

Starmer's Palestinian Statehood Pledge Sparks Debate

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UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer's pledge to recognise a Palestinian state by September 2025, unless Israel meets specific conditions, has sparked fierce debate, with critics arguing it risks emboldening Hamas while supporters see it as a step towards peace.

Starmer's announcement, made after an emergency cabinet meeting, ties UK recognition of a Palestinian state to Israel agreeing to a ceasefire, halting West Bank annexation, addressing Gaza's humanitarian crisis, and committing to a two-state solution. Yet, he also demanded that Hamas, the terrorist group controlling Gaza, release all hostages, disarm, accept a ceasefire, and cede governance to the Palestinian Authority (PA). The Office for National Statistics (ONS) does not track Gaza's crisis, but United Nations (UN) reports describe worsening conditions, with some agencies warning of famine. Starmer's dual conditions aim to balance pressure on both sides, but clarity is lacking. Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander's focus on Israel's role alone muddies the message, raising doubts about the government's resolve against Hamas.

The plan has drawn sharp criticism. Emily Damari, a British-Israeli freed after 15 months in Hamas captivity, called it a "moral failure" that "risks rewarding terror," echoing concerns from families of British hostages who fear it weakens leverage for their release. Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch slammed it as "political posturing" to appease Labour's left wing, while Reform UK claimed it rewards Hamas for the October 2023 attacks. Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu echoed this, claiming it "punishes victims." Conversely, Liberal Democrats, the Green Party, and independent Jeremy Corbyn insist Palestinian statehood is an "inalienable right," not a bargaining chip. A letter from over half of Labour's non-minister MPs, backed by some cabinet members, pushed Starmer to act, reflecting internal party pressure.

UK policy has historically tied Palestinian statehood to a negotiated two-state solution. Starmer's shift, influenced by talks with leaders like France's Emmanuel Macron, marks a bolder stance. The Centre for Policy

Studies (CPS) warns that premature recognition could undermine peace efforts, citing lessons from previous failed negotiations. With Labour expecting recognition by September's UN General Assembly, the move risks alienating allies while failing to secure the release of hostages or achieve peace. Starmer's gamble may reshape UK diplomacy or deepen division.