Recognising a Palestinian state should follow reforms, not terror

written by Asher Fredman | 15.05.2025

Some 13 conservative MPs and peers wrote to Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer last week, urging him to recognise a Palestinian state. The push followed French President Macron's revival of the idea of unilateral recognition last month, which prompted several Labour MPs, including Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Emily Thornberry, to call on the British government to join the French.

Such a step would not only be a strategic mistake – it would be a tragedy for the Palestinians, for Israel, and for all who seek a future of peace in the Middle East.

Those advocating for recognition must ask themselves: what kind of Palestinian state do they envision? A peaceful, democratic state living side by side with Israel? Or a radical Islamist entity, indoctrinating youth to hatred, glorifying terror, and perpetually at war with the Jewish state?

The Palestinian Authority stands at a critical crossroads. President Mahmoud Abbas, 89, is in the 20th year of his four-year term. The question of who will lead the Palestinian political system in the post-Abbas era is wide open. Abbas' government is riddled with corruption, and his security forces proved unable to take back parts of the northern West Bank from terror groups and militias, forcing Israel to intervene. According to a survey published this month by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) in Ramallah, 81 per cent of Palestinians want him to resign.

The main challenger to Abbas and his Fatah party is Hamas. The October 7 massacres have led to a surge in Hamas' popularity in the West Bank. Even 19 months into the war, 59 per cent of West Bank Palestinians still believe Hamas was right to launch the attacks, and 67 per cent are satisfied with Hamas' performance, according to PCPSR. In fact, polling shows that support for Hamas in the West Bank more than tripled between September 2023 and September 2024.

Hamas' favorability numbers stem not only from support for terror, but from the belief that its violence may yield diplomatic gains. Sixty-four per cent of West

Bank Palestinians said the war in Gaza "may lead to increased recognition of the Palestinian state".

If the UK were to recognize a Palestinian state now, it would produce absolutely no positive changes on the ground. But it would validate the dangerous narrative that mass murder brings diplomatic reward, and lead to a further spike in Hamas' popularity. In 2007, Hamas brutally seized control of Gaza from the Palestinian Authority in just six days after Israel withdrew. Recognition now would all but ensure Hamas' dominance over the entire Palestinian arena in the post-Abbas era.

The rise of Hamas in the West Bank would not only increase terror against Israel. It would doom Palestinians to repression under a totalitarian Islamist regime. It would also threaten the stability of moderate Arab governments – many of which, like Jordan and the UAE, are intensifying their campaigns against the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas' parent organization. Just last month, Jordan banned the Muslim Brotherhood after arresting members of the Islamist group on suspicion of planning rocket and drone attacks. Hamas' survival in Gaza and victory in the West Bank would inspire violent Islamist movements across the region.

British recognition would also destroy the already fragile incentive for Palestinian reform. Under pressure from Israel, the US, and the EU, the PA has faced mounting calls to abolish terror payments, improve governance, and halt incitement. So far, it has responded with token changes and bureaucratic tricks. Rewarding the PA with recognition would signal to Palestinian leaders that reforms are unnecessary, and that their choice to enable and fund terror, hate education, and corruption is no obstacle to international legitimacy.

Such a move would also fatally undermine prospects for a negotiated peace. It would sideline negotiations and entrench maximalist demands. It would further convince Palestinians that they can make political gains without renouncing violence or abandoning the extremist goal of erasing Israel from the map.

After October 7, the vast majority of Israelis are no longer persuaded by the arguments that incitement should be ignored or that territorial concessions will bring peace. Without the defeat of Hamas and a fundamental transformation on the Palestinian side, calls to hand over the strategic hilltops overlooking Tel Aviv and Ben Gurion Airport to a Palestinian entity will be flatly rejected.

And there is a more basic question: what, exactly, would Britain be recognizing?

Gaza and the West Bank have been ruled since 2007 by different leaders hostile to each other. More than a dozen reconciliation attempts between Hamas and Fatah have failed. The idea of a unified Palestinian entity is becoming more fictional by the day – undermined not by Israel, but by the Palestinians themselves.

Recognition of a Palestinian state under these conditions is not brave diplomacy. It is reckless virtue-signaling, disconnected from reality and blind to consequences.

If the UK wants to support a peaceful future for both peoples, it should take a different course. It should demand that the PA end its payments to convicted terrorists, implement real reforms, and replace incitement and hate education with a culture of peace. At the same time, Britain ought to support Israel's efforts to eliminate Hamas as the military and governing power in Gaza, proving that terrorism leads to defeat, not reward. To bring about positive change, the UK should encourage initiatives for economic cooperation and dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians and back the expansion of the Abraham Accords, which have created unprecedented momentum for regional integration and stability.

This is the real path to a viable and lasting peace.

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