



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات
Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

وحدة الدراسات السياسية
Political Studies Unit

Situation Assessment | 3 August 2025

Shifting Western Attitudes Towards Recognizing Palestinian Statehood

Motives and Implications

Shifting Western Attitudes Towards Recognizing Palestinian Statehood: Motives and Implications

Series: **Situation Assessment**

3 August 2025

Political Studies Unit

The Political Studies Unit is the Center's department dedicated to the study of the region's most pressing current affairs. An integral and vital part of the ACRPS' activities, it offers academically rigorous analysis on issues that are relevant and useful to the public, academics and policy-makers of the Arab region and beyond. The Unit for Political Studies draws on the collaborative efforts of a number of scholars based within and outside the ACRPS. It produces three of the Center's publication series: Assessment Report, Policy Analysis, and Case Analysis reports. .

Copyright © 2024 Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. All Rights Reserved.

The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies is an independent research institute and think tank for the study of history and social sciences, with particular emphasis on the applied social sciences.

The Center's paramount concern is the advancement of Arab societies and states, their cooperation with one another and issues concerning the Arab nation in general. To that end, it seeks to examine and diagnose the situation in the Arab world - states and communities- to analyze social, economic and cultural policies and to provide political analysis, from an Arab perspective.

The Center publishes in both Arabic and English in order to make its work accessible to both Arab and non-Arab researchers.

The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies

Al-Tarfa Street, Wadi Al Banat

Al-Dayeen, Qatar

PO Box 10277, Doha

+974 4035 4111

www.dohainstitute.org

Table of Contents

The Beginning of a Shift in European Positions	1
The New York Declaration: A Joint Call to Recognize the State of Palestine	2
Motives for Recognizing a Palestinian State	3
The Significance and Implications of Recognizing the State of Palestine	5
Conclusion	6

There is an accelerating trend in international diplomacy towards recognition of the State of Palestine, a development with significant implications for Israel's international relations, and one that is likely to ratchet up the pressure on Benjamin Netanyahu's government to halt its aggression against the Gaza Strip, which has been underway since 7 October 2023. Fifteen Western countries, including France, Britain, and the Netherlands, have announced that they are considering formally recognising the State of Palestine during the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly, to be held in New York in September. In a joint statement, they described recognition of the State of Palestine as "an essential step towards the two-State solution," and called on other countries to adopt the same approach. The move represented a clear shift in the positions of major European countries on the Palestinian issue.

The Beginning of a Shift in European Positions

While there had been clear indications since mid-2024 of a shift in European positions towards Israel's assault on Gaza, the trend gathered further momentum after Israel violated the truce that had been reached on 19 January 2025, resuming its aggression two months later, on 19 March. This came amid a deteriorating humanitarian situation, with multiple human rights groups reporting systematic starvation, and the direct targeting of women and children.

In this phase of the conflict, Israel is degrading human dignity and starving the population to an unprecedented degree, through its mechanism for delivering aid and the killings of civilians attempting to collect it. This has produced mounting domestic pressure in many European countries, forcing governments to break their silence and take a stronger line vis-à-vis Israel, going beyond calls for "restraint" to reach the point of direct threats of punitive measures.

On 19 May, Britain, France, and Canada jointly declared that Israel's continued blockade of Gaza and policy of preventing of aid from entering "risks breaching International Humanitarian Law," and threatened to impose sanctions on Israeli officials, an unprecedented move in their dealings with Israel.¹ Italy, France, Spain, and Portugal have since gone even further, recalling their ambassadors from Tel Aviv. Belgium and Spain have announced the cancellation of military and trade agreements with Israel and called for a review of the European Union-Israel Association Agreement, which gives Israel trade privileges with the European market.

The shift in Europe culminated in French President Emmanuel Macron's announcement, via X on 24 July, that France would become the first G7 country officially to recognize the State of Palestine, during the UN General Assembly meetings in September. This is part of efforts led by Paris to revive efforts towards a political settlement to the conflict and achieve peace in the region.²

1 "Joint Statement from the Leaders of the United Kingdom, France, and Canada on the Situation in Gaza and the West Bank," GOV.UK, 24/5/2024, accessed on 3/8/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9zSc3>.

