

Recognizing Palestinian Statehood: Steps Canada Can Take to Advance Regional Peace

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Summary of Recommendation:

We are at a critical juncture in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and believe this is the time for bold moves. The horrific terror attacks perpetrated by Hamas on October 7, 2023, and the ensuing Israel-Hamas war guarantees a paradigm shift in Israel-Palestinian, and broader Israeli-Arab conflicts.

This shift could lead to further restrictions on Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza, to a deepening occupation including steps toward annexation of the West Bank, and the growth of Hamas and other terror organizations in both Gaza and the occupied West Bank, or it could lead to a recommitment to two-state negotiations and a return to solving the conflict.

JSpaceCanada acknowledges that in their current states of trauma, neither Israelis nor Palestinians are able to embrace the concept of two states. These feelings are exacerbated but the absence of leadership on both sides willing to commit now or in the short-term to such negotiations. That said, both sides and their populations now realize that so-called conflict management is no longer a solution, if it ever was. As a result and with the knowledge that two states for these two peoples is the only viable solution going forward, we call on the Canadian government to unilaterally recognize the state of Palestine despite no such recognition by Israel.

By doing so, along with further conditions outlined in this brief, and in lock-step with our allies, we believe that such a move can help accelerate a much needed diplomatic process to revive two-state negotiations. At the same time, it could also lead to broader normalization for Israel and its Arab neighbours, and prevent a worsening of extremism in both Israeli and Palestinian societies.

Reasoning and Rationale:

Following the horrific terror attacks perpetrated by Hamas on October 7, 2023, and the ensuing Israel-Hamas war, there is recognition from the Canadian government and our international allies that there is no returning to a pre-October 7 “status quo.”

Canada's long-stated policy for a peaceful outcome to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a two-state solution, with a Palestinian state alongside a Jewish state negotiated based on 1967 borders.

Both current Israeli and Palestinian leaders lack the political will and popular support to successfully and confidently put two-state negotiations back on the table, and Israeli and Palestinian civil society are understandably traumatized and focused on their own security concerns and rights under such an arrangement.

Therefore, we believe that international leadership should fill the current leadership vacuum while offering security guarantees to both sides.

Steps and Recommendations:

The Canadian government should commit to the following four steps toward an eventual peaceful two-state resolution.

Step One: Support all efforts by our US and other allies to end the fighting in Gaza and secure the release of the hostages, surge humanitarian aid to the region, and convene a peace summit that would include G7 and Western country allies, the Gulf states and other key international actors.

The Canadian government should continue to advocate for a cessation in hostilities along with the release of Israeli hostages still held in captivity in Gaza, and an immediate surge of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip, as laid out in the tripartite statement by the Prime Ministers of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand on February 14, 2024. Once the parameters of a ceasefire are agreed upon and the hostilities have ceased, we recommend the Prime Minister publicly recognize a state of Palestine and lay out policy in line with these recommendations as a means of pressuring both sides to create a political horizon for peace.

Step Two: Lay out unilateral steps that must be taken simultaneously by Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA).

In addition Canada and its allies should apply pressure on Israel and Palestine to undertake the following actions:

Israel should:

- work to alleviate tensions between the two sides by transferring withheld customs revenues to the Palestinian Authority, reinstating work permits for Palestinians from the West Bank, halting the demolition of homes, curbing military operations in Area A, addressing violence by settlers, significantly increasing humanitarian aid to Gaza and halting any and all settlement expansion.

The PA should:

- Work to form a new government with a Prime Minister and cabinet members who are freely elected and who renounce the events of October 7, 2023, recognize Israel, demilitarize, denounce terrorism, and support nonviolence. A rejuvenated PA should also commit to a range of reforms aimed at enhancing democracy and governance, fighting corruption, revising its prisoner payment program, and addressing incitement.

Step Three: In the event of the recognition of the state of Palestine by our American allies and/or others, e.g., the UK, France, Australia and New Zealand, the Canadian government should follow suit. It could, at the same time, support the Arab Peace Initiative and the Clinton Parameters as a potential basis for a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement.

To further ensure a resumption of negotiations, the Arab League should reaffirm the Arab Peace Initiative, and should commit to investment in the redevelopment and reform of leadership in Gaza and the West Bank.

Step Four: Massive investment in people-to-people and civil society peacebuilding and reconciliation

Canada should invest in the de-radicalization and trust-building of both Israeli and Palestinian societies through civil society organizations already embarking on this work. We believe that top-down diplomacy needs bottom-up trust-building and support in order to achieve lasting results.

Similar to the International Fund for Ireland, to which Canada was also a major contributor, a single-fund investment structure focused mainly on building trust between Israelis and Palestinians can ensure that political leaders in the region advancing peace can gain and maintain broad support from their respective societies. Following decades in the peacebuilding arena, former US Ambassador and special envoy Martin Indyk claimed: “The difficulties we faced were far more because of the 20 years of distrust that built up than because of the core issues that divide the two sides.”

Conclusion:

We come to this proposal not through dismissal of the very real fears or concerns of the Israeli or Palestinian people, but to directly address them.

In the fog of war, with devastation all around, it is understandable that taking a risk for peace feels impossible. Our role as Israel’s allies is to recognize the inherent privilege of safety and peace that we enjoy in Canada, and utilize that lens to assess the situation that Israel and the Palestinians find themselves in order to ensure the horrific attack by Hamas on October 7 and the ensuing war are never repeated. We believe this can only be done through an entirely new approach to the region.

We categorically reject any notion or suggestion that this conflict is intractable, or that it cannot be resolved. It was that manner of thinking that created the conditions for the October 7 attacks, and we must recognize the need to thoroughly and utterly change that approach for the future safety and security of Israelis and Palestinians alike.

We believe Canada has an important role to play both as a close ally of the US and Israel and as a bona fide peacebuilding nation. We believe that our values and national interests, e.g., democracy, human rights, and equality, are best served when we and our allies uphold and recognize these rights.