

British Parliament Sends a Message to Obama: the People See Israel as a ‘Bully’

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Yesterday the British Parliament voted overwhelmingly (274-12) to recognize a Palestinian state, and if you listened to the debate, one theme above all else explains the crushing victory: The British public has been horrified by Gaza and its opinion of Israel has shifted. Even Conservative members of Parliament cited pressure from the public. As Labour’s Andy Slaughter said, Britain has witnessed a new “barbarism”:

I think that the British people have been on the same sort of the journey as the right hon. Member for Croydon South [[Conservative Sir Richard Ottaway](#)] [described](#)—it is certainly true of the Labour movement—from being very sympathetic to Israel as a country that was trying to achieve democracy and was embattled, to seeing it now as a bully and a regional superpower. That is not something I say with any pleasure, but since the triumph of military Zionism and the Likud-run Governments we have seen a new barbarism in that country.

Slaughter and a fellow Labour member, Kate Green, said that just as the British Parliament sent a message to Obama a year ago in voting to oppose the Conservative Prime Minister on attacking Syria, [a vote Obama heeded in reversing course on a Syria attack](#), today the British Parliament aims to influence U.S. policy on Palestine.

The Parliamentary debate was conducted in moral terms throughout, a fact that the parliamentarians described as historic. And the discussion was astonishing in its contrast to the stifled debate on these issues in the US Congress. (The debate can be found online: Section [one here](#). Section [two is here](#). Section [three is here](#).)

Below I have made excerpts of the debate, emphasizing the powerful ideas the parliamentarians sounded that you would never hear in Washington. One lawmaker says that the occupation is “much worse” than apartheid in South Africa. Another says that the Balfour Declaration of 1917 now seems like a “sick joke,” because it never guaranteed freedom to Palestinians. Many members offer frank descriptions of Israeli detention of children and unending settlement expansion. Several describe Israeli actions in Gaza as war crimes. One mentions the use of terrorism by Mandela and Begin long before Palestinians used the tactic. Labour and Conservative members alike speak about the role of the Israel lobby in the United States. I should note that all these pols also supported the two-state solution. (I’ve largely ignored those portions because I believe the 2SS is a dead letter. But you can find the arguments at the links.)

Here are my excerpts. First, the sponsor of the legislation, Grahame M. Morris, Labour, on Britain's historical responsibility, and the failure of Oslo:

As the originator of the Balfour declaration and holder of the mandate for Palestine, Britain has a unique historical connection and, arguably, a moral responsibility to the people of both Israel and Palestine. In 1920, we undertook a sacred trust—a commitment to guide Palestinians to statehood and independence. That was nearly a century ago, and the Palestinian people are still to have their national rights recognised. This sacred trust has been neglected for far too long. As the hon. Lady has just said, we have an historic opportunity to atone for that neglect, and take this small but symbolically important step...

It is now more than 20 years since the Oslo accords, and we are further away from peace than ever before. An entire generation of young Palestinians—the Oslo generation—has grown up to witness a worsening situation on the ground. We have seen a significant expansion of illegal Israeli settlements, heightened security threats to both sides, punitive restrictions on Palestinian movement, economic decline, a humanitarian crisis in Gaza of catastrophic proportions and the construction of an illegal annexation wall through Palestinian land.

It is clear that both Israel-Palestine relations and our foreign policy are at an impasse, which must be broken...

Morris emphasized the Israeli responsibility for the crisis:

Let us make no mistake about this: to make our recognition of Palestine dependent on Israel's agreement would be to grant Israel a veto over Palestinian self-determination...Recognition is not an Israeli bargaining chip; it is a Palestinian right. It is one that has to form the basis of any serious negotiations. Indeed, the lack of equity between Israel and the Palestinians is a structural failure that has undermined the possibility of a political settlement for decades. As it stands, Israel has little motivation or encouragement—perhaps little incentive is a better way of putting it—to enter into meaningful negotiations. The majority of Israeli Government politicians flat-out reject the notion of a Palestinian state. There are currently no negotiations and, as Secretary of State John Kerry admitted, it was Israeli intransigence that caused the collapse of the latest round of talks...

Those Palestinians who have pursued the path of diplomacy and non-violence for more than 20 years have achieved very little. We need to send them a message and give them encouragement that it is the path of peace and co-operation, and not the resorting to force of arms, that will actually lead to a lasting and just peace....

Richard Burden, Labour, describes Palestinian persecution in ways you would never hear in the US congress:

Over the years, I have spoken about the things I have seen for myself, whether that has been settlements growing in violation of international law and successive resolutions; the barrier that snakes in and out of the west bank, cutting Palestinian communities off from each other and farmers from the land; or Palestinian children being brought in leg irons into Israeli military courts, accused of throwing stones, and being subject to laws that vary depending on whether one is Palestinian or Israeli. I have sat with Palestinian families in East

Jerusalem who have had their homes destroyed and who are no longer allowed to live in the city of their birth. I have seen for myself the devastation of homes, schools and hospitals in Gaza. I have met fishermen who are fired on if all they do is try to fish. Yes, I have been to Sderot as well and know that Israelis have spoken about their real fear about rocket attacks from Gaza. I also know the fear that Palestinians in Gaza feel daily because of the constant buzz of drones overhead, 24 hours a day, that could bring death at any moment.