2 Matthew Hay Brown, "France will Recognize a Palestinian State, Macron Says France will Become the Largest Western Power and the First Member of the G-7 to Recognize Palestinian Statehood," *The Washington Post*, 24/7/2025, accessed on 3/8/2025, at: <https://n9.cl/bj19j3>.

Israel and the United States responded to this initiative with harsh criticism,³ especially given France's clout within Europe. Four European countries – Spain, Norway, Ireland, and Slovenia – had already recognized the State of Palestine in May 2024. Indeed, Macron's announcement put pressure on the remaining G7 countries to follow suit. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer subsequently announced that the United Kingdom intended to recognize the State of Palestine unless Israel committed to ending the blockade of the Gaza Strip and halting military operations against Palestinian civilians.⁴ This position was followed by a series of shifts by several of Israel's traditional Western allies, including Canada and the Netherlands, in what amounts to an growing response to the political and moral pressure arising from the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip.

The New York Declaration: A Joint Call to Recognize the State of Palestine

Recent Western diplomatic steps, most notably announcements by France and Britain that they intend to recognize the State of Palestine, were pre-emptive moves ahead of a UN conference that was held in New York from 28-30 July, aimed at reviving international momentum towards a two-state solution. The conference concluded by issuing a document called the "New York Declaration on the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution," signed by 17 countries, along with the League of Arab States and the EU.⁵

The "New York Declaration" proposes a step-by-step plan to end the Israeli Palestinian conflict and halt the war on Gaza. It calls for the establishment of an independent, demilitarized Palestinian state living in peace alongside Israel, calling on Palestinian militant group Hamas to relinquish power and give up its arms, and for the Palestinian Authority to take power in Gaza with international support and cooperation, as part of a transitional phase aimed at enabling the Palestinians to build an independent state. It also includes an explicit condemnation of the Hamas-led attacks of October 2023, and of Israeli military operations targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure in the Gaza Strip, including its blockade and policies of starvation, which have exacerbated a humanitarian catastrophe that has reached the point of famine.⁶

At the conclusion of the conference, 15 countries announced their intention to recognize the State of Palestine, and issued a collective appeal to other countries that had not yet made this decision to follow suit. French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot described the move as an advanced collective political position in the context of the shifts underway in Western positions on the Palestinian

3 John Irish, "French Plan to Recognise Palestinian State Draws Fire from Israel, US," *Reuters*, 25/7/2025, 3/8/2025, at: <https://n9.cl/dv4nb>.

4 Andrew Macaskill & William James, "UK Plans to Recognise Palestinian State in September Unless Israel Takes Action," *Reuters*, 29/7/2025, accessed on 3/8/2025, at: <https://n9.cl/0erw4j>.

5 Sara Leykin, "Reviving the Two-State Solution: The UN Conference and The Recognition of Palestine," *ISPI Online*, 31/7/2025, accessed on 3/8/2025, at: <https://n9.cl/r1lw2>.

6 "New York Call – Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs," *Global Affairs Canada*, 30/7/2025, accessed on 3/8/2025, at: <https://n9.cl/bsoy5r>.

issue.⁷ Signatories to the appeal included France, Canada, and Australia, as well as Andorra, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Slovenia, and Spain.⁸ The appeal was the culmination of the political efforts made during the New York conference, and an extension of the growing international awareness that the continuation of the status quo – particularly in light of the ongoing war on Gaza – is no longer politically or morally acceptable, and that recognition of the Palestinian state is a necessary condition for reviving a credible political process.

Motives for Recognizing a Palestinian State

The growing diplomatic momentum towards recognition of a Palestinian state can be understood in light of a number of motives, first and foremost the famine in the Gaza Strip and Israel's policy of ever-tightening siege. These policies have led to a catastrophic humanitarian situation that in turn has sparked growing global outrage, meaning it can no longer be ignored. According to a joint statement by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the children's agency (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP), the Gaza Strip now faces the severe risk of famine, with an unprecedented collapse in levels of food consumption and indicators of nutrition since the start of the war, according to the latest Food Security Early Warning System (FWS) classifications.

