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Recognition as a Catalyst: The World's Last Stand for the Two-State Solution

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The diplomatic landscape surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has fundamentally changed. In the catastrophic wake of the October 7th attacks and the prolonged conflict in Gaza, the question of Palestinian statehood—long treated as the prize of a final treaty—has violently reasserted itself as the necessary catalyst for peace.

This transformation culminated in 2025 with an unprecedented wave of diplomatic action. Following earlier recognition by key European states, major Western powers—including the United Kingdom, France, Canada, and Australia—formally acknowledged the State of Palestine. Simultaneously, the UN General Assembly endorsed the New York Declaration, demanding "tangible, time-bound, and irreversible steps" toward sovereignty.

This is not mere symbolism; it is a strategic and ethical intervention. The question is no longer if Palestine is a state, but how the international community must now act to make that state viable.

Why the Wait Had to End

For two decades, the failed "peace-first" model imposed an extreme power imbalance that corroded the chance for a just solution. While Israel enjoyed full statehood, Palestine was relegated to a power-crippled aspirant, lacking fundamental sovereign rights. This vacuum allowed the occupying power to continuously expand illegal settlements and unilaterally alter facts on the ground, systematically eroding the physical space available and making the prospect of a contiguous Palestinian state physically impossible.

To condition statehood on Israel's final approval was effectively to grant the occupier a permanent veto over the occupied's right to self-determination. The moral failure here is profound: it meant placing the legal destiny of the Palestinian people perpetually hostage to the consent of the very power engaged in occupation and settlement expansion.

The moral calculus became unsustainable when compounded by humanitarian devastation. The recent recognitions are a moral condemnation of this failed status quo, sending a signal to both Israelis and Palestinians that the world will no longer be complicit in a process designed to fail. It is an act that restores a measure of dignity, affirming that the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination is inalienable—a non-negotiable right, not a concession contingent upon Israeli agreement.

Furthermore, the action is legally sound. Under the prevailing Declaratory Theory¹ of international law, Palestine already meets the factual criteria for statehood. The key legal impediment—the lack of "defined territory"—is not an inherent failing of the Palestinian entity, but the direct result of a prolonged military occupation. By recognizing the State of Palestine based on the pre-1967 borders, the world is choosing to affirm the integrity of international law over the geopolitical reality created by occupation.

Recognition Unlocks Accountability

The most immediate and critical outcome of this diplomatic revolution is the shift in the dynamics of power and accountability. The era of treating the conflict as a mere bilateral dispute is over.

By solidifying its status as a recognized state, Palestine is now fully empowered to use international mechanisms to enforce its rights. Its territory is no longer merely "occupied land" in legal theory but the internationally affirmed sovereign jurisdiction of a UN member majority state. No longer a "non-member observer entity," it can utilize the International Criminal Court (ICC) to seek redress for crimes committed on its sovereign territory,

¹ Dugard, John, "Palestine and the ICJ: The Wall Case." *The Leiden Journal of International Law*, 18, no. 3 (2005): 483-492.

increasing the international system's capacity to enforce the law.² The debate moves from pleading for justice to demanding legal compliance—a profound transformation in the global standing of the Palestinian cause.

For Israel, this transforms the negotiation table entirely. Any potential withdrawal from the occupied territories is no longer a voluntary concession—a painful gift—but a mandatory fulfillment of international legal obligations to a sovereign entity.³ The shift forces political leaders to acknowledge that the two-state solution, long treated as an abstract dream, is now the inescapable legal reality. The recognition wave provides the Palestinian Authority—or any future governing body—with the undeniable authority of a head of state, vastly expanding its ability to sign binding treaties, manage borders, and demand compensation for damages at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The debate shifts from whether Palestine deserves a state, to when and how Israel will meet its legal duty to its recognized neighbor within the 1967 borders.

The Hard Truth: What Recognition is Not

It is essential to be clear about the limits of this diplomatic tool. Recognition is not a peace treaty. It is a starting gun, not a finish line.

The immediate formal recognition of Palestine does not, by itself, result in the immediate withdrawal of a single Israeli soldier, the dismantling of a single settlement, or the unification of governance between the West Bank and Gaza. It does not instantly resolve the internal political divisions among Palestinian factions (Hamas and Fatah), nor is it an overnight security solution for Israel.

What it achieves is a permanent change in the legal basis for future actions. It elevates the State of Palestine from a bargaining chip to an equal legal subject. It moves the entire world's posture from one of hopeful mediation to one of legal enforcement, setting the 1967 borders as the recognized, legally mandated baseline for all future negotiations. This clarity prevents the endless deferral of obligations that plagued the previous peace process.

Forcing a New Geopolitical Reality

The recognition wave signals a historic shift in global governance, moving beyond the narrow U.S.-centric framework that has dominated for decades.

This action signals a profound decline in the ability of any single power to unilaterally manage the conflict, marking a clear re-assertion of multilateralism and international law. By aligning their policy with the long-standing, majority demands of the Global South, Western powers

² Hathaway, Oona A., and Scott J. Shapiro "The International Criminal Court and Palestine: A State-Based Inquiry." *Yale Law Journal Forum* (2015).

³ Bennouna, Karima "The Green Line: The Legal Status of the 1967 Armistice Demarcation Line." *American Journal of International Law*, 103, no. 1 (2009): 1-36.

have finally acknowledged that a solution requires global consensus, not just superpower brokerage.⁴

Crucially, this step forces a reckoning on Arab-Israeli normalization. Prior to 2025, normalization efforts (such as the Abraham Accords) were largely decoupling the Palestinian question from bilateral ties. Now, with Western allies affirming a recognized Palestinian state, the Palestinian issue is injected back into the center of any future deal, particularly with major players like Saudi Arabia. Recognition acts as a powerful leveraging mechanism to compel a comprehensive regional settlement, ensuring that normalization is achieved with the Palestinians, not at their expense.⁵ The calculus for Riyadh and others is simple: solidifying a relationship with Israel must be tied to achieving the long-denied promise of a sovereign Palestinian state.

The New Imperative

The international community has issued its verdict. By choosing to recognize Palestine, the world has set a new political horizon and imposed a new set of international obligations on all involved parties.

We should remain realistic -- recognition does not end the conflict. Nonetheless, it transforms the parameters of negotiation from a discussion over a hypothetical state to compliance with binding law toward an existing, recognized state. The moral weight of the world, now converted into legal standing, offers the best chance to break the cycle of violence. Now should be the time for states to commit to diplomatic, economic, and security resources to ensuring the newly-recognized state's immediate viability and long-term security.

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⁴ Hamzawy, Amr. "Palestine, the Wave of Western Recognition, and a Global System in Transformation." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (September 26, 2025).

⁵ Atlantic Council, Issue Brief "Saudi-Israeli normalization is still possible—if the United States plays it smart", 2 May 2025. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/saudi-israeli-normalization-is-still-possible-if-the-united-states-plays-it-smart/>