN headquarters in New York, at the level of foreign ministers. It produced the "New York Declaration," which set out a gradual plan to end the Israel-Palestine conflict and halt the war in Gaza. It proposed the establishment of an independent, demilitarized Palestinian state living in peace alongside Israel, and called on Hamas to "end its rule in Gaza and hand over its weapons to the Palestinian Authority, with international engagement and support, in line with the objective of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State".⁴

The Declaration received broad support in the General Assembly, with 142 countries voting in favour and 10 against (Israel, Argentina, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Palau, Tonga, Micronesia, Nauru, Hungary and the United States) while 12 countries abstained.⁵ The Declaration became the legal and political basis for convening the New York conference, with broad global participation that included key Western states historically close to Israel. The wave of recognition for the State of Palestine – by the United Kingdom, France, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Denmark, Andorra, Monaco and San Marino – gave the conference even greater significance, lending it additional diplomatic and media momentum.

Conference Outcomes

The New York Conference concluded with a joint Saudi French statement comprising fifteen points. It highlighted the historic significance of the UN General Assembly's overwhelming adoption of the "New York Declaration," describing it as an "irreversible pathway to build a better future for Palestinians, Israelis and all peoples of the region".⁶ The statement stressed that the Declaration offered a realistic alternative to the "cycle of violence and endless wars" and called on the international community to "move from words to deeds" by taking concrete steps in this regard. It also welcomed the growing recognition of Palestine, and urged other states to follow suit.

The statement further called for a "a permanent ceasefire, the release of all hostages, exchange of prisoners, and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance throughout Gaza and the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza". It expressed support for a "temporary international stabilization mission upon invitation by the Palestinian Authority".

Notably, the text linked the achievement of an independent Palestinian state to issues unrelated to statehood and sovereignty, such as the implementation of "reforms" announced by the Palestinian Authority (including ending stipends for prisoners, reforming Palestinian school curricula, and holding general elections) alongside the launch of an emergency financial coalition to support the PA budget. The statement also urged Israel to halt settlement expansion and annexation activities, deeming them obstacles to the creation of a Palestinian state. Finally, it situated the Palestine question within a broader

⁴ "New York Declaration on the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State solution – UN High-Level International Conference", United Nations, 29/7/2025, accessed on 25/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9BPEh>

⁵ United Nations, "General Assembly Adopts Declaration Calling for Immediate Ceasefire, End to Hostilities, Ending Gaza Crisis," *UN Press*, 25/9/2025, accessed on 23/9/2025 at: <https://acr.ps/1L9BOXn>

⁶ "Joint Statement"

regional context, asserting that ending the occupation and achieving a just peace are the pathway to "peace and security for all in the Middle East, mutual recognition and full regional integration".

The Limits of the New York Declaration

The diplomatic – or symbolic – importance of the New York Declaration lies in the rare international consensus surrounding it, which elevates the two-state solution and the Palestinian people's right to self-determination to the level of established UN norms. While this does not alter the facts Israel is seeking to impose on the ground, it nevertheless places Israel in the position of being morally and politically isolated, raising the diplomatic cost of its ongoing annexationist and genocidal policies in the occupied territories. At the same time, it strengthens the Palestinian position by providing unprecedented international support for the establishment of a Palestinian state. Most importantly, it directly challenges Netanyahu's efforts, backed by his coalition and encouraged by the current US administration, to erase the idea of a Palestinian state and the two-state solution from the international agenda. The key difference, however, is that the Israeli government creates material realities on the ground, while the Declaration is political in nature, with significance that is primarily symbolic.

This marks the first time since the Oslo Accords of 1993 that an international reference point, jointly led by Arab and European actors, has emerged to challenge the US monopoly over mediation in the Israel–Palestine peace process. For decades, the Palestine question has been confined to a framework defined exclusively by Washington, one that has proved both ineffective and biased. This framework has been bound to a narrow US approach that paid lip service to the two-state solution all the while hollowing out the very notion of a Palestinian state, going so far as to call the Palestinian Authority's limited control over parts of the West Bank a "state". Today, the US administration fully aligns itself with Israel's vision and role, reducing the Palestine question to little more than an Israeli domestic affair as far as the White House is concerned.