The ongoing war, the collapse of essential services, and severe restrictions on the delivery and distribution of humanitarian aid have created a food security catastrophe for the population throughout the territory. The food consumption index has seen a sharp decline, accompanied by a significant increase in rates of acute malnutrition. There have also been increasing reports of deaths resulting from famine. Since April 2025, approximately 20,000 children in Gaza have been hospitalized due to severe malnutrition. It has become clear that the Gaza Strip is suffering the scourge of famine, as Gazans are prevented from accessing food, as a result of Israeli policies aimed at punishing and them and committing genocide against them.⁹

Four months after Israel broke the ceasefire, closed the crossings into the Gaza Strip, resumed its military operations, and set about reshaping the international aid system through alternative supply arrangements aimed at subduing Hamas and forcing it to accept Israel's terms, the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip has worsened dramatically, sparking widespread international condemnation. On 26 July, the Israeli occupation authorities announced their intention to airdrop food aid into the Gaza Strip and implement daily "humanitarian pauses" in thinly populated, designated areas, to allow the entry of international relief convoys.¹⁰ This decision came under mounting pressure, including US

7 Andrew Roth, "Canada to Recognise Palestine at UN General Assembly, Joining France and UK in Push for New State," *The Guardian*, 30/7/2025, accessed on 3/8/2025, at: <https://n9.cl/3fcb3>.

8 "New York Call – Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs," *Global Affairs Canada*, 30/7/2025, accessed on 3/8/2025, at: <https://n9.cl/bsoy5r>.

9 "UN Agencies Warn Key Food and Nutrition Indicators Exceed Famine Thresholds in Gaza," Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 29/7/2025, accessed on 3/8/2025, at: <https://n9.cl/6s5yv>.

10 "Israel's Military Says Airdrops of Aid will Begin in Gaza as Hunger Grows," *Politico*, 26/7/2025, accessed on 3/8/2025, at: <https://n9.cl/u1477x>.

President Donald Trump's admission that a "real famine" was underway in the Strip, something he had until then repeatedly denied.¹¹

Since late May 2025, the dubious organization known as the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) has been distributing food via four aid hubs located within areas controlled by the Israeli military and operated by private American security companies. This change has severely slowed the delivery of humanitarian aid. Furthermore, hundreds of Palestinians have been killed on the roads leading to these hubs, either as a result of Israeli fire, or in stampedes or as a result of being run over while they waited for food. On 21 July, 28 countries – including Australia, the United Kingdom, and France – issued a joint statement condemning "the inhumane killing of civilians, including children, seeking to meet their most basic needs of water and food," stressing that the Israeli-controlled aid distribution model threatens the dignity of the population of the Gaza Strip and exacerbates the humanitarian crisis. The statement warned Israel that these countries "are prepared to take further action to support an immediate ceasefire and a political pathway to security and peace for Israelis, Palestinians and the entire region."¹²

In this context, European moves toward recognition of the State of Palestine can be seen as the result of a number of intertwined motives, first and foremost the mounting pressure in the form of domestic public anger at Israel's policies of starvation and destruction in the Gaza Strip. European capitals and other cities have seen daily demonstrations demanding an end to the genocide being committed against Palestinians, which has forced their governments to formulate clearer and more assertive political positions. This has been compounded by a growing sense of helplessness, particularly given the international community's failure to impose a ceasefire or advance a viable political process.

This trend is also reinforced by growing European concern over the Israeli government's policies of expanding its illegal settlements in the West Bank, repeated attacks on the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, and Israeli settlers' daily assaults on Palestinian villages.¹³ It is also strengthened by the Netanyahu government's moves towards annexing large parts of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which would spell the end of any prospect of a two-state solution. Israel's genocidal acts in Gaza have coincided with a parallel escalation in the West Bank, including settlement expansion, escalating violence by settlers against Palestinians,¹⁴ and the transfer of administrative powers in the West Bank from the Israeli military to civilian authorities – a move widely interpreted as a de facto prelude to full annexation.¹⁵

11 "Famine in Gaza Shows the Failure of Israel's Strategy," *The Economist*, 31/7/2025, accessed on 3/8/2025, at: <https://n9.cl/9bglj>.

12 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and The Rt Hon David Lammy MP, "Occupied Palestinian Territories: joint statement, 21 July 2025", 21/7/2025, accessed on 6/8/2025 at: <https://rb.gy/00nc9y>.

13 "Israel Ramps Up Settlement and Annexation in West Bank with Dire Human Rights Consequences," Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 18/3/2025, accessed on 6/8/2025, at: <https://bit.ly/4mu2sN4>.

