



By: TA | AP Insight

UK's recognition of Palestine - a symbolic step to keep the two-state solution alive



British Prime Minister Keir Starmer confirmed Sunday that the U.K. is formally recognizing a Palestinian state despite vociferous opposition from the U.S. and Israel.

His announcement follows those from Canada and Australia, in what appears to be a coordinated initiative from the Commonwealth nations.

Starmer, who has faced pressure to take a harder line on Israel within his own governing Labour Party, said the move is intended “to revive the hope of peace for the Palestinians and Israelis” but that it wasn’t a reward for Hamas, which he stressed will have no role in any future governance of the Palestinian people.

“We must channel our efforts, united together in hope, behind the peaceful future that we want to see: the release of the hostages, an end to the violence, an end to the suffering and a shift back towards a two-state solution as the best hope for peace and security for all sides,” he said.

Though the move is largely symbolic, it is a historic moment as the U.K. arguably laid the groundwork for the creation of the Israeli state when it was in control of what was then known as Palestine in 1917.

The announcement was widely anticipated after Starmer **said** in July that the U.K. would recognize a Palestinian state unless Israel agreed to a ceasefire in Gaza, allowed the U.N. to bring in aid and took other steps toward long-term peace.

The U.K. is not alone in recognizing a Palestinian state. More than 140 countries have already taken that step and more are **expected** to do so at the U.N. General Assembly this week, including France.

Not universally agreed

The U.K.’s recognition of a Palestinian state comes just days after a state **visit** from U.S. President Donald Trump, during which he

voiced his disapproval of the plan.

Critics, including the U.S. and the Israeli government, which has shown no interest in a two-state solution, have condemned the plans, saying it rewards Hamas for its attack on Oct. 7, 2023.

As well as arguing that recognition is immoral, critics argue that it’s an empty gesture given that the Palestinian people are divided into two territories — the West Bank and Gaza — with no recognized international capital.

Historical overlay

France and the U.K. have a historic role in the politics of the Middle East over the past 100 years, having carved up the region following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I.

As part of that carve-up, the U.K. became the governing power of what was then Palestine. It was also author of the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which backed the establishment of a “national home for the Jewish people.”



The issue today is ending the denial of our existence that started 108 years ago - Husam Zomlot

However, the second part of the declaration has been largely neglected over the decades. It noted “that nothing shall be done, nothing which may prejudice the civil and religious rights” of the Palestinian people.

“It’s significant for France and the U.K. to recognize Palestine because of the legacy of

these two countries' involvement in the Middle East," said Burcu Ozcelik, senior research fellow for Middle East Security at London-based Royal United Services Institute. "But without the United States coming on board with the idea of a Palestine, I think very little will change on the ground."

The Palestinian head of mission in the U.K. Husam Zomlot told the BBC that recognition would right a colonial-era wrong.

"The issue today is ending the denial of our existence that started 108 years ago, in 1917," he said. "And I think today, the British people should celebrate a day when history is being corrected, when wrongs are being righted, when recognition of the wrongs of the past are beginning to be corrected."

think tank, Chatham House.

Change of tack

The U.K. has for decades supported an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel, but insisted recognition must come as part of a peace plan to achieve a two-state solution.

This move has symbolic and historic weight – Olivia O'Sullivan

However, the government has become increasingly worried that such a solution is becoming all but impossible – not only because of the razing of Gaza and **displacement** of most of its population during nearly two years of conflict, but because Israel's government is aggressively **expanding** settlements in the West Bank, land Palestinians want for their future state.

Much of the world regards Israel's occupation of the West Bank, which is ostensibly run by the Palestinian Authority, as illegal.

"This move has symbolic and historic weight, makes clear the U.K.'s concerns about the survival of a two-state solution, and is intended to keep that goal relevant and alive," said Olivia O'Sullivan, Director of the U.K. in the World Programme at the London-based