The Declaration also represents a qualitative shift in language. It moved the international debate away from traditional rhetoric that merely reiterated the principle of the two-state solution, towards a more operational framework. It proposed concrete steps with defined timelines: a ceasefire, prisoner exchanges, reforms within the Palestinian Authority, the establishment of an international mission, and ultimately, the proclamation of a Palestinian state within fifteen months. In this way, the conference sought to address one of the shortcomings of earlier initiatives – most recently the Paris Peace Conference of January 2017 – which stopped at issuing a generic statement of support for the two-state solution, without clear deadlines or mechanisms. Yet the New York Declaration also overreaches, by intervening in the structural and security arrangements of a Palestinian state even before negotiations on its actual creation have begun.

At the same time, the Declaration faces the same obstacles that have plagued previous international initiatives on Palestine. At its core, it is not legally binding, since the US would block any attempt to enshrine it in a Security Council resolution. And even if it were adopted by the Council – as with Resolutions 242 and 338, which called for Israel's withdrawal from territories occupied in 1967 – the question would remain of how to enforce it in the absence of genuine international will. Moreover,

the Declaration contains no clear mechanisms to pressure Israel should it continue to undermine the two-state solution. It relies instead on generic language condemning "violent extremist settlers," "settlers' violence" and "settlement activities". It is worth noting that the same international system which has failed to stop two years of ongoing genocide in Gaza is hardly in a position to force Israel back to the negotiating table using the same outdated tools.

The assumptions underpinning the Declaration also contradict the realities that Israel has enacted on the ground long before the events of 7 October 2023. Decades of settlement activity have fragmented the West Bank into isolated enclaves; Jerusalem has effectively been annexed through demographic engineering; while bypass roads, checkpoints and gates have turned Palestinian sovereignty into little more than an illusion.

All this suggests that, in the absence of enforceability, the New York Declaration risks becoming a mere adjustment in the language of official international discourse, driven largely by mounting public pressure in major European capitals, where governments are under increasing strain to align their political rhetoric with the demands of their societies. Indeed, the speeches of European leaders at the New York conference reflected this trend: they carried a more apologetic tone than a direct and explicit condemnation of Israeli policies, emphasizing "Israel's security" and "the release of hostages," and collectively condemning the 7 October attack before addressing the two-state solution, which was not framed as a response to Palestinian national rights, but as a tool for achieving regional stability. For some European states, support for the two-state solution is less about justice for the Palestinians and more about saving Israel from itself, and from the far-right policies that have turned it into a pariah state. Recognition of Palestine, in this sense, is a substitute for taking real decisions to hold Israel accountable for its crimes or applying sufficient pressure to stop them.

Thus, while the New York Declaration represents a notable shift in Western diplomatic discourse on Palestine, it ultimately reflects a continuation of the same crisis-management approach rather than a genuine attempt at resolution. The consensus reached in the General Assembly, and the accompanying recognitions of Palestine – significant though they are, politically and symbolically – came largely in response to growing public pressure in the West to end the genocide in Gaza. Yet the essence of the Declaration does not directly challenge Western political and security alliances with Israel.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the Two-State Solution Conference, along with the significant recognitions of the State of Palestine by major Western countries – including Britain, Canada and Australia, which have historically aligned with Israel – represents a major symbolic act of solidarity with the Palestinian people. It also constitutes an important political lever against Israel, which today finds itself more isolated than at any time, even compared with the era of global liberation movements in the 1950s and 1960s, as reflected in the UN General Assembly vote on recognition of the State of Palestine. Nevertheless, a wide gap remains between recognition, as a political stance and acknowledgement of the Palestinian right to self-determination, and the establishment of their independent state. At the same time, an inability persists to confront Israel's crimes or to take real measures that would



compel the occupying power to halt its campaign of genocide in the Gaza Strip, carried out in full view of the world. This demands a far more serious stance from the states that gathered at the Two-State Solution Conference to confront a rogue state that is systematically breaking every norm and value agreed upon by humanity and nations across the globe.















Endnotes