I have not merely read about such things; I have seen them for myself. They are why a negotiated settlement is so important. ..

Sir Alan Duncan, a Conservative, echoed Conservative Richard Ottaway ([whose speech on Israel-has-finally-lost-me we excerpted yesterday](#)) in describing the personal journey that many have had to make to support Palestinian rights, as well as the political “intimidation” factor:

I cannot think of any other populous area of the world that is subject to so many resolutions but is not allowed to call itself a state. After the civil war, albeit two years after 1948, we recognised the state of Israel. It was still not the tidiest of Administrations. Its borders were not clear; they still are not. It had no agreed capital—it wanted Jerusalem; at the moment, it has Tel Aviv—and no effective Government...

So many of us go on a personal journey on this issue, as I have done over the past 20 years. Recognition of statehood is not a reward for anything; it is a right. The notion that it would put an end to negotiations, or somehow preempt or destroy them, is patently absurd; Palestine would still be occupied, and negotiations would need to continue, both to end that occupation and to agree land swaps and borders. Refusing Palestinian recognition is tantamount to giving Israel the right of veto...

A lot of people feel intimidated when it comes to standing up for this issue. It is time we did stand up for it, because almost the majority of Palestinians are not yet in their 20s. They will grow up stateless. If we do not give them hope, dignity and belief in themselves, it will be a recipe for permanent conflict, none of which is in Israel's interests.

Jack Straw, former foreign secretary, now a Labour MP, says Israel pays no price for the settlements:

Israel has been occupying Palestinian land for nearly 50 years. It fails to meet its clear international legal obligations as an occupying power. In the last 20 years, as we have heard, it has compounded that failure by a deliberate decision to annex Palestinian land and to build Israeli settlements on that land. There are now 600,000 such Israeli settlers in East Jerusalem and the west bank. The Israelis are seeking to strangle East Jerusalem by expropriating land all around it, and two months ago, they announced the illegal annexation of a further nearly 1,000 acres of land near Bethlehem. The Israeli Government will go on doing this as long as they pay no price for their obduracy. Their illegal occupation of land is condemned by this Government in strong terms, but no action follows. The Israelis sell produce from these illegal settlements in Palestine as if they were made or grown in Israel, but no action follows.

Israel itself was established and recognised by unilateral act. The Palestinians had no say whatever over the recognition of the state of Israel, still less a veto. I support the state of Israel. I would have supported it at the end of the 1940s.

But it cannot lie in the mouth of the Israeli Government, of all Governments, to say that they should have a veto over a state of Palestine, when for absolutely certain, the Palestinians had no say whatever over the establishment of the state of Israel....

Andrew Bridgen, Conservative MP, businessman, talks about the Israel lobby:

Does my hon. Friend agree that, given that the political system of the world's superpower and our great ally the United States is very susceptible to well-funded powerful lobbying groups and the power of the Jewish lobby in America, it falls to this country and to this House to be the good but critical friend that Israel needs, and this motion tonight just might lift that logjam on this very troubled area?

Gerald Kaufman, Labour, says what [Rev Bruce Shipman lost his job at Yale for saying](#), that Israeli actions foster anti-Semitism:

The Israelis, with the checkpoints, the illegal wall and the settlements, are making a coherent Palestinian state impossible.

That is why it is essential to pass this motion, because it would be a game changer. The recognition of Palestine by the British House of Commons would affect the international situation. This House can create an historic new situation. I call on right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House to give the Palestinians their rights and show the Israelis that they cannot suppress another people all the time. It is not Jewish for the Israelis to do that. They are harming the image of Judaism, and terrible outbreaks of anti-Semitism are taking place. I want to see an end to anti-Semitism, and I want to see a Palestinian state.

Nicholas Soames, Conservative, says that the conflict exacerbates tensions in the region, and the legislation will put pressure on the United States:

Ninety-seven years later, the terms of the Balfour declaration are clearly not upheld with respect to the Palestinians, and in Britain that should weigh very heavily upon us indeed. It is in our national interest to recognise Palestine as part of a drive to achieve lasting peace. We face so many dire emergencies in the middle east today; we cannot afford to add to them the continuing failure of the middle east peace process and the inevitable death of the two-state solution....

What does impede peace is a dismal lack of political will to make the necessary concessions and a tendency in Israel to believe that it will always be sheltered by the United States from having to take those difficult steps. Recognition by the United Kingdom would be a strong signal that the patience of the world is not without limit.

Mike Wood, Labour, explains that conditions in Palestine are much worse than under apartheid in South Africa.

The situation is far worse than that in apartheid South Africa, which has been mentioned. It has been regularly referred to as a parallel to what is going on in

Palestine, but the situation in Palestine is much worse than apartheid. The white junta in South Africa accepted that somewhere in the country—preferably not near them —there would be land for black people. It was the worst possible land and a long way from the ruling white group, but none the less the junta accepted that there would be a place for the blacks. A one-state solution in Israel does not accept such a thing. There is no place in Israel and Palestine for the Palestinians....

