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Saudi Arabia and France Lead Renewed Push for Israel-Palestine Peace Deal

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France and Saudi Arabia have stepped up their diplomatic campaign for a two-state solution to the long-standing Israel-Palestine conflict, following a major United Nations (UN) conference that brought global attention back to the issue of Palestinian statehood. Despite the obstacles, the two nations are pledging to maintain pressure on the international community to support an independent Palestine existing peacefully alongside Israel.

The high-level meeting, held in New York and co-chaired by both French and Saudi representatives, took place amid continued fighting in Gaza and a volatile situation in the

West Bank. These regions, seen as key parts of any future Palestinian state, remain engulfed in violence. The Israeli government, led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, remains firmly opposed to the two-state proposal, arguing it would reward terrorism in the aftermath of Hamas' deadly attacks on Israel on October 7, 2023.

Nevertheless, the conference underscored growing international backing for a political resolution. According to France's Ambassador to the UN, Jerome Bonnafont, around 160 of the UN's 193 member states participated, with 125 countries voicing support for a two-state solution. The unexpected turnout stretched the meeting into a third day, with 40 to 50 countries represented by ministers.

Bonnafont acknowledged that progress would be impossible without an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and expanded humanitarian access. "It will be extremely difficult to move forward to define a new way of administering Gaza as part of Palestine," he told the Associated Press, calling humanitarian aid and a ceasefire top priorities.

Over 145 countries already recognise the state of Palestine, and the recent meeting prompted additional pledges of recognition from key players. France, the United Kingdom, and Canada – all members of the influential Group of Seven (G7) – indicated renewed intent to officially acknowledge Palestinian statehood, alongside Malta. Several others, including Australia, New Zealand, Portugal, and Finland, expressed openness to the idea.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot and his Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan plan to keep the issue alive during the upcoming UN General Assembly in September. The ministers are organising a new event to coincide with the annual gathering of world leaders, where more countries are expected to formalise their support.

One of the defining aspects of the New York meeting was the joint leadership between a Western and an Arab nation, which brought a balanced approach to discussions. Eight working groups were established to produce detailed proposals on central issues, including regional security, political reforms, legal concerns, economic development, and rebuilding Gaza.

The outcome was a seven-page "New York Declaration," which both ministers have circulated to all UN member states. It includes recommendations and calls on nations to endorse the document before the September summit. The declaration has also secured backing from the European Union (EU) and the Arab League.

In a notable shift, all 22 members of the Arab League jointly condemned the October 7 attacks by Hamas and agreed that the militant group should relinquish control of Gaza and disarm in favour of the Palestinian Authority. This united stance was a significant development in regional diplomacy.

The declaration proposes a phased approach, aiming to establish a demilitarised Palestinian state supported by a temporary UN Security Council-mandated stabilisation mission. The mission would work with the Palestinian Authority to ensure civilian protection and security guarantees and lay the groundwork for lasting peace between both parties.

Richard Gowan, United Nations Director at the International Crisis Group, praised French President Emmanuel Macron for elevating the conference's importance. "He raised the level of ambition for the conference," Gowan said, noting that it became more meaningful than many diplomats had initially anticipated. He added that the event allowed key countries to express dissatisfaction with Israel's policies while giving Palestinian advocates more leverage in international talks.

Turkey's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan also weighed in, highlighting what he sees as rising global support for Palestinian statehood and Israel's growing diplomatic isolation.

France's Bonnafont delivered a clear message to both sides of the divide. "We say to those who are hostile to Israel, the way to peace is certainly not to deny the right of existence to Israel. This is the way to perpetual war," he said. "And the real way to defend the Palestinians is to give them a state, and the only way to give them a state is a two-state solution, and we have demonstrated concretely that this solution exists and is feasible."

While challenges remain immense, especially given the current Israeli government's opposition, France and Saudi Arabia appear committed to keeping the push for peace firmly on the international agenda.