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UK Threatens Palestinian State Recognition to Pressure Israel Over Gaza Crisis

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The United Kingdom has announced that it intends to recognise a Palestinian state by September unless Israel takes substantive steps to end the crisis in Gaza, including agreeing to a ceasefire and committing to a two-state solution. Foreign Secretary David Lammy, speaking at the UN conference in New York, said the UK has a “special burden of responsibility” and aims to protect the viability of a two-state solution by influencing the

situation on the ground, including pushing for a ceasefire and increased humanitarian access.

In remarks widely reported, Lammy referred to the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, emphasising the need for action to alleviate suffering and restore prospects for a lasting peace. The UK's move signals a shift in foreign policy, though officials maintain that recognition of a Palestinian state must occur at a time when it will have maximum impact within a peace process.

Lammy described the announcement as a solemn undertaking, stating the UK intends to act "with the hand of history on our shoulders" by recognising a Palestinian state in September, unless conditions are met to achieve a ceasefire, hostages are released, and aid flow resumes.

The announcement, however, has drawn sharp criticism from multiple UK political parties. Liberal Democrat leader Sir Ed Davey argued that recognition should not be treated as "a bargaining chip" and called for stronger measures against Israel, including ending arms exports and enforcing sanctions on the Israeli government. He criticised the government's conditional approach, stating recognition "should have taken place many months ago."

On the other side of the political spectrum, Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch said that although she supports eventual Palestinian statehood, she considers this timing ill-judged: "Recognising a Palestinian state won't bring hostages home, won't end the war and won't get aid into Gaza. This is political posturing at its very worst," accusing Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer of succumbing to internal party pressure.

Reform UK echoed this sentiment. Party representative Zia Yusuf told *BBC Newsnight* that the move was a "political calculation" that trivialises the conflict in Gaza and undermines the severity of the situation.

Labour MP Dame Emily Thornberry, chair of the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, welcomed the announcement as a "historic moment" and a "first step" towards a two-state solution; her committee recently warned that further delay could jeopardise the viability of future Palestinian statehood.

Israel responded with strong condemnation. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that the UK's decision amounted to rewarding "Hamas's monstrous terrorism" and warned that

appeasement of jihadist groups had historically failed. Lammy, however, countered by accusing the global community of being “deeply offended by children being shot and killed as they reach out for aid,” urging for medical supplies and humanitarian assistance to be allowed into Gaza.

Prime Minister Starmer specified that recognition would be conditional: Israel must end military operations in Gaza, commit to a ceasefire and a two-state peace process, and allow humanitarian aid under UN oversight. He also demanded that Hamas release all hostages, disarm, disavow governance of Gaza and abide by a ceasefire.

The backdrop to these developments is the continued military conflict between Israel and Hamas. The Israeli Defence Forces launched their Gaza operation following Hamas-led attacks on southern Israel on 7 October 2023, which reportedly caused around 1,200 deaths and 250 abductions. Gaza’s health ministry reports that over 60,000 Palestinians have been killed since the conflict began, a figure consistent with multiple sources.

While the UK government’s strategy signals a renewed push for peace, it has opened deep divisions across the political spectrum over the appropriateness and timing of Palestinian recognition. Whether the threat of recognition will alter events on the ground remains uncertain, as humanitarian conditions in Gaza worsen and political tensions intensify.