



Australia's Recognition of Palestine

A Case of Supporting the *Status Quo* over Accountability

Martin KEAR

▶ Key Takeaways

- Australia's decision to recognize Palestine was done to place diplomatic pressure on Israel to cease or scale back its war on Gaza, not to advance the case for a Palestinian state.
- The government's decision to recognize Palestine was also an attempt to relieve domestic political pressure concerning the government's refusal to hold Israel accountable for breaching international humanitarian law.
- Australia's decision to recognize Palestine highlights tensions in its foreign policy making between its strategic culture that supports Israel's settler-colonial narrative and its liberal internationalism that is critical of Israel's persistent breaches of international humanitarian law in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and what it means for Australia to be a good international citizen.

Introduction

Hamas's terrorist attacks against Israel on October 7, 2023, killed over a thousand Israelis, altering irrevocably the way the Palestinian/Israeli conflict is viewed internationally. Australia's government professed profound shock and disgust at Hamas's attacks, together with its unwavering diplomatic and political support for Israel.¹ But as Israel's response became more concerned with exacting revenge and as the pretext to fulfill long-held ideological dreams of a Greater Israel, support from Australia became more muted and conditional.² This culminated in Australia joining Britain, France, and Canada in formally recognizing a Palestinian state at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) meeting in September 2025.³

The question is, how can we account for Australia's apparent diplomatic U-turn? To answer this question, this paper places Australia's recognition in a historical context, arguing that the government's decision to recognize Palestine is a consequence of the interplay between Australia's strategic culture and its liberal internationalism in determining what it means to be a "good international citizen" (GIC). Professor of International Relations Hakan Mehmetcik defines GIC as "a multidimensional concept that encompasses not only the actions of states, but also their motivations, commitments, and the broader ethical considerations that guide their behavior on the global stage."⁴

On one side of the debate over GIC stands Australia's strategic culture. This is a distinct set of beliefs, attitudes, and practices concerning the use of force that arises through a unique and protracted historical process.⁵ This process reflects Australia's Anglo-Saxon settler-colonial heritage and the corresponding need for great power patrons to protect its interests against potential foreign aggression.⁶ Therefore, Australia's strategic culture prioritizes Israel's continued security over Palestinian claims to statehood. Since Israel's inception, Australia has followed the United States' (US) foreign policy orthodoxy on the Palestinian/Israeli conflict that condones, appeases, and supports Israeli settler-colonial policies aimed at subjugating and pacifying Palestinians

1. A. Albanese, "Remarks to the Jewish Community in St Kilda", Prime Minister of Australia, October 11 2023, available at: www.pm.gov.au.

2. "Sovereignty in All But Name: Israel's Quickening Annexation of the West Bank", International Crisis Group, October 9, 2025, available at: www.crisisgroup.org.

3. A. Albanese and P. Wong, "Australia Recognises the State of Palestine", Prime Minister of Australia and Minister for Foreign Affairs, September 21 2025, available at: www.pm.gov.au.

4. H. Mehmetcik, "Reframing Good International Citizenship: Principles of Responsibility, Cooperation, and Empathy", in C. Efstathopoulos and H. Mehmetcik (eds.), *Good International Citizenship and Non-Western International Relations: Perspectives and Cases from the Global South*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2025, pp. 44–45.

5. K. Longhurst, *Germany, and the Use of Force: The Evolution of German Security Policy 1990–2003*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004, p. 17.

6. M. O'Keefe, *Australian Foreign Policy: Relationships, Issues, and Strategic Culture*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023, pp. 18–19.

until they no longer pose a threat to the Israeli state.⁷ From this perspective, for Australia to consider itself a GIC, its foreign policy must be finely attuned to the strategic calculations of the US.⁸

On the other side of the debate stands Australia's adherence to a liberal international foreign policy framework that promotes diplomatic openness, sovereign equality, respect for human rights, and democratic accountability. This is reflected in Australia's support for collective peacekeeping, the promotion of the rule of law, and support for the array of international institutions intended to resolve complex global problems.⁹ As Australia's Foreign Minister, Penny Wong stated, "We want a world that is peaceful, stable, prosperous, and respectful of sovereignty. Where disputes are addressed in accordance with international law and norms, not by power and size."¹⁰ From this perspective, for Australia to consider itself a GIC means not only acting in accordance with these tenets but refusing to accept/tolerate actions from other states that run contrary to them.

