

By Recognizing “State of Palestine,” Sweden Could Harm Palestinians

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[Electronic Intifada](#)

Region: [Europe](#), [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Religion](#)

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Update, 14 October:

The House of Commons, the lower house of the UK parliament, [voted by 274-12](#) on Monday to approve the non-binding motion:

That this House believes that the Government should recognise the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel, as a contribution to securing a negotiated two state solution.

While the motion carried by an overwhelming majority, fewer than half of the members of the house took part in the vote.

Update, 12 October: UK vote

On Monday 13 October, members of the UK parliament [are to vote on a symbolic motion](#) that “the Government should recognize the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel.”

The [BBC reports](#) that the motion is likely to be further amended to add the words that this recognition should be done as “a contribution to securing a negotiated two-state solution.”

This initiative may have good intentions in the minds of many, but for reasons I explain below, I believe that recognizing such a “state” is harmful to the rights of most Palestinians. So I respectfully but strongly disagree with friends who support it.

Originally published last week, I have slightly revised the post below to explain more clearly why this is the case. The logic that applies to Sweden applies precisely to the UK move as well.

Original post

The Palestinian Authority in Ramallah was ecstatic last weekend after [Sweden’s](#) new center-left Prime Minister Stefan Löfven announced in his inaugural address to parliament what appeared to be a break with Western orthodoxy: his country would recognize the “State of Palestine.”

“We salute the announcement by the Swedish prime minister,” [crowed](#) Saeb Erekat, the PA “chief negotiator.”

Although dozens of countries already recognize the “State of Palestine,” including several in Europe, Israel’s staunchest backers – the US, Canada, Australia and most of the European Union states – do not.

For the PA, with no achievements – and many losses – to show for more than two decades of a “peace process,” such diplomatic recognition is a coveted prize that gives the false impression of progress.

But American objections and Israeli fury quickly pushed the Swedes to try to cool expectations.

On Friday, US State Department spokesperson Jennifer Psaki criticized the Swedish move as “[premature](#).”

The Swedish ambassador in Tel Aviv [was summoned to the Israeli foreign ministry for a scolding](#) on Monday – but Sweden’s government [would not reveal](#) the content of his discussion with Israeli officials.

And the Swedish prime minister was subjected to the usual insults by Israeli Foreign Minister [Avigdor Lieberman](#) who suggested that Löfven did not understand the region.

“If what concerns the prime minister of Sweden in his inaugural address is the situation in the Middle East, he would better focus on the more urgent problems in the region, such as the daily mass murder taking place in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere in the region,” [Lieberman advised](#).

Publicly, the Swedes did their best to soothe Israel’s anger.

Prime Minister Löfven spoke with Israeli opposition leader Isaac Herzog, chair of Israel’s Labor Party, a “sister party” to Löfven’s Social Democrats.

Herzog [told Haaretz](#) that Löfven stressed that Sweden “wasn’t going to recognize a Palestinian state tomorrow morning” and “wants to speak first with all the relevant parties, including Israel, the Palestinians, the United States and other EU states.”

So much for a big, bold break.

Vague statement

Also on Sunday, Sweden’s foreign ministry [tweeted out Löfven’s exact words](#) apparently to underline Sweden’s support for the sterile “peace process” and the “two-state solution.”

And this statement was [posted on the website](#) of the Swedish embassy in Tel Aviv:

The following text is a quote from the Prime Minister Stefan Löfven’s declaration on the government policy in the parliament on 3 October.

“The conflict between Israel and Palestine can only be resolved through a two-state solution, negotiated in accordance with the principles of international law. It must guarantee the legitimate demands of both the Palestinians and the Israelis for national self-determination and security. A two-state solution requires mutual recognition and a will to coexist peacefully. Therefore, Sweden will recognize the State of Palestine.”

Löfven's commitment has no specific date attached to it, leaving, at best, confusion over his government's intentions.

