

Patrick Lawrence

Yes, recognizing Palestine matters.

As widely and flamboyantly advertised for weeks beforehand, numerous nations in the Western camp have formally recognized Palestinian statehood at this, the 80th session of the U.N. General Assembly, which opened at the Secretariat in New York on 9 September. France, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Andorra, and Belgium declared their recognition on the first day of the General Debate, 23 September. Britain, Canada, Australia, and Portugal announced last Sunday, 21 September.

But for Britain, these are among the signatories of [the New York Call](#), a statement of intent signed by 15 foreign ministers in Ottawa at the end of July. Other nations, which have either declared recognition or will shortly do so, are Spain, New Zealand, Finland, Ireland, Norway, Iceland, Slovenia, and San Marino. On Tuesday, [Al Jazeera published a full list](#) of the 157 nations that now recognize Palestinian statehood. This is slightly more than 80 per cent of the U.N.'s 193 members.

The Zionist state prompted this evident diplomatic turn when it began, on 2 March, to use starvation as a weapon of war against the Palestinians of Gaza. Virtually the whole of the Western bloc now recognizes Palestinian sovereignty; This includes all of the major Western powers except the United States—and all of the Anglosphere other than the Americans. But this round of diplomacy is about more than the numbers. What will these new commitments formally to welcome Palestine into the community of nations mean? This is the pressing question of the day—pressing, not least, given Bibi Netanyahu, who is wanted under international

law for war crimes and crimes against humanity, is permitted to address the G.A. with his usual paranoic diatribe against anyone critical of Israel's barbaric conduct.

The argument is made in many places that these new diplomatic declarations are wanting in all substance and come to little more than gestures. There is no dismissing these perspectives out of hand.

Straight off the top, all of these new signatories, in recognizing Palestinian statehood, do so in support of a two-state solution. This amounts to nothing more than a diplomatic dodge: A Palestinian nation next to Israel is altogether impossible because (1) all that remains of available land comes to a series of unconnected dots on maps, (2) the Zionist regime is adamant it will never accept Palestinian sovereignty, and (3) one hears from West Bank Palestinians that the terror campaign the Israelis now conduct in Gaza and the Occupied Territories has rendered any kind of peaceful coexistence out of the question.

As if this were not enough, London and Paris are currently drafting a series of conditions to be imposed on any new Palestinian entity that are not short of preposterous. Among these, an overseeing authority, not yet identified, would censor Palestinian textbooks and vet candidates for office; there would be no provision for a Palestinian defense force, and stipends given to the families of prisoners in Israeli prisons, long provided by the Palestinian Authority, would be prohibited.

More pointedly, these nations insist that Hamas must be excluded from any governing structure atop a future Palestine. On what grounds this? Even the Zionist-supervised *New York Times* acknowledges that Hamas consistently commands more respect and support among Palestinians than the Palestinian Authority. There is a simple explanation for this, evident over many years: Hamas

stands for a truly independent Palestine; the P.A. is a pliable puppet regime, and a puppet regime is what the Western powers prefer when there is talk of Palestinian statehood.

What, exactly, is left of the terms “sovereign” and “state,” one must ask.

Numerous commentators who support the Palestinian cause have answered “Nothing” since this week’s announcements at the G.A. “Britain now ‘recognises’ Palestine,” Matt Kennard, a co-founder of *Declassified UK*, wrote on “X” Tuesday. “It’s theatre. Starmer [Keir Starmer, the British PM] is still sending a spy plane over Gaza every day to collect intelligence for the Israeli military in real-time.”

Ali Abunimah, director of *The Electronic Intifada*, wrote the same day, “What a mockery. Now they just need an actual state.” An advocate of a free Palestine named Ahmed al-Hasan added in response to Abunimah’s note, “Reminds me of an old Palestinian saying/joke about someone who found a horse shoe on a road and was ecstatic that now he only needs 3 horse shoes and a horse.”

I find this sort of bitter disdain revealing of a deep frustration among those eager—eager on the way to desperate—to see the Western powers advance beyond their long record of hypocrisy—long as in very long—toward the Palestinian people.

“So the UK government now recognizes the existence of a Palestinian state. How kind,” Philip Bowring, the distinguished English journalist and author, wrote in [an excellent review of the historical record](#), published in *Asia Sentinel* the day after London announced recognition. “This comes almost exactly 110 years after 1915, when Britain’s Sir Henry McMahon, in a series of letters between him and Hussein, Sharif of Mecca and King of Hijaz, pledged postwar Arab independence in return for the Arab revolt against their Ottoman overlords.”

Bowring's piece is headlined, "The West's Empty Promise of Palestinian Statehood." The subhead on it is, "There appears no way to redeem this promise." Is this true? This is my question.

Even before the spate of formal announcements this week, the reaction among American and Israeli officials was vicious. "Unfortunately, Hamas has repeatedly rejected reasonable offers to make peace," President Trump said before the G.A. convened. "Now, as if to encourage continued conflict, some of this body is seeking to unilaterally recognize a Palestinian state. This would be a reward for these horrible atrocities, including Oct. 7."

It is ridiculous, but there is a lot of this around. "A gift to Hamas," Netanyahu said last week.

The Israelis have gone far beyond paranoid rhetoric since the G.A. General Debate convened Tuesday and the declarations of recognition by the French and others began. The Zionist regime immediately announced that, effective Wednesday, it would close the Allenby Bridge "until further notice." This blocks the only passage between the West Bank and Jordan, effectively requiring all entry and exit into and out of the Occupied Territories to go through Israel.