The interplay between these two concepts occasionally creates tension in Australian foreign policymaking because strategic culture favors maintaining the *status quo*, while maintaining liberal internationalist values requires vigilance and occasionally necessary change.

Australia, Israel, and the Palestinian question

To understand why this interplay influences Australia's foreign policy on the Palestinian Question, it is necessary to analyze the evolution of Australia's diplomatic position on the conflict and its position as a middle power in the international system. In 1947, Australia's Minister for External Affairs, Dr. Herbert Vere Evatt, was appointed Chairman of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) to provide advice to the UNGA on how to resolve the competing claims from Palestinians and Zionists for statehood. Evatt was a key architect of the United Nations (UN) Charter and a proponent of the UN's newfound role in resolving intractable conflicts. Consequently, Australia's government was less concerned about the issue and more concerned about the process. It is believed that the spiraling crisis over who could/should achieve statehood created an opportunity for the UN to demonstrate its institutional legitimacy and acuity at resolving contentious conflicts. Success for the UN would cement its place

7. M. O'Keefe, "Teaching Australian Foreign Policy Through the Lens of Strategic Culture", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 73, No. 6, 2019, pp. 534–535; S. Burchill, "The Israel-Palestine Conflict Since 9/11", in F. Mansouri (ed.), *Australia and the Middle East: A Frontline Relationship*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2006, pp. 123–133.

8. M. O'Keefe, *Australian Foreign Policy*, op. cit., p. 31.

9. D. Deudney and G. J. Ikenberry, *Democratic Internationalism: An American Grand Strategy for a Post-exceptionalist Era*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, November 2012, pp. 7–8.

10. P. Wong, "Speech to the Asia Summit", Australian Government, Minister for Foreign Affairs, September 3, 2024, available at: www.foreignminister.gov.au.

in the international political system, thereby providing Australia and other middle powers with an international venue through which to advocate their national interests independently of their links with great power patrons.¹¹

However, Australia's determination for the UN to succeed exposed intrinsic biases in its strategic culture and what it means to be a GIC. Reflecting Australia's settler-colonial antecedence, the government believed there was a sense of justice about the Zionists' desire for a state to protect the Jewish people from future horrors and backed the Zionists' narrative that violence against Palestinians was self-defense. Australia also saw the potential for an Israeli state to be an outpost of European/Western civilizational values, demonstrating the benefits of liberal democratic governance to the region.¹²

Nevertheless, this sense of justice did not extend to Palestinians and their concomitant claims to statehood. Not only did Australia ignore and disparage these claims, but its government also viewed Palestinian/Arab efforts to thwart a Jewish state as flouting the will of the international community and of attempting to destabilize regional peace and security. This strengthened Australia's support for an Israeli state and the Zionists' narrative, while concurrently hardening its opposition to Palestinian/Arab efforts to resist any Israeli state.¹³

Australia viewed any future Palestinian claims to statehood as void

After substantial debate, UNSCOP recommended the division of Mandatory Palestine, and on November 29, 1947, the UNGA passed Resolution 181, formally partitioning the territory into Jewish and Palestinian areas.¹⁴ While the Zionists grudgingly accepted the decision, Palestinians and their Arab supporters bitterly opposed it.

After the 1947-1948 War of Independence, Australia, like many Western states, viewed any future Palestinian claims to statehood as void, meaning its interpretation and application of international law and what it considered to be a GIC prioritized the *status quo* of Israel's continued security, not that of the Palestinian resistance that resulted from Israel's formation. This standpoint provides the foundation of Australia's foreign policy position on the Palestinian Question that remains to this day.