Sweden's new foreign minister Margot Wallström added to the confusion, tweeting cryptically: "Recognizing Palestine: Important step towards a two-state solution. Both sides must be respected."

[on Twitter](#)

Recognising Palestine: Important step towards a two-state solution.
Both sides must be respected.

— Margot Wallström (@margotwallstrom) [October 6, 2014](#)

By "both sides," she presumably means the occupier and colonizer on the one hand, and its victims, on the other.

Sweden's misguided motives

Wallström elaborated on Sweden's intentions [in comments to the newspaper Dagens Nyheter](#) on Sunday.

The minister said that the strong Israeli reaction was unsurprising: "This I can understand and respect even if I do not share it."

She said she didn't think the planned move would "have any serious impact on relations between Sweden and Israel," stressing "We have good relations."

She rejected criticism that the move was too early: "I would say that the risk is that it is too late."

But why float this step at all? "It is important that we take an initiative that hopefully will inspire other countries," Wallström said.

Wallström is right: it is too late. It is too late to revive the dead "peace process" and there is no point talking about a "two-state solution" anymore. She's also right to suggest that things cannot go on as they are and something must be done.

But moving from quiet complicity with Israel to antagonizing it with symbolic recognition of a Palestinian state - while maintaining "good relations" - will do absolutely nothing to change the Palestinian reality, even if other states followed Sweden's lead (if and when it comes).

"State" harms Palestinians

As I have explained in my book [The Battle for Justice in Palestine](#) and in an [article for Al-Shabaka](#), recognition of a Palestinian "state" in a fraction of Palestine actually negates the rights of most Palestinians and conflicts with the Palestinian right of self-determination.

While recognizing the "State of Palestine" excites and pleases many who support the

Palestinian cause, people should not to get carried away with the aesthetics of “statehood” in what would amount to a [bantustan](#).

Instead, I have argued, they should focus on the negative consequences for the right of return and the rights of Palestinian citizens of Israel.

The main purpose of the so-called two-state solution is *not* to restore Palestinian rights, but rather to preserve and recognize Israel’s so-called “right to exist as a Jewish state.”

As I further explain in [this excerpt from my book](#), Israel’s claimed “right to exist as a Jewish state” can only be exercised by violating in perpetuity the rights of millions of Palestinians – [Palestinian citizens of Israel](#) who will retain second-class status if not expelled outright, and Palestinian refugees who will never be allowed back home. And even the rights of Palestinians in the so-called “state” would barely be realized since Israel insists that this state have extremely curtailed sovereignty.

So from my perspective, I do not see recognition of a Palestinian “state” in the context of the so-called two-state solution as anything to celebrate. Indeed, it [may well be harmful to Palestinians](#) in the long run.

What Sweden could do

But I do applaud Sweden’s desire to show leadership, initiative and to break with a stifling consensus. So, here are some ideas for Sweden’s new government that might actually do that:

- Lead a campaign for the immediate, unconditional end to Israel’s [illegal siege of Gaza, which amounts to “collective punishment.”](#)
- End Sweden’s [arms purchases from Israel](#) and call on all countries to impose an [arms embargo](#).
- End Sweden’s [military collaboration with Israel](#).
- Stop Swedish and EU [financial support for Israeli occupation](#).
- Stop [EU research support](#) to Israeli occupation.
- Support efforts to bring Israeli war criminals to justice by arresting war crimes suspects who set foot in Sweden and by encouraging other countries to do the same.
- Ban the import to Sweden of all Israeli settlement goods, and encourage EU countries to do the same.
- Urge EU countries to suspend the [EU-Israel Association Agreement](#).

Sweden led the way among European countries in opposing apartheid in South Africa. That included rejecting the regime’s bantustans which were designed to preserve apartheid by disguising it as “independence” for Blacks.

It is also past time for Sweden and other countries to stop concealing their complicity with Israeli apartheid behind the so-called “two-state solution” and to openly support [full rights and equality for all Palestinians](#) throughout historic Palestine.

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