Israel-Palestine at the UN General Assembly

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Arianna Vicinanza and Lucia Almendros Zaragoza



The 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), held from 22 to 26 September 2025, took place amid heightened global tensions. Its theme, "Better Together: 80 Years of Peace, Development, and Human Rights", aptly reflected the world's fragile state (UN, 2025). Although debates ranged from sustainable development and gender equality to artificial intelligence, discussions ultimately converged on the Middle East, which dominated the spotlight. Co-chaired by France and Saudi Arabia, the session opened with President Emmanuel Macron's declaration of France's formal recognition of the State of Palestine (Ministère de l'Europe et des

Affaires étrangères, 2025). Macron emphasised that this recognition does not undermine Israel's right to exist (BBC, 2025).

Another much-anticipated speech came from President Trump, which reflected his usual criticism of the United Nations and the United States' historical allies. Already in 2019, Trump refused to engage with UN Human Rights monitor risks (The Guardian, 2019). During his speech, Trump accused the UN of being ineffective, dismissed climate change, and claimed that some countries "are going to Hell" because of their immigration policies (Reuters, 24th of September 2025). The US president also branded the recognition of Palestine as a "reward for Hamas" (Politico, 2025). Finally, Netanyahu's speech saw dozens of delegates leaving the room while he presented what some called a "pop quiz" (BBC, 2025).

Given these polarised positions, how can the UN meaningfully address the Israel-Palestine conflict moving forward?

Current Situation in Gaza

On 7 October 2023, Hamas launched a surprise armed attack on Israel, deliberately coinciding with the Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah. The attack resulted in the deaths of 1,200 Israelis, and hundreds of hostages were taken to Gaza, where 20 Israelis have been held for more than two years and were released on October 14th (Red Cross, 2025). The Gaza hostage crisis included 251 victims in total; 168 hostages were returned alive to Israel, and 67 were killed, either in captivity or by being mistaken for enemy fighters (Reuters, October 2025). Notably, most of them weren't Israeli; they represented a wide range of nationalities, including Americans, Thais, Argentinians, and Israelis (Reuters, October 2023).

In response to the October 7th offensive, the Israeli government initiated a devastating military incursion into the Gaza Strip. This operation caused more than 67,000 deaths (Reuters, October 2025), meaning that roughly one in every 33 Gazans has been killed (Al Jazeera, October 2025). The military incursion also involved the targeting of schools, hospitals, and humanitarian aid (UNRWA, August 2025).

In December 2023, South Africa presented a lawsuit against Israel to the International Court of Justice, accusing it of genocide, requesting provisional measures, and emphasising the international community's responsibility under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Several NGOs, including Amnesty International, echoed these allegations (Amnesty International, December 2024).

Finally, in 2025, an Independent International Commission of the UN ruled that Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza (UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, September 2025). The Commission cited multiple violations of the Geneva Conventions, including punitive "sieges and starvation" (p. 17), "inhuman treatment" (p. 19), and widespread "forced displacement"

(p. 7). Nowadays, the international community faces increasing pressure to halt genocide and resolve this conflict, which was one of the main subjects that stimulated the UNGA 80th debate.

UNGA's Discourse: Narratives and Legitimacy

The conference was a momentum-building one, as more states recognised the statehood of Palestine, such as Belgium, Portugal, and the United Kingdom. Antonio Guterres condemned both Hamas's attacks and Israel's conduct in Gaza (Guterres, 2025). He argued that the scale of casualties and the protracted conflict underline the urgent need for peace measures, affirming that the two-state solution remains "the only credible path to a just and lasting peace" (Guterres, 2025, p. 3). This strategy outlines that the territory should be divided into two states, which could coexist peacefully and respect each other's independence, sovereignty, and the right of peoples to self-determination. Indeed, this is a clear reference to the 1947 United Nations Resolution 181 (UNGA, 1947, p. 2), which proposed the partition of Palestine into two independent states, but it was never implemented as originally intended.

The two-state solution has been reflected in the New York Declaration, signed by 142 out of 164 states (UNGA, 2025). This document establishes a plan for a "just, peaceful and lasting settlement" (UNGA, 2025, p. 2), demonstrating that it is the "only way" (UNGA, 2025, p. 2) to satisfy aspirations of both states, as they claim their own legitimate territory, not only for their population to live, but also for a secure and recognised border that could guarantee peace and cohabitation.

The Declaration outlines several key principles. First, it urges states to end war for humanitarian reasons and determine security guarantees to avoid new conflicts in this zone. Second, the Declaration encourages the creation of a safe and stable post-war governance under "the Palestinian Authority" (UNGA, 2025, p. 3) that would extend its legitimate sovereignty over the West Bank and Gaza, without Hamas, and with international support. It should be stressed that the policy of the Palestinian Authority would be "One State, One Government, One Law, One Gun" (UNGA, 2025, p. 3), referring to the fact that Hamas must surrender its arms to the new regime under international supervision. However, the document doesn't specify how this process would be implemented, making its feasibility uncertain. The goal remains to create a legitimate, independent Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, consistent with UN resolutions and both states' aspirations for peace and security.

Moreover, the Declaration advises having a temporary international stabilisation mission under a UN mandate. While examples like the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) have saved lives during communal and political violence (UNSC, 2025, p. 7), UN operations often face significant constraints, including limited funding, overambitious mandates, and polit-

ical divisions. Moreover, such a UN mission would rely on both Chapter VI (Pacific Settlement of Disputes) and Chapter VII (Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace) of the UN Charter. The latter allows permanent members of the Security Council to exercise a veto. Furthermore, the receiving state must consent to receiving this mission; otherwise, it is condemned to fail, as occurred during the UNAMIR in Rwanda during its genocide (UNSC, 1993).