Henceforth, the government's official narrative on the Palestinian Question portrays it as a humanitarian problem and in deciding how best to support Palestinian refugees in the Gaza Strip, West Bank, and neighboring Arab states. Staying consistent

11. D. Mandel, "A Good International Citizen: H. V. Evatt, Britain, the United Nations, and Israel, 1948-49", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 2003, p. 83.

12. E. Han and H. Rane, *Making Australian Foreign Policy on Israel-Palestine: Media Coverage, Public Opinion, and Interest Groups*, Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2013, p. 49 and P. Mendes, "The Australian Left's Support for the Creation of the State of Israel, 1947-48", *Labour History*, No. 97, 2009, pp. 140-145.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

14. "United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181", United Nations, November 29, 1947, available at: www.un.org.

with its liberal internationalism, successive Australian governments believed that the UN should play a proactive role in addressing this problem and that peace between Palestinians and Israelis could only be achieved through negotiation under the auspices of the UN and the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP). This was the position taken during the 1967 and 1973 Arab/Israeli wars and later with the 1993 Oslo Accords, with Australia maintaining a neutral position towards both Israel and Palestinians, arguing that both sides should respect international law and conventions.¹⁵

However, as Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation, and later to the Accords, became more associated with terrorism, being a GIC meant that successive Australian governments strongly favored the *status quo* of maintaining Israel's security. In practice, this meant ignoring persistent Israeli breaches of international humanitarian law through its occupation and settlement construction, while denouncing the terrorism associated with Palestinian resistance.

Australia, global terrorism, and the Palestinian Question

Al-Qaeda's 2001 terrorist attacks fortified Australia's policy standpoint. The aftermath of these attacks saw Australia's strategic culture become a more dominant factor in determining its foreign policy, with Australia's government parroting US policy positions that portrayed Palestinian terrorist attacks during the Second Intifada (2000–2005) as being part of a wider assault on democratic ideals by militant Islamists unleashed by al-Qaeda.¹⁶ Consequently, Australia's government viewed any Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation not only as a threat to Israel but as an exemplar of this assault. Reflecting its strategic culture, Australia aligned itself with Israel's settler-colonial narrative, viewing state violence as necessary for security, while dismissing Palestinian violence as illegitimate resistance.¹⁷ Accordingly, the government argued that peace between Palestinians and Israelis could only come when Palestinians unconditionally recognized Israel's legitimacy and ceased using violence against it. Until that time, Israel could legitimately use violence against Palestinians to repress any perceived terrorist threat.¹⁸

This position is also reflected in the Australian government's voting patterns on UNGA Resolutions affecting the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, with the government opposing any resolution critical of Israel, its occupation, and its efforts to combat Palestinian terrorism.¹⁹ For example, in 2003, Australia voted against UNGA Resolution A/RES/ES-10/14 concerning the construction of Israel's Separation Wall. While Israel claimed it was necessary to protect Israel from Palestinian terrorists, the UNGA

15. E. Han and H. Rane, *Making Australian Foreign Policy on Israel-Palestine*, op. cit., pp. 52–53.

16. S. Burchill, "The Israel-Palestine Conflict Since 9/11", op. cit., pp. 123–124.

17. E. Han and H. Rane, *Making Australian Foreign Policy on Israel-Palestine*, op. cit., p. 64.

18. S. Burchill, "The Israel-Palestine Conflict Since 9/11", op. cit., pp. 124–125.

19. E. Han and H. Rane, *Making Australian Foreign Policy on Israel-Palestine*, op. cit., pp. 60–62.

requested the International Court of Justice (ICJ) provide an advisory opinion concerning whether the Wall breached Israel's legal obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention.²⁰

This diplomatic stance shaped Australia's foreign policy for the next two decades, leading it to remain silent on contentious legal issues surrounding Israel's occupation, its settlements, and the siege of the Gaza Strip that contravened the Hague and Geneva Conventions, while continuing to condemn Palestinian resistance.