Yet more radically, Itamar Ben-Gvir, the national security minister and one of the most prominent of the fanatics in Netanyahu's freak-show cabinet, responded to the first wave of recognitions by proposing a cabinet vote on the immediate annexation of the West Bank, lands the Zionists call Judea and Samaria. "The recognition by Britain, Canada, and Australia of a 'Palestinian' state, as a reward for the Nukhba murderers, demands immediate countermeasures," he declared on "X." He then called for "the immediate application of sovereignty in Judea and

Samaria and the complete crushing of the ‘Palestinian’ terror authority.” “Nukhba” is an Arabic term referring to Hamas’s elite military units.

■

How shall we judge these various events and reactions? Is the succession of pledges in support of Palestinian statehood mere piffle, lighter and emptier than air—hollowly performative, to use the currently fashionable term? *The New York Times* reported in its Wednesday editions that many Palestinians residing in the West Bank are fearful of the retaliatory measures the Zionist regime will take in response to developments at the G.A. in New York. Does this suggest that all the diplomatic activity is pointlessly, thoughtlessly provocative and will lead nowhere good?

I do not count these questions simple or easy. The long, long story of the West’s dishonesty toward the Palestinian people makes, on the face of it, a strong case for dismissing these new affirmations of the rights of Palestinians as posturing and nothing more. There are no known limits to the cruelties the Israelis will perpetrate on a population it considers sub-human, and more may indeed be in the offing.

O.K. But I argue nonetheless that the diplomatic activity affirming the justice of a Palestinian state is, in net terms, more positive than negative. In my formulation, these declaration merit very critical, highly critical support. There are a number of ways to defend this view.

Straightaway, is it better to have more than a dozen mostly Western nations join the mostly non-Western majority that stand for the Palestinian cause, or would it be preferable if they continued to decline to do so? However little difference these declarations make—in the near term, on the ground—the world’s official position has changed for the better and there is no going back on it, only forward. This is an

advance, surely. If it were otherwise, would the Americans and Israelis not simply shrug?

This leads to the Israeli reaction.

Closing the Allenby Bridge for an extended period and a formal annexation of the West Bank are very daring moves. Both are illegal under international law. But let us consider these carefully.

The Israeli announcement said Allenby will be closed “until further notice.” Why this phrase, we should ask. Ben-Givri declared he would raise the annexation question at the next cabinet meeting. This is a proposal to talk, not act. At the risk of reading too much into these particulars, the Zionist regime appears to be watching the Western powers’ responses very carefully before proceeding further. This is, after all, how “the Jewish state” has done business since its founding: It aggresses incessantly but also tentatively, ever prepared to attenuate or retreat. And in my read it may be prepared to retreat now from formal annexation, if not from its settlement policies.

The declarations of recognition, it follows directly, are likely to lead in due course to a confrontation. Any move by the Israelis formally to annex or permanently to close the land passage to Jordan will further sharpen a contradiction between the collective West and the Zionists that has just got sharper. This, too, must be taken as net-positive. Somewhere out in the distance, I mean to say, lies a denouement, and what happened this week in the General Assembly may serve to define the limits of the Western powers’ tolerance of the Israelis’ barbarities and breaches of international law.

There are two other perspectives from which to judge the week’s events at the U.N.

One, not only have the Western powers other than the United States put their alienation from the Zionist regime in writing, so to say. The signatories of the New York Call and the others to issue statements in favor of Palestinian statehood have underscored the United States' creeping isolation in the international community. As Paris, London, Canberra, and the others surely know, they have put their drift away from the American imperium in writing, too. This is altogether a good thing.

Two, we ought not miss the force of public opinion as a factor behind the week's diplomatic activity. Populations across the West have grown increasingly outraged as their purported leaders continue to support the Israelis' genocide. It is difficult to measure this, but increasingly large demonstrations in London, Paris, Brussels, and elsewhere have almost certainly been in some measure instrumental in forcing the hands of the governments that have recently recognized a Palestinian state.

I say "difficult to measure," but this may be a little less true as of this week. As has been by now well-reported, in response to the Meloni government's refusal to join other Western nations at the G.A. Italian unions led a general strike Monday that drew (depending on who is counting) almost a million Italians into the streets to protest Rome's support for the Israelis' continuing genocide.

There has been more in this line since then. On Tuesday a special adviser to Gustavo Petro, the leftist president of Colombia, spoke outside the U.N. Secretariat to call for an armed U.N. force to break Israel's blockade on food and aid to Gaza. More or less simultaneously, the Spanish and Italian governments announced that they are dispatching naval vessels to protect the much-publicized aid flotilla now under repeated Israeli attacks as it navigates the Mediterranean toward Gaza.

The same people who dismiss the diplomatic declarations announced in recent days recognize these as significant developments. I do not understand this. They seem to miss the larger lesson here. However inadequate all the recent declarations in favor of the Palestinian cause, they must be seen in the large—as an expression, I mean to say, of a prevalent drift in sentiment against Israeli atrocities. Conditions are dynamic, the direction clear. However flawed or inexcusably qualified, the week's diplomacy at the U.N. deserves the (vigorously) critical approval of those who stand not only for the Palestinian cause but also for the human cause, and who accept that there is much further to go in both cases.

25 September 2025.