

France, others to recognize Palestinian state as UN week gets underway

AFP :: France and other countries prepared to recognize a Palestinian state as the UN's centerpiece diplomatic week gets underway Monday, following a rash of Western governments in symbolically endorsing statehood and sparking Israel's wrath.

Recognition by Britain, Canada, Australia and Portugal on Sunday of a Palestinian state piled pressure on Israel as it intensifies its war in Gaza, which has killed tens of thousands, devastated the enclave and drawn vocal rebukes from its allies.

President Emmanuel Macron has indicated France will follow suit Monday as he prepares to host a meeting with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohamed Bin Salman on the moribund two-state solution – Palestinian and Israeli coexistence.

"They want a nation, they want a state, and we should not push them towards Hamas," Macron told CBS News's "Face the Nation" Sunday, adding that the move would help isolate the armed group.

He also said he would make the release of hostages taken by Hamas during its October 7, 2023, attack on Israel a precondition of opening an embassy to the Palestinian state.

Israel's foreign ministry said the recognition moves do not "promote peace, but on the contrary further destabilizes the region and undermines the chances of achieving a peaceful solution in the future."

More than 140 world leaders will descend on New York this week for the annual United Nations General Assembly summit, which

will be dominated by the question of the future of the Palestinians.

One world leader who will miss the gathering is Mahmud Abbas, the Palestinian president who Washington denied a visa to attend, along with his officials.

That earned a rebuke from the General Assembly, which will be the focus of world leaders' speeches and the inevitable protest walkouts this week. The assembly voted 145 to five to exceptionally allow Abbas to speak via video link.

The humanitarian catastrophe ravaging the small Palestinian territory will top the agenda, two years after the beginning of the Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip that was triggered by the unprecedented Hamas attack on October 7, 2023.

Some diplomats fear Israeli reprisals over the Western push to recognize a Palestinian state in order to kickstart talks on the two-state solution.

German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepuhl said on Monday that "a negotiated two-state solution is the path that can allow Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace, security and dignity."

"For Germany, recognition of a Palestinian state comes more at the end of the process. But this process must begin now," he said ahead of the General Assembly.

– 'Erasure of Palestinian life' –

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated on Sunday his position that there would be no Palestinian state and vowed to accelerate the creation of new settlements.

Two far-right Israeli ministers, Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, went further, calling for the annexation of the West Bank.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told AFP Friday “we should not feel intimidated by the risk of retaliation.”

“With or without doing what we are doing, these actions would go on and at least there is a chance to mobilize international community to put pressure for them not to happen,” he said.

All eyes will be on Netanyahu when he takes to the podium Friday, as well as on his main backer US President Donald Trump – staunchly opposed to recognizing a Palestinian state – who will speak Tuesday.

Washington has repeatedly rejected Abbas’s Palestinian Authority as a partner for peace.

“Unless backed up by concrete measures, recognizing Palestine as a state risks becoming a distraction from the reality, which is an accelerating erasure of Palestinian life in their homeland,” said International Crisis Group’s Israel-Palestine project director Max Rodenbeck.

The October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel resulted in the deaths of 1,219 Israelis, mostly civilians, according to official data.

Israeli military operations since then have killed 65,062 Palestinians, mostly civilians, in the Gaza Strip according to the Hamas-run health ministry, figures the UN considers reliable.

The normally quiet corner of Manhattan that is home to the UN’s 38-floor headquarters and the cavernous General Assembly has been gripped by a whirlwind of security sweeps, protests and road closures as the world’s most powerful people descend on it.

As well as Gaza, the week’s meetings and events will shine a spotlight on the reimposition of sanctions on Iran’s nuclear program, the deadly conflict in Ukraine, and Russia’s

violations of its neighbors' airspace.

The Security Council will hold an emergency meeting on Monday to discuss Estonia's allegation that Russian aircraft violated its airspace.

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