Australia's response to October 7

After Hamas and other Palestinian resistance movements attacked Israel, Australia's strategic culture continued to dictate what it meant for the government to be a GIC, with the Australian government promoting two central themes: Israel's right to self-defense, and Hamas is a terrorist movement bent on the destruction of the Israeli state.²¹

Nevertheless, the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, alongside ample evidence of Israel repeatedly breaching international humanitarian law, made it harder for the government to support Israel's claims to self-defense, and it started coming under sustained domestic political pressure to reassess what it means to be a GIC. The problem for the government was that the US remained Israel's staunchest supporter, providing diplomatic cover and material support to Israel. In Australia's mainstream political and media narratives, a norm quickly emerged that anything short of unequivocal support for Israel bordered on antisemitism and represented a public break with US policy.²²

Israel's war on Gaza flagrantly violated international humanitarian law

However, from a liberal internationalist perspective, Israel's war on Gaza flagrantly violated international humanitarian law, especially on the issues of proportionality and the deliberate targeting of civilians and critical infrastructure. In early 2024, student protests broke out in several Australian universities, mirroring similar protests in the US, Britain, France, and Canada. These occurred alongside widespread community protests that denounced Israel's breaches of international humanitarian law and called on the government to stop Israel from killing Palestinians.²³

20. "Illegal Israeli Actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the Rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory", A/RES/ES-10/14, United Nations General Assembly, December 12, 2003, available at: <https://docs.un.org>.

21. "Television Interview – Today, Transcript", Prime Minister of Australia, October 9, 2023, available at: www.pm.gov.au.

22. S. Carland, "Australian Media's Instagram Posts on Gaza War Have an Anti-Palestine Bias That Has Real-World Consequences", The Conversation, February 2, 2024, available at: <https://theconversation.com> and D. Muller, "At a Time When Journalism Needs to Be at Its Strongest, an Open Letter on the Israel/Hamas War Has Left the Profession Diminished", The Conversation, November 28, 2023, available at: <https://theconversation.com>.

23. L. Jackson, "'Show Solidarity': Pro-Palestinian Protesters Camp Across Australian Universities", Reuters, May 3, 2024, available at: www.reuters.com.

Then, on May 15, 2024, the government was rocked by controversy when one of its senators, Fatima Payman, said:

“Instead of advocating for justice, I see our leaders performatively gesture, defending the oppressor’s right to oppress, while gaslighting the global community about the rights to self-defense. This is a genocide, and we need to stop pretending otherwise. The lack of clarity, the moral confusion, the indecisiveness is eating at the heart of our nation.”²⁴

Her statement gave voice to the unease within sections of the government, Australia’s 1-million-strong Muslim community, and the broader public concerning the government’s unequivocal support for Israel, its refusal to publicly criticize and sanction Israel for violating international humanitarian law, and the consequent debates over what it means to be a GIC.

To add more domestic political pressure on the government, in the lead-up to the May 2025 Federal election, several senior government ministers from the Australian Labor Party (ALP) faced challenges from Muslim Australian independent candidates.²⁵ For decades, Muslim Australians, particularly those from Middle Eastern backgrounds, had favored the ALP in elections. There was intense media speculation about whether the government’s pro-Israel stance would shift those voters away from the ALP and what this could mean for the government’s chances of winning what was forecast to be a tight election.²⁶

Reviving the two-state solution

To try and relieve some of these political pressures, Australia’s government followed others by calling for the reinvigoration of the two-state solution, claiming it was the only practical way of ending the incessant cycle of violence. While Australia had long supported the two-state solution, it traditionally viewed the issue as one to be negotiated between Israelis and Palestinians under the auspices of the MEPP. Now, however, the government argued that unless the international community addressed the problem quickly, there “would be no Palestine to recognize.”²⁷

Australia also used the UN to express its diplomatic displeasure at Israel’s war in Gaza, while simultaneously signaling to the US that the government’s position remained broadly consistent with US policy positions for ending the war. For example, while

24. “From The River to The Sea’: Labor Senator Breaks Ranks to Accuse Israel of Genocide”, SBS News, May 15, 2024, available at: www.sbs.com.au.

