



# Failed state from the start: Why a sovereign Palestine isn't happening any time soon

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On May 22, the prime ministers of Spain, Norway and Ireland held a joint press conference formally announcing that their governments were poised to recognize a sovereign Palestinian state. The move, though largely symbolic, is fraught with significance, coming amid Israel's war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip (and clearly intended to influence it). As a practical matter, it is also decidedly dangerous — first and foremost, for the Palestinians themselves.

Set aside for a moment the moral dimensions of rewarding Hamas's October 7 atrocities with Palestinian sovereignty. The other problem, which does not get nearly enough attention, is the new legal and political status quo that would prevail between Israel and the Palestinians once statehood kicks in.

For one thing, it would dramatically expand the international obligations of whichever entity ends up governing Gaza and the West Bank. Currently, the Palestinian Authority enjoys lavish subsidies, including from the U.S., for its security forces, while assuming only limited responsibility for maintaining order in the West Bank and simultaneously adopting policies that incentivize terrorism against Israel.

In fact, the PA itself is very much compromised in this regard; back in March, Israeli newspaper Ma'ariv outlined that in recent years, members of the PA's official security apparatus have been involved in extremist violence against Israel, on average, every two weeks. In Gaza, the situation is far worse, with the territory ruled by a full-blown terrorist organization that has repeatedly vowed to do everything in its power to eradicate Israel.

That state of affairs will become untenable upon "statehood." Customary international law mandates that a sovereign state must ensure neighboring nations are protected from harms emanating from within its own borders. If a country is unwilling or unable to do so, they're duty bound to ask for international assistance or face the consequences, up to and including the use of force.

This legal justification has been interpreted by countries to permit tactical strikes on foreign soil (as was the case in the Obama administration's policy of extensive drone strikes on Pakistani soil), and likely will be used by Israel as the basis for extensive counterterrorism operations throughout the Palestinian Territories.

As a practical matter, this means a nascent Palestinian state would find itself at war with neighboring Israel almost immediately.

For another thing, a Palestinian state would find itself abruptly stripped of subsidies that Palestinians currently enjoy. Prior to Oct. 7, Israel provided the Palestinian Territories with nearly a third of their fuel, direct employment for over 100,000 workers, indirect employment for tens of thousands more and myriad other incentives. Even over the course of the current war, humanitarian considerations — as well as extensive Western pressure — have led Israel to extend and even bolster its assistance. All that would come to an end with the formal creation of "Palestine." Israel would no longer be under any obligation to prop up the new entity, either economically or otherwise.

Meanwhile, a state of affairs that leaves Hamas in power is unacceptable to Israel, the U.S. and many other nations. Yet the only available alternative at the moment, the government of Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas, has proven itself unable (or unwilling) to meaningfully provide for Palestinian prosperity. Rather, the PA has become widely acknowledged as a hotbed of corruption, graft and misrule.

The PA is overwhelmingly unpopular among Palestinians. In an April 2024 survey by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey research, a respected Ramallah-based pollster, two-thirds of respondents expressed "the belief that the PA is now a burden on the Palestinian people," and the majority of those polled favored its outright dissolution.

This means that, without serious internal change, "Palestine" is predestined to be something like a failed state from the start, requiring intensive investments and involvement from international donors for decades.

These and myriad other factors explain why the U.S., though a consistent advocate of a "two state solution," opposes the near-term creation of a Palestinian state. They are also the reasons why, although 142 countries have now formally recognized "Palestine," the international community stops far short of treating it like a sovereign nation.

Almost assuredly, none of the above has factored into Spanish, Norwegian or Irish calculations, which seem to be propelled by the impulse to ameliorate the current suffering in Gaza by any means necessary. But if those governments and others are truly interested in helping Palestinians, a more useful and meaningful approach would be to press for sustainable development and responsible governance.

As the situation stands, advocates of Palestinian statehood should be exceedingly careful what they wish for.