**The United Kingdom, Israel and Palestine: Recognition Q and A**

**Preamble**

**Labour Party election manifesto, 2024**

“Palestinian statehood is the inalienable right of the Palestinian people. It is not in the gift of any neighbour and is also essential to the long-term security of Israel. We are committed to recognising a Palestinian state as a contribution to a renewed peace process which results in a two-state solution with a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state.”

**Foreign Secretary David Lammy, 19 July 2024**

“We are committed to Palestinian recognition. We hope to work with partners to achieve that, when the circumstances are right.”

**Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer, 22 July 2024**

“We have always been opposed to the expansion of illegal settlements and we call on all sides to recommit to stability, peace, normalisation and the two-state solution: a recognised Palestinian state – the right of the Palestinian people – alongside a safe and secure Israel.”

**Briefing note by the Balfour Project**

**Q: Why recognise the state of Palestine?**

**A:** The Palestinian people has the right to self-determination, including the option of statehood, as then PM Tony Blair affirmed in 1999 at the Berlin European Council. Over 140 states of the 193 UN membership have recognised the state of Palestine, on the land occupied militarily by Israel in June 1967 - Gaza, East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank - 22% of British Mandate Palestine, which the UK abandoned in 1948. As the Balfour Project seeks to highlight, Britain has “form” in Palestine, coupled with a historic and contemporary responsibility to do better. The Labour Party is committed to recognition, ever since a 2014 vote in Parliament by 276:12 on a cross-party motion. UK recognition is overdue. The Labour Government is committed to deliver it.

**Q: What practical difference will British Govt recognition of Palestine make?**

**A:** Recognition makes a difference politically, legally and morally.

Politically: the UK has political clout as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, a close ally of the US, a partner of the European Union and a firm but critical friend of both Israel and Palestine. Putting our weight behind Palestinian statehood matters to all critical stakeholders. Advancing the two-state solution entails recognising both of the states which embody that solution. As the manifesto makes clear, the decision to recognise belongs to the UK Government alone, and is not subject to any third-party veto. Recognition is a right, not a gift.

Legally: Our present Government is committed to uphold International Law without fear or favour, and respects the independence of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC). The Conservative Government used the pretext of UK non-recognition of Palestine to lobby the ICJ and the ICC against involvement in Israel/Palestine, arguing that Palestine is not a state because the Conservative Govt had not recognised it. Palestine’s legal standing with the ICC derives from its signing of the Rome Statute establishing the Court in 2015. The UK did not object at the time. That flimsy argument is removed by UK recognition of the state of Palestine. Palestine fulfils the criteria for statehood, subject to the Occupation: then Foreign Secretary William Hague said so in 2011. The Occupation does not give Israel a veto over recognition.

Morally: there are contradictions inherent in the Balfour Declaration of 1917. The UK deliberately used the Palestine Mandate it obtained from the League of Nations until 1948 to prevent the development of democratic institutions for as long as there was a Palestinian majority in the Mandate territory. That troubling history means that the UK today carries a responsibility and owes a debt to the Palestinian people which can only be met by action to create an independent, sovereign Palestine at peace with its neighbours. Our Government seeks to be the trusted friend of both peoples – Israeli and Palestinian. Recognition of both states signifies British parity of esteem and equal status for both peoples, currently lacking.

**Q: What exactly will our Government be recognising?**

**A:** On 19 July the ICJ issued its Advisory Opinion on the illegality of Israel’s 1967 occupation of Gaza, East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank, and stated that Israel should withdraw from those territories. It follows that the state of Palestine should consist of those territories. The established position of the international community is that the borders of the states of Palestine and Israel should be along the 1948 armistice lines in force before the June 1967 War, and that Jerusalem should be the shared capital of two states – Israel and Palestine. There has been inconclusive discussion of mutually agreed land swaps of equal size and value between Israel and Palestine. But in recent years, successive Israeli Governments have ignored the question of land swaps as a means of addressing the issue of over 700,000 Israeli settlers illegally present on Palestinian land. The ICJ advises that they should return to Israel.

**Q: Who should govern the state of Palestine?**

It is for the Palestinian people to choose who should represent them. The international community deals with President Mahmoud Abbas as the head of the Palestine Liberation Organisation and of its administrative body, the Palestinian Authority.