25. E. Scott, “Statement or Setback? What Happened to the Gaza Protest Vote at the Federal Election”, SBS News, May 4, 2025, available at: www.sbs.com.au.

26. M. Walden, “Melbourne Seat of Calwell Highlights Labor’s Woes as Gaza Galvanises Muslim Voters”, ABC News, April 20, 2025, available at: www.abc.net.au.

27. T. McIlroy, “No Palestine Left to Recognise’ If World Doesn’t Push for a Two-State Solution with Israel, Penny Wong Warns”, *The Guardian Australia*, August 5, 2025, available at: www.theguardian.com.

Australia voted in favor of resolutions condemning Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory as breaching international humanitarian law, it abstained from resolutions requesting the ICJ provide advisory opinions on Israeli policies and practices concerning its occupation and on Israel's response to the presence and activities of various UN organizations.²⁸

Then, on August 11, 2025, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced that Australia, along with Britain, France, and Canada, would recognize a Palestinian state at the next UNGA meeting in September. His reasons for doing so highlight the resurgence of Australia's liberal internationalism as he criticized Israel's "continued illegal expansion of settlements in the West Bank, an increase in settler violence, and threats to annex parts of Palestine". Albanese also criticised Israel's "failure to comply with its legal and ethical obligations in Gaza". However, Australia's recognition was conditional firstly on the Palestinian Authority (PA) undergoing democratic reform, secondly that Hamas play no role in Palestinian politics, and finally that Palestinians affirm Israel's right to live in peace and security.²⁹

Australia fell into diplomatic lockstep with its patron

Responding to the announcement, US Ambassador to Israel, Mike Huckabee, argued that recognition of Palestine was a "gift to Hamas" and that the Trump Administration was "disgusted" with a decision that threatened the prospects of achieving a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas.³⁰ Similarly, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu argued that recognizing Palestine "rewarded terrorism" and that he would do everything to prevent "the establishment of a terrorist state".³¹

Despite Albanese's rhetoric, when the Trump Administration published its 20-point plan in October 2025, Australia fell into diplomatic lockstep with its patron.³² Any future moves towards Palestinian statehood would need to occur under the auspices of this plan. This resulted in the Australian government effectively divesting itself of the responsibility to hold Israel accountable for its continuing breaches of international humanitarian law concerning its decades-long occupation of Palestinian

28. "Request For an Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the Obligations of Israel in Relation to the Presence and Activities of the United Nations, Other International Organizations, and Third States", A/RES/79/232, UNGA, December 19, 2024, available at: <https://docs.un.org> and "Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem, and the Occupied Syrian Golan", A/RES/79/91, UNGA, December 12, 2024, available at: <https://docs.un.org>.

29. A. Albanese, "Address to the Two-State Solution Conference", Prime Minister of Australia, September 22, 2025, available at: www.pm.gov.au.

30. M. Hampson, "Trump Administration Reveals 'Enormous Disappointment' with Albanese Government over Palestinian Statehood Decision, Says US Ambassador", Sky News Australia, August 15, 2025, available at: www.skynews.com.au.

31. A. Herndon and L. Shvets, "'Wait for It': Netanyahu Warns Australia, Other Nations for Recognizing Palestinian State", SBS News, September 22, 2025, available at: www.sbs.com.au.

32. "Read Trump's 20-Point Proposal to End the War in Gaza", PBS NewsHour, September 29, 2025, available at: www.pbs.org.

territories and its war on Gaza. This is despite Israel announcing the construction of more settlements in the West Bank, advancing its efforts to annex the West Bank entirely, and the rising death toll in Gaza.³³

The contradiction between the reality of the situation in the Palestinian territories and Australia's stated purpose for recognition leads to a position where it can be argued that Australia used its recognition not to promote the two-state solution, thereby advancing the case for Palestinian statehood, but to place diplomatic pressure on Israel to cease, or scale back, its war on Gaza. The government was also simultaneously signaling its unease at the US's refusal to cease its unflinching military, political, and diplomatic support for Israel. Ultimately, Australia's decision highlights the tensions between its strategic culture and its liberal internationalism concerning what it means to be a "good international citizen" when determining Australia's foreign policy positions on the Palestinian Question.