14 Ephrat Livni, "Britain and France Have Pledged to Recognize a Palestinian State: What Would It Mean?" *The New York Times*, 29/7/2025, accessed on 3/8/2025, at: <https://n9.cl/qg8fq>.

15 "Changing the Structural Architecture of the Civil-Military Administration: Implications and Scenarios," Palestinian Liberation Organization, Colonization and Wall Resistance Commission, Accessed 3/8/2025, at: <https://n9.cl/u07ch>.

In light of these realities, European recognition of the State of Palestine at this moment appears to reflect the level of political embarrassment facing European governments, particularly as Israel continues to perpetrate atrocities and the humanitarian situation in Gaza deteriorates further, with civilians – especially women and children – facing slow death and systematic starvation. Growing swathes of the population in Europe are demanding their governments take firmer stances against Israel's genocide and violations of international humanitarian law. This shift in Europe reflects a belated realization of the danger of sliding toward an irreversible reality of permanent occupation, mass starvation, and regional upheaval, which could threaten security and stability across the region and the world.

The Significance and Implications of Recognizing the State of Palestine

The announcements by more than 15 countries that they intend to recognize a Palestinian state begs the question of how significant such a recognition would be, and what consequences it would have in practice. Although French and British recognition, in particular, would carry major symbolic significance if it indeed materializes, it is conditional on a series of demands that erode its political content to a large extent. These conditions include the removal of Hamas, renunciation of the option of resistance, and the disarmament of Palestinian factions. Furthermore, it does not require Israel to recognize a Palestinian state, commit to halting settlement activity, or accept clear borders in accordance with the international consensus.

In this sense, the state that France, Britain, and other countries are supposedly preparing to recognize would remain a theoretical entity, devoid of actual sovereignty over its territory, where Israel's colonial settlements continue to expand. It may even amount to a new manifestation of the PA, with its limited powers, such that the move becomes merely a change of name and the granting of full UN membership to the body. Even this is unlikely, as the US can exercise a veto against granting Palestine full membership.

In this sense, such recognition remains an initial step that will only have real meaning if it is coupled with practical measures addressing issues of sovereignty, first and foremost the end of the occupation and the removal of the settlements. The move toward recognition will not impact the lives of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and it could even be used as an alternative to applying real pressure to stop the war – such as through effective EU sanctions against Israel or the withdrawal of its privileges, at least in terms of the partnership agreement. However, its most significant impact will be felt internationally, through the potential repercussions for Israel's foreign relations.

Recognition of a Palestinian state implies a recognition of the Palestinians' right to self-determination, as well as representing a clear rejection of Israeli policies and practices that undermine this right. According to experts in international law, one of the most significant implications of such recognition

would be that it provides a legal basis for a comprehensive review of states' bilateral relations with Israel. States that recognize the State of Palestine are legally obliged to refrain from supporting the Israeli occupation in any way, and to respect international humanitarian law and relevant UN resolutions. Although these obligations already exist in principle, recognition makes them more explicit and legally binding.

Governments that recognize Palestinian statehood will be required to review the agreements they have concluded with Israel to ensure that they are consistent with their obligations toward the State of Palestine, including their political, sovereign, economic, cultural, social, and civil aspects. In practical terms, recognition thus provides a basis upon which civil society and legislators in those states can step up the pressure to modify government policies and align them with the requirements of recognition.

Conclusion

Recognition of the State of Palestine is no longer merely a symbolic act of solidarity with the Palestinian people. It can now be viewed as a tool for political pressure on Israel, aimed at pushing it toward engaging in a political process towards ending the war, given the current state of political deadlock and the failure of diplomatic efforts to halt it. Re-tabling the Palestinian issue at the UN would have a highly significant symbolic dimension. Whatever the outcome of the General Assembly in September, one thing is clear: Palestine, whether or not it gains UN membership, now enjoys near-unanimous recognition from member states, representing widespread support for the rights of the Palestinians. However, a vast gap remains between recognition as a political stance and an acknowledgment of the Palestinians' right to self-determination on the one hand, and on the other, the international community's inability to confront Israeli crimes and make serious moves to oblige the occupying power to halt its ongoing genocide in the Gaza Strip – all while refraining from requiring it, too, to recognize that state.