Palestinian Statehood

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On 18 April 2024, against 12 votes in favour and two abstentions, the United States exercised their veto in the UN Security Council. Doing so, it blocked a draft resolution on recognising the Palestinian state from reaching the UN General Assembly. There, a two-thirds majority to allow Palestine to join the UN as a full member state would have been likely reached.

The voting record is a testament to the growing isolation of the United States in not recognising Palestinian statehood. Most developing countries already recognise Palestine as a state, while a dwindling number of European countries reject the step. Currently, 142 out of 193 UN member states formally recognise the Palestinian state and more countries are indicating their willingness to join. According to the EU High Representative for

Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell, several EU member states are expected to recognise Palestinian statehood by the end of May. Spain, Ireland, Malta, and Slovenia are among the European countries having indicated their readiness, while Emmanuel Macron in February also declared the openness of France towards this step. They would join nine EU countries which already officially recognise the State of Palestine.

The accession of Palestine as a UN member state would form the legal basis towards the two-state solution of coexisting Israeli and Palestinian states, but it would do little to solve the underlying political conflict. Following the Six-Day War in 1967, the Palestinian territories, namely the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, are under illegal Israeli occupation. Israeli control over the territories involves security measures such as military presence and restrictions on the freedom of movement. Without a political agreement, these would likely continue irrespective of Palestinian statehood. Still, the recognition of Palestine holds diplomatic significance, although the intention and meaning associated with such a step varies depending on the recognising country.

For Palestinians and most countries of the Global South, statehood signifies a further step in a historic struggle towards the liberation of the Palestinian people. For Israel's government, statehood at this moment of time is seen as a reward for the Hamas-led terror attacks that were perpetrated from 7 October 2023, in which an estimated 1.200 people were killed. Finally, for many European countries opening up towards the idea, recognition is used as a tool to put pressure on Israel as the death toll in Gaza crosses 34.500 following Israeli strikes. Their rhetoric highlights growing impatience among Western leaders amid the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip.

In the United States, the Biden administration's decision to not unilaterally accept the accession of Palestine as a full member state without Israel's approval follows a long-held foreign policy consensus between Democrats and Republicans. While the US government propagates a two-state solution, it believes that Palestinian statehood should be the result of a mutual peace agreement between Israel and Palestinians. Six months before the presidential elections, Biden finds himself under internal pressure, as public opinion polls show that the question of military aid to Israel divides voters. While Republicans demand continued support for the war in Gaza, a growing number of Democratic lawmakers and student protests at several US universities call for an end to the United States' military aid to Israel. Given this backdrop, the vote in the UN Security Council is a delicate matter for Biden. Although merely reflecting the status quo, by forcing a vote on the issue, countries of the Global South were able to display the growing isolation of the United States and the shifting momentum among European countries on the most prominent global stage.