The Bondi Beach attack and its political fallout

On December 14 2025, two Muslim Australian men targeted Jewish Australians celebrating Hanukkah at Bondi Beach—the heart of the Jewish community in Sydney. Australia's worst terrorist attack killed fifteen people, injured another forty, and led to an outpouring of support for Australia's Jewish community.³⁴ According to police, the men made a video prior to the attacks explaining their motivations and "condemn[ing] the acts of Zionists".³⁵ Prime Minister Netanyahu quickly linked the attacks to Australia's recognition of Palestine and accused the Australian government of facilitating antisemitism.³⁶

In response, Prime Minister Albanese invited Israeli President Isaac Herzog to visit Australia to demonstrate the government's acknowledgment of the trauma suffered by Jewish Australians and to show the government's determination to tackle antisemitism. Nevertheless, Herzog's visit was controversial after a vision emerged of him signing shells to be fired into Gaza and following a UN Commission finding that

33. "International Condemnation of New Israeli Settlement Measures in the West Bank Grows", ABC News, February 10, 2026, available at: www.abc.net.au and M. Mansour, "Gaza Death Toll Exceeds 75,000 As Independent Data Verify Loss", Al Jazeera, February 18, 2026, available at: www.aljazeera.com.

34. B. Cubby, "Profoundly Sorry': PM Leads Tributes to Australian Jews at Bondi Memorial", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 22, 2026, available at: www.smh.com.au.

35. P. Duffin, "Bondi Beach Terror Accused Appears in Court", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, February 16, 2026, available at: www.smh.com.au.

36. M. Doran, "Benjamin Netanyahu Lashes Out at Anthony Albanese over Bondi Shooting", ABC News, December 15, 2025, available at: www.abc.net.au.

he should be investigated for inciting genocide against Palestinians—an allegation Herzog strenuously denies.³⁷

Ultimately, Herzog's visit only served to highlight the tension between Australia's strategic culture and its liberal internationalism as the government struggled over what it is to be a "good international citizen" and whether this means maintaining the *status quo* of unequivocal support for Israel as per its strategic culture or holding Israeli leaders accountable for breaching international humanitarian law as per its liberal internationalism.

Martin Kear holds a PhD in International Relations from the University of Sydney and is a lecturer in the University's Discipline of Government and International Relations. His research focuses on non-state armed groups (NSAGs) and their complex and asymmetric violent and non-violent interactions with the state. He is particularly interested in understanding the role that resistance plays as a key causal driver behind the decision-making processes of these groups concerning any move they make into institutional/electoral politics and how they justify these decisions to core constituencies. He is also interested in understanding the changing function of violence in these groups' organizational narratives that necessarily accompany these decisions, and similarly, how they justify this to core constituencies. He is the author of a book, *Hamas and Palestine: The Contested Road to Statehood* (Routledge, 2019) and has published articles on Hamas in the journals *Democratization*, *the Australian Journal of International Affairs*, and *Participation and Conflict*. He also has a chapter on Hamas in the Routledge Handbook of Political Parties in the Middle East and North Africa.

How to quote this publication:

Martin Kear, "Australia's Recognition of Palestine: A Case of Supporting the *Status Quo* over Accountability", *Ifri Memos*, Ifri, April 21, 2026.

ISBN: 979-10-373-1210-5

The opinions expressed in this text are the responsibility of the author alone.

© All rights reserved, Ifri, 2026

Cover: As part of a national rally, protesters are gathering in Melbourne's CBD, Victoria, Australia, to show support for Palestine in its conflict with Israel © FiledIMAGE/Shutterstock.com

37. "Legal Analysis of the Conduct of Israel in Gaza Pursuant to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide", A/HRC/60/CRP.3, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, September 16, 2025, available at: www.ohchr.org.



27 rue de la Procession
75740 Paris cedex 15 – France

Ifri.org

