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Middle East Diplomacy: Rethinking Australia's Stance on Gaza and Regional Stability

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As conflict in Gaza continues to provoke international outrage and diplomatic tension, pressure is mounting on Australia to re-evaluate its position in the Middle East. Recent commentary by legal expert Professor Donald Rothwell has reignited calls for Canberra to formally recognise Palestine and impose targeted sanctions on Israel. These recommendations, though controversial, highlight the growing global

divide over how democratic nations should respond to humanitarian crises in contested regions.

While many countries, particularly in Europe and the Global South, have moved to support Palestinian statehood in symbolic or legislative form, Australia has remained cautious. Advocates of recognition argue that this diplomatic gesture would serve as a foundation for constructive engagement and peace. Critics, however, warn that such a move risks aligning Australia too closely with politically unstable entities without meaningful reforms. A decision of this magnitude requires a balanced approach, ensuring that foreign policy reflects not just moral sentiment, but long-term national interest and security.

Calls for sanctions against Israel have also drawn attention. Rothwell and others argue that targeted measures similar to those applied in other conflicts could be a diplomatic tool to pressure de-escalation and accountability. However, imposing sanctions on a close economic and intelligence partner would be an unprecedented and politically risky step. It could jeopardise key strategic relationships, including Australia's longstanding alliance with the United States, which continues to back Israel. Moreover, critics argue that such a move risks setting a precedent for impulsive policy based more on popular pressure than thoughtful international law.

Ultimately, Australia must tread carefully. The nation has a responsibility to advocate for peace and human rights, but it must do so without compromising its global partnerships or domestic stability. Rather than adopting radical shifts in policy, a more pragmatic approach would involve increasing humanitarian support for affected civilians, promoting ceasefire agreements through diplomatic channels, and supporting

international efforts for a two-state solution. Australia can play a role in fostering peace without taking polarising sides in a complex and volatile region. Strong leadership lies not in symbolic gestures, but in principled diplomacy that priorities outcomes over ideology.