

Opinion – Australia's Recognition of Palestine as a Catalyst

Written by Timothy Lakaseru

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TIMOTHY LAKASERU, AUG 26 2025

Australia, a middle power, has entered the long stalled Israel-Palestine debate. What does this signal about international diplomacy's evolution? The move, which will be formalized by recognizing Palestine next month, shows countries are now willing to act independently of Washington. It is also a step toward an increasingly multipolar peace process. Naturally, it has ignited a spectrum of reactions: hope, questioning, and strategic calculation- both in Australia and across the globe. It raises questions about diplomacy, regional influence, and prospects for real progress. Similar to UK's pending decision, Australia now affirms recognition is a starting point for a renewed peace process, where acknowledging a Palestinian state's legitimacy is now a precursor to negotiations. This is a popular decision, especially among the international community, yet has met Israel's hostility.

The Albanese administration's recognition of Palestine signifies a long-calculated intersection between its principles and strategic interests in the region. Why is this so? It rests upon preconditions, all consented by President Mahmoud Abbas: Gaza's demilitarization, Hamas' exclusion from a future Palestinian government, and general elections. Australia has been long committed to the two-state solution and democratic self-determination in Palestine. It therefore views recognition as its further commitment for these ideals, knowing taking steps forwards will introduce and reinforce its credibility as a partner in the peace process.

Australia is presenting itself globally as a middle power with principles of its own, further adding to its aspirations for regional leadership. In turn, it also seeks credibility among states forming the Global South by signaling its autonomy from Washington's dominance. Support for the two-state solution shown by both Labor and the Coalition, though divisions among the populace are undeniable. Jewish lobby groups express disappointment, while Palestinian ones either welcome it despite its lateness, or see it as insufficient. Of course, Australia's decision will have impacts on its alliances, trade relationships, and security partnerships. These will determine if recognition is a genuine shift in Australian diplomacy, or would remain a symbolic gesture that does not disrupt traditional alliances.

If viewed through an internal context, recognition is less of a foreign policy, but is a cultural moment that forces Australia's diverse society to further reflection. Predictable enthusiasm has been shown by Palestinian groups, though stark divisions among Jewish lobbying groups are those that are more surprising. The moderate Jewish Council of Australia, known for its criticism of Zionism, is distinct for its explicit call for an action to stop Israel's Gazan Strip 'genocide'. The council's role as an ethno-civil organization shows Australia's identity politics is skewed towards those that align with humanitarian goals.

Naturally, activism in universities (a longtime staple in Australian democracy), and the role of interfaith groups towards emphasizing humanitarianism are also those that assist Australia in pursuing a foreign policy where zero-sum games are minimized. It is arguable that this, alongside its own experience of fostering a multicultural society with minimized (not eradicated) divisions serves as contributors towards its decision to recognize Palestine. Australia's media landscape, with its relative plurality, has allowed alignment between foreign policy and public aspirations to be achieved. Mirroring Australia's own diversity, recognition presents it as a credible partner whose successes in multiculturalism allow fresh socio-political insights for Israel and Palestine's coexistence. Lessons may be drawn for future Israel-Palestine relations.

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Recognizing Palestine must not be viewed exclusively through Australia-Israel or Australia-Palestine relations. The state has entered a process traditionally under America's hegemony, and it realizes changing a *status quo* is not, and will never be received well by Israel and the US. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has forewarned western partners planning to recognize Palestine their decisions are "shameful" and "disappointing". America too reacts similarly to when the UK expresses its recognition plans, and is adamant any recognition of Palestine is 'reward' for Hamas. Such denial of the need of a multipolar peace process only further mars the US' credibility in the international community, in addition to its longtime arrogance. The question, especially for the Global South, has always been "If peace is possible through America's mediation alone, why has not real progress taken place?"

Support from the Global South appears to be likely, and though perceived as 'western' Australia's has geographical proximity to this group. Australia has the opportunity for legitimacy as a leading regional actor leading those aspiring for a multipolar peace process. Yet, Australia's losses in key partnerships will need to be anticipated. The US will inevitably reassess alliances such as the AUKUS. This example may not have direct relevance to Israel-Palestine dynamics per se, yet the Trump administration's emphasis on shared values will eventually result in US doubt over Australia's legitimacy as an ally. The contrast would be visible to ASEAN, NAM, and Arab League members. A transfer of legitimacy would be facilitated, though multipolarism will allow strategic leeway.

Recognition is a powerful symbol; but it is also a long-calculated diplomatic strategy. The latter leads to symbolism as well, showing a close relationship between the two. Regardless of this gesture, though, is the reality Gaza's demilitarization, general elections, and a government excluding Hamas are highly ambitious. The Albanese administration may find strong alignments with Abbas' when it comes to elections and removing Hamas. However, demilitarization, if Gaza is governed by Ramallah, will not be possible in practice. If administered by a joint Arab provisional government? only temporarily until Ramallah seeks Gaza's incorporation. Australia is also aware of the United States' preference for a monopolized peace process for Israel and Palestine. Yet, the greater risk comes from the possible upcoming consequences straying away from Washington's rules would bring to its key alliances with the US. This means stronger partnerships with regional neighbors and partners, as well as seeking commonalities in defense affairs are new necessities.

Recognition will only lead to concrete steps if Australia adopts a more active role in the peace process. Its entry is accepted by immediate regional players (Israel, the Arab League), and how those in the Global South would provide its support. A substantial role would only be possible with immediate acceptance, but perceived legitimacy requires further backing from the Global South. Without these, Australia's recognition of Palestine is a nullified historic gesture.

Australia's decision is a display of its willingness to demonstrate independence in today's complex geopolitical landscape. It has chosen to actively enter a hegemonized peace process with multipolar aspirations, a potential significant step. By doing so, Australia shows it is not strictly a member of either the Western or Global South blocs, but establishes itself as a credible actor possessing strong relations with both. This aligns with calls for multipolarity, where Australia may serve as a facilitator for Israel-Palestine dialogues here inclusivity is a core principle. This ideally occurs in tandem to its increasing role in mediating Indo-Pacific disputes.

In the face of American power and influence, Australia's influence is set to be limited in the near future. Its intention to retain diplomatic relations with Israel, on the other, is already a ceiling that keeps Australia to supporting middle-way initiatives in the process. This does not mean stalled progress will remain, Australia's contribution will need to avoid idealism. It is appropriate to understand Australia's recognition of Palestine as both beneficial and challenge-filled. Its role will slowly show influence, yet need intense navigation through American hegemony – and with an understanding that short-term visible impact may be limited.

About the author:

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Timothy Lakaseru is an independent researcher specializing in Asia-Pacific policy, international relations, and regional development. With five years’ experience in policy research and analysis, he has worked on human rights due diligence in fisheries, strategy for virtual events, and development issues across the Indo-Pacific. He holds dual degrees in Philosophy (Honours) and Politics & International Relations from the University of Canberra.