Importantly, the signatories of the New York Declaration do not, by signing, recognise Palestinian statehood. The Declaration is political rather than legal in nature; it expresses collective intent rather than conferring recognition. Recognition of statehood remains a sovereign right of individual states, typically requiring national legislative approval.

A key actor in this process was France, which recognised Palestine as a state and described the decision as a moral imperative requiring immediate action, recognising the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, and exhorting the international community to reach a peace agreement. President Macron criticised the international community's historical failure to implement the 1947 partition plan, observing that while Israel achieved statehood in 1948, "the promise to an Arab state (...) remains unfulfilled" (Macron, 2025, p. 1).

The UK urged the implementation of concrete measures to end genocide, including increasing UNRWA funding or suspending arms exports that may be used in this conflict (Lammy, 2025, p. 2). Although increased funding from the UK, Portugal, and Belgium is a positive step, it merely offsets the loss of US support following the closure of USAID (UNRWA, 2023). While suspending arms exports could deter further violence, its effectiveness depends on broad international consensus.

Distinct and Opposing Positions

Some member states differed from the New York Declaration intentions and values, advocating their own commitments. First, although Germany's position appears consistent with the two-state solution, it also contains several differences. Germany strictly condemns human rights violations that come from both sides and firmly believes in the two-state solution: "an independent (...) Palestinian state, existing side by side (...) with Israel" (Wadephul, 2025). On the other hand, the German government maintains that formal recognition of Palestine can occur only once both parties have negotiated a mutually accepted peace agreement. Germany believes that Palestine "needs to be built" through international dialogue, while incorporating Israel's security concerns and perspectives. This approach allows Germany to avoid direct interference in the conflict, reflecting its foreign policy emphasising respect for the sovereignty of both states and support for a negotiated resolution.

The United States and Israel stand in stark contrast to the New York Declaration. Both estimate that recognising Palestine as a state could result in a "reward for Hamas." Their reasoning draws on the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States (1933, art. 1), which identifies three essential criteria for statehood: a defined territory, a permanent population, and an effective government. Recognising Palestine while Hamas retains control over parts of Gaza and continues to hold hostages taken on 7 October 2023 would confer legitimacy on a non-sovereign, non-representative actor. Additionally, both states prefer bilateral negotiations over multilateralism. Former President Donald Trump, in particular, has sought to position himself as a broker of peace through direct engagement with regional stakeholders outside UN structures (Trump, 2025). These efforts appear partly motivated by his pursuit of international recognition, including aspirations toward the Nobel Peace Prize.

Iran's stance differs even more starkly from that of Western states. Its policy is influenced by its conservative and Shiite Ayatollah regime, which is opposed to the existence of a created Jewish state. Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, Iranian leaders have considered Israel's existence an affront to the Muslim world and a threat to Palestinian sovereignty. Iran condemned the "policy of appeasement" (Saeid Iravani, 2025, p. 1) towards Israel, arguing that diplomatic restraint has failed to stop "the ongoing genocide". Not only does Iran condemn how Israel and its allies destroy the Gaza Strip and its population, but also how Iranian "high-ranking officials, scientists and civilians" are targeted (Saeid Iravani, 2025, p. 2). Finally, Iran refuses the two-state solution for numerous reasons. First, Iran defends the right of self-determination for the Palestinian people exclusively because of its ideological opposition, as its Shiite government is opposed to a Jewish state. Second, Iran rejects the appeasement, as it failed to stop the genocide and didn't prevent the population from suffering and starvation. Finally, Iran also feels targeted by Israel, which is perceived as a threat to its own security.

The Tools Proposed During the UNGA: Pathways from Rhetoric to Action

During the UNGA, ending the conflict was a priority, and the necessity of an actual plan was highlighted. US President Trump presented a 21-point plan for Gaza, which included an immediate ceasefire, the release of hostages, unrestricted humanitarian access to Gaza, Hamas's disarmament, and Israel's withdrawal from the area (BBC, 2025). Moreover, Trump's plan, which relied on a proposal made by former UK Prime Minister Blair, focused on Palestine's reconstruction and the establishment of a temporary Palestinian government. The plan was welcomed by many European and Middle Eastern leaders while emphasising the importance of humanitarian access and human rights respect (Al Jazeera, 2025).

Nonetheless, the plan's effectiveness has been questioned. To Palestinians, the plan is unbalanced and prioritises Israel's security. It doesn't involve Palestinian voices and doesn't say anything about Palestine's right of self-determination (Al Jazeera, 2025). Moreover, the plan doesn't include any UN involvement and doesn't respond to some peacekeeping challenges, particularly the mechanisms for Hamas disarmament (BBC, 2025). The questions around the plan are miscellaneous, as Gaza will need to be completely reconstructed.

To conclude, the 80th UNGA meeting showed that the international community possesses a will to solve the conflict in the Middle East, but this solution requires institutional courage, coordinated diplomacy, and major cooperation. It is through legal accountability, inclusive negotiation, and commitment that the UN can fulfil its mandate and its mission. At the end of the day, despite the doubts and fear, the UN stands still in the name of diplomacy and cooperation.

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