**Q: How is Palestinian statehood “essential to the long-term security of Israel”, as the manifesto says?**

**A:** The international community is committed to the two-state solution for many reasons. One is that without Palestinian political and other rights, including the right to live securely within agreed borders, Israel itself will not be safe. The ICJ has advised that the 1967 occupation of Gaza, East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank is illegal. This injustice imperils the safety of the people of Israel: Mr Netanyahu promised them security and that he should be left to “manage” the dispossession and oppression of the Palestinians. The Hamas attack of 7 October 2023 proved that promise to be false. Security for Israelis depends on security for Palestinians, and vice versa: mutual security, guaranteed by the international community.

**Q: How does recognition alleviate the pain of Gaza?**

**A:** Only an immediate ceasefire, with the release of all hostages and Palestinians arbitrarily detained by Israel since last October, as well as a huge increase in humanitarian aid, can begin to address the Gaza tragedy. Today the priority in Gaza is survival. But people in all of the occupied Palestinian territories need hope – of peace and a better future for their children. British recognition of the Palestinian right to self-determination through state recognition can offer hope of a future free from occupation and violence. Other UK actions – humanitarian, economic, political - must accompany recognition. But recognition is essential, as a step towards the attainment of equal rights.

**Q: Does UK Govt recognition of Palestine reward Hamas terrorism?**

**A:** No. British recognition of both states – Israel and Palestine – means equal British regard for both peoples: equal status in our eyes. Israel asserts that Hamas seeks to eliminate Israel. But recognition of the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel actually confirms the existence of Israel on 78% of British Mandate Palestine. At present Israel does not enjoy internationally recognised borders. In 1988 the PLO recognised the state of Israel on that 78% of Mandate Palestine. President Abbas has reaffirmed that recognition.

**Q: When should the UK Government recognise Palestine?**

Now. A changed, rights-based UK approach is required. The Commons voted for recognition ten years ago. Labour officially backed that resolution and whipped Labour MPs accordingly. The last Government failed to act on the clear will of the House of Commons. The Labour Government has pledged to put that right. The manifesto envisages recognition as a contribution to a renewed peace process. There is no prospect of genuine negotiations now or soon. Mr Netanyahu presides over a far-right government. His Finance and National Security Ministers are self-declared Jewish supremacists. The published coalition agreement that led to the creation of his government states that only Jews are entitled to self-determination in the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea and that only Israel can be sovereign there. Even after Mr Netanyahu leaves office, the trauma felt by Palestinians and Israelis will remain, making a just peace a distant prospect requiring much arduous effort. Tying recognition to a nonexistent process is a recipe for further unjustifiable delay. But precisely because of our historic role in the region, British recognition of Palestine carries disproportionate political and moral weight, and can change mindsets both at home and in the region.

In May several of our European partners – Spain, Norway, Ireland and Slovenia – recognised Palestine. There are increasing signs that Commonwealth partners, particularly Australia and New Zealand, are also considering recognition of the state of Palestine. Action by the British Government now is likely to encourage them to do so, making the cumulative impact even greater. Recognition will signal both that Palestinian self-determination alongside Israel is the key to Middle East peace and that the UK is charting its own independent, rights-based course in foreign policy. Consultation and possibly joint action with France, our partner as a fellow-European permanent member of the UN Security Council, is desirable but should not be a barrier to action. This Israeli government is working day and night to make the two-state solution impossible by building new settlements and infrastructure in the occupied territories at an unprecedented pace. Time is not on our side. Waiting is a bad option.

**What does a “viable and sovereign” Palestinian state look like?**

**A:** The ICJ Advisory Opinion of 19 July calls upon Israel to withdraw from the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The illegal Israeli military occupation has deliberately suppressed the rights of the Palestinian people to free movement, economic activity, health and dignity, and control of its own future. A viable, sovereign state of Palestine requires that it controls its own borders, reunites Gaza with the West Bank administratively and economically, collects its own taxes and customs dues, has its own airport and seaport and controls its own land registry and registration of births, marriages and deaths, as well as the entry and exit of persons to and from its territory. All residents of Palestine will be subject to national laws – as in the UK. Mutual security will be the norm: Israel’s security depending on Palestine’s security, and vice versa, backed by international guarantees.

Balfour Project, August 2024

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If you have questions or comments, please contact [info@balfourproject.org](info%40balfourproject.org%20)