

Jimmy Carter: America Must Recognize Palestine

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We do not yet know the policy of the next administration toward Israel and Palestine, but we do know the policy of this administration. It has been President Obama's aim to support a negotiated end to the conflict based on two states, living side by side in peace.

That prospect is now in grave doubt. I am convinced that the United States can still shape the future of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict before a change in presidents, but time is very short. The simple but vital step this administration must take before its term expires on Jan. 20 is to grant American diplomatic recognition to the state of Palestine, as 137 countries [have already done](#), and help it achieve full United Nations membership.



Back in 1978, during my administration, Israel's prime minister, Menachem Begin, and Egypt's president, Anwar Sadat, signed the Camp David Accords. That agreement was based on the United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, which was passed in the aftermath of the 1967 war. The [key words](#) of that resolution were "the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and the need to work for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East in which every state in the area can live in security," and the "withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict."

Photo



From left, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt, Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel and President Jimmy Carter of the United States in 1978 during the White House announcement of a Middle East peace agreement reached at Camp David. Credit Associated Press

The agreement was ratified overwhelmingly by the Parliaments of Egypt and Israel. And those two foundational concepts have been the basis for the policy of the United States government and the international community ever since.

This was why, in 2009, at the beginning of his first administration, Mr. Obama reaffirmed the crucial elements of the Camp David agreement and Resolution 242 by [calling for](#) a complete freeze on the building of settlements, constructed illegally by Israel on Palestinian territory. Later, in 2011, the president [made clear](#) that “the borders of Israel and Palestine should be based on the 1967 lines,” and added, “negotiations should result in two states, with permanent Palestinian borders with Israel, Jordan and Egypt, and permanent Israeli borders with Palestine.”

Today, however, 38 years after Camp David, the commitment to peace is in danger of abrogation. Israel is building more and more settlements, displacing Palestinians and entrenching its occupation of Palestinian lands. Over 4.5 million Palestinians live in these occupied territories, but are not citizens of Israel. Most live largely under Israeli military rule, and do not vote in Israel’s national elections.

Meanwhile, about 600,000 Israeli settlers in Palestine enjoy the benefits of Israeli citizenship and laws. This process is hastening a one-state reality that could destroy Israeli democracy and will result in intensifying international condemnation of Israel.

The Carter Center has continued to support a two-state solution by hosting discussions this month with Israeli and Palestinian representatives, searching for an avenue toward peace. Based on the positive feedback from those talks, I am certain that United States recognition of a Palestinian state would make it easier for other countries that have not recognized Palestine to do so, and would clear the way for a Security Council resolution on the future of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Security Council should pass a resolution laying out the parameters for resolving the conflict. It should reaffirm the illegality of all Israeli settlements beyond the 1967 borders, while leaving open the possibility that the parties could negotiate modifications. Security guarantees for both Israel and Palestine are imperative, and the resolution must acknowledge the right of both the states of Israel and Palestine to live in peace and security.

Further measures should include the demilitarization of the Palestinian state, and a possible peacekeeping force under the auspices of the United Nations.

A strong Security Council resolution would underscore that the Geneva Conventions and other human rights protections apply to all parties at all times. It would also support any agreement reached by the parties regarding Palestinian refugees.

The combined weight of United States recognition, United Nations membership and a Security Council resolution solidly grounded in international law would lay the foundation for future diplomacy. These steps would bolster moderate Palestinian leadership, while sending a clear assurance to the Israeli public of the worldwide recognition of Israel and its security.

This is the best — now, perhaps, the only — means of countering the one-state reality that Israel is imposing on itself and the Palestinian people. Recognition of Palestine and a new Security Council resolution are not radical new measures, but a natural outgrowth of America's support for a two-state solution.

The primary foreign policy goal of my life has been to help bring peace to Israel and its neighbors. That September in 1978, I was proud to [say to a joint session](#) of Congress, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." As Mr. Begin and Mr. Sadat sat in the balcony above us, the members of Congress stood and applauded the two heroic peacemakers.

I fear for the spirit of Camp David. We must not squander this chance.

***Jimmy Carter**, the founder of the Carter Center, was the 39th president of the United States.*

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