



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: US RECOGNITION OF PALESTINIAN STATEHOOD

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J Street is urging the United States to announce its readiness to recognize the state of Palestine, contingent on steps to be taken by the Palestinian leadership, and as part of a broader comprehensive diplomatic initiative. The US would undertake this move in advance of negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians over conflict resolution, as one vital step in a broader initiative. Details of J Street's proposal can be found in the accompanying issue brief: "[US Recognition of Palestinian Statehood and a Bold Initiative for Comprehensive Regional Peace](#)."

This FAQ addresses key questions regarding US recognition of Palestinian statehood:

Why should President Biden undertake this bold action now?

- The horrific carnage suffered by Israelis and Palestinians since October 7 has led many to realize that "managing the conflict" is a recipe for regular spasms of catastrophic bloodshed and ever-deepening occupation. President Biden has [stated](#), "there's no going back to the status quo as it stood on October the 6th." Instead, "[T]here has to be a vision of what comes next. And, in our view, it has to be a two-state solution." If that is truly the case, US readiness to recognize Palestinian statehood would indicate meaningful US determination to break the pre-October 7 status quo.
- Both the Biden Administration and key allies understand the powerful role that an early commitment to recognize Palestinian statehood could play. According to a recent [report](#), the State Department is presently considering options for US and international recognition of Palestinian statehood following the war in Gaza. Similarly, Foreign Secretary David Cameron of the United Kingdom has [stated](#) that "we [the UK], with allies, will look at the issue of recognising a Palestinian state, including at the United Nations. This could be one of the things that helps to make this process [toward a two-state solution] irreversible."
- Prior US policy of only being ready to recognize Palestinian statehood after not only Israeli-Arab normalization efforts, but concurrent with or after Israeli recognition, has given right-wing Israeli governments a veto over Palestinian statehood. It is time to try a new approach that, at the outset of a push to achieve peace, signals clearly that the US and the world are serious in their determination to achieve two states as the end result.
- The Israeli public, deeply [traumatized](#) following the October 7 attack, needs to know that it faces a choice going forward. The preferred option is peace with the Palestinians, normalization with the Arab world, and regional integration. The alternative is a continuation of the status quo of perpetual conflict under a government committed to perpetual occupation and determined to undermine Israeli democracy. Recent [polling](#) indicates that despite the Israeli public's further shift to the right in reaction to the October 7 attack, a majority of Israelis would support a US-supported package agreement that includes return of the hostages, normalization with Saudi Arabia, and a stipulation that the Palestinian state would be demilitarized. Given the [goodwill](#) President Biden has earned with the Israeli people, he is in the best possible position to present the Israeli public with this pivotal choice.
- US recognition of Palestinian statehood would be helpful, and may even be [necessary](#), in order to convince key Arab states to invest in the rebuilding and stabilization of Gaza. Saudi Arabia and

other Gulf states have [made clear](#) that they will not commit to such an effort without a clear path to Palestinian statehood. The Saudis have also [confirmed](#) that their potential normalization of relations with Israel is contingent on a two-state solution.

What conditions should the US place on recognition?

- *Governance changes:* Governmental and leadership bodies (including the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority) should be reinvented and reformed, including through bringing in new leadership committed to addressing corruption and promoting democracy.
- *Commitment to demilitarization and peaceful coexistence:* Only individuals ready to commit to demilitarization and willing to renounce terror and violence, as well as reaffirm Palestinian recognition of Israel, should be permitted to enter Palestinian leadership and governing bodies.
- *Policy reform:* This would include elements of the prisoner payment program, as well as changes in education and media.
- The promise of American recognition is a powerful inducement for needed changes by the Palestinian leadership and should be leveraged to bring about key reforms.

What recognition has Palestinian statehood received to date?

- [139 countries](#) recognize Palestine as a state.
- The UN General Assembly [acknowledged](#) the 1988 Palestinian declaration of independence and granted Palestine non-member observer entity status. In 2011, the Palestinian Authority submitted an application for membership of Palestine in the UN, which failed due to insufficient support in the UN Security Council and a US [threat](#) to veto its bid. In 2012, the General Assembly upgraded Palestine to non-member observer state status, which allowed Palestine to join treaties, specialized UN agencies ([including UNESCO](#)), and the [International Criminal Court](#) (ICC).
- Palestine has achieved [partial or de facto](#) statehood recognition through membership in international organizations and by [signing international treaties](#). It enjoys full membership in the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Should the US recognize Palestinian statehood as a stand-alone action or as part of a larger initiative?

- J Street is calling on the Biden Administration to lay out a comprehensive regional peace initiative that includes the following components:
 - Securing a stop in the fighting and release of the hostages, surging humanitarian aid to Gaza, and laying out a comprehensive regional peace initiative
 - Pushing for immediate steps by Israelis and Palestinians to demonstrate their interest in moving forward
 - Reissuance of the Arab Peace Initiative
 - Negotiations on two tracks: Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution and Israel-Saudi Arabia normalization
 - Pushing for a package of US legislation to facilitate Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Saudi agreements
 - US support for the admission of Palestine as a full member state in the United Nations

Would US recognition prejudice the outcome of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations over final-status issues?

- Recognition of Palestinian statehood by the US and its allies that have not yet taken this step would be a powerful reaffirmation of what has long been US policy and a matter of international consensus: the conviction that only a two-state solution will lead to freedom and self-determination for Palestinians and peace, as well as peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians.
- That said, the exact borders of Israel and Palestine will be subject to negotiation in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 242 – based on the pre-1967 Green Line with mutually agreed adjustments, in accordance with longstanding US policy. Other final-status issues would be determined through negotiations between the parties.

Would recognition empower Hamas or reward violence?

- Recognition of Palestinian statehood does not preclude the ability to substantially degrade Hamas' military capabilities, such that Hamas is no longer able to inflict harm on Israelis. Ultimately, Hamas must be disarmed and demobilized; it cannot be left in operational control of Gaza.
- Defeating Hamas requires a diplomatic strategy that allows moderate Palestinian leaders – whose favorability among Palestinians is [poor](#) due partly to their failure to achieve progress in ending the occupation through pursuit of a two-state solution – to deliver freedom and self-determination to their people. Moderate Palestinian leaders would receive a significant boost from US recognition of Palestinian statehood. Such a step would [legitimize the Palestinian Authority](#), while disempowering Hamas and reducing the despair upon which it feeds.
- Hopelessness and disenfranchisement [lead](#) to support for violence. After the devastation in Gaza, it is more urgent than ever to end the cycle of retaliation and provide hope for a future in which Palestinians can realize their legitimate rights to self-determination.
- Hamas opposes the very two-state solution that US recognition would help to realize. The argument that recognition would be a reward to Hamas for its horrific violence against Israelis has little basis in logic or fact. A two-state solution is an effective means of sidelining Hamas and shrinking its relevance.

Is recognition merely a symbolic move? If not, what would tangibly change?

- Rather than being a symbolic step, recognition can be – and J Street urges that it should be – a step in a broader, comprehensive, multilateral initiative that would further the development of a thriving, independent, demilitarized Palestinian state. Pursuit of regional normalization would be part of this initiative. Such an initiative – with recognition as a key part – has the potential to bring about peace that has long eluded Israelis and Palestinians, as well as broadly desired regional integration.
- In addition, US recognition of Palestinian statehood would remove the threat of a US veto of a UN Security Council vote to admit Palestine as a full member state to the United Nations. UN member states have equal representation and the power to vote in the General Assembly, as opposed to non-member states, which can only observe.