What Israel is looking at in a one-state solution is a continuation, year after year, of war and violence such as we have seen building in the past 20 years. The Israelis have just finished a third incursion into Gaza in 10 years. Are we suggesting that every two years another 1,500 people should be killed and another 100,000 people rendered homeless as a continuation of the process of driving everybody who is not Jewish out of what is considered to be greater Israel?

David Ward, Liberal Democrat, described Jewish desire for safety in the wake of the Holocaust and Israel's inability to ever have security so long as Palestinians resist:

Quite apart from the Zionist agenda, the need for a place to be safe somewhere was so important because of the failure to find safety from persecution in many other places. All that is perfectly understandable, but what I do not understand is why the Palestinians should have had to pay such a terrible price for the creation of the state of Israel, where it was believed that security could be created, or why the Israelis believed that the brutal expulsion and continued suppression of the Palestinians would ever lead to the sense of security that they seek.

I remember a meeting not too long ago in one of the big Committee rooms in the House of Commons at which there were lots of members of the Palestinian community. I said that the Israelis were winning; I was in despair at the lack of progress. I said that they will not negotiate and asked why should they when the immense support of the US and the inaction of the international community at large meant that they were gaining, day in and day out, and could ignore international law, continue to act with impunity, and, of course, increase their holding of Palestinian land. But a Palestinian rebuked me, saying that they were not winning because "We have not forgotten and we never will forget." How can the Israelis believe that they can ever have security, because the Palestinians will never forget?

Bob Stewart, Conservative, immediately brought up the right of return:

My wife, who is a delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross, met many Palestinians in south Lebanon who still have keys round their neck on a string from the house that they were ejected from in the late 1940s. They will not forget.

Ward mentions the Nakba:

Israel is in breach of the contract set out in the Balfour declaration stating that "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine".

In the light of the Nakba and everything since, that seems like a sick joke. The failure of the international community to recognise the state of Palestine has helped Israel to ignore this commitment.

Anas Sarwar, Labour, emphasized the global attention on the vote:

There are moments when the eyes of the world are on this place, and I believe that this is one of those moments. What message will we send to the international community? There will be those living in Palestine who keep hearing that word, “peace”, while at the same time seeing a continued occupation, an ongoing blockade, further expansion of illegal settlements, and the never-ending cycle of violence and bloodshed, causing fear on both sides of the conflict.

To go back to the issue of previous false dawns in Palestine, the people there have been hearing warm words for decades, but I am sorry to say that words are no longer enough. Our best chance of seeing a rejection of violence and militant forces is by rekindling hope so that people can stop hearing the word peace and start living its true meaning...

Neil Carmichael was one of many Conservatives who spoke of self-determination and justice:

If we believe in internationalism and self-determination, is it not wholly unacceptable, unjust and illogical not to allow the Palestinians to have a state?..

Tobias Ellwood, a Conservative, was unflinching in his description of the shocking nature of the Gaza blockade.

I will start by addressing the terrible situation in Gaza, which I visited last week. I was profoundly shocked and saddened at the suffering of ordinary Gazans. More than 100,000 people have been made homeless by the conflict, and 450,000 people—about a third of the population—have no access to water....Let me be clear: we do not want to see a return to the status quo. This is the third time in six years that conflict has broken out in Gaza and reconstruction has been needed. To illustrate the problem, in 2000, more than 15,000 trucks of exports left Gaza. In 2013, the figure had dwindled to only 200 trucks. The UN estimates that it could take 18 years to rebuild Gaza without major change. It says that Gaza could become unliveable by 2020. If the underlying causes are not addressed, it risks becoming an incubator for extremism in the region.

Mike Hancock, Independent, emphasized the historic nature of the vote:

If we give this motion our blessing, there is not a single thing that will harm Israel, but it will send a powerful message which is crying out to be heard for the people of Palestine, whether they are in the refugee camps—where four generations have now lived—or in Gaza, the west bank, Lebanon, or wherever. The people of Palestine have waited 65 years to get the justice they deserved. We did not listen then: when we could have given a two-state solution in '48, we chose not to do it. People made that biggest mistake.

Julie Elliott, Labour, told a personal story about statelessness:

For me, the issue is very straightforward and very simple and I am going to keep my comments brief and end on a personal story. I have a friend who came to Sunderland—my city—in the early '80s to study at what was then the polytechnic and is now the university. He was born in Gaza and on his travel documents his nationality is given as "Palestinian", but his brother, who was born in precisely the same place seven or eight years later, had "stateless" on his travel documents. No child should have that on their travel documents; it is wrong, it is immoral and it should stop. That is why, on a personal level, I will support the amendment and the motion. It is the right and the moral thing to do.

A moving speech on terrorism as a political tool, from Mandela to the Irgun, by Andy McDonald, Labour:

My father served with the Army in Palestine from 1945 to 1948 during the currency of the British mandate. He did not say much about it, but he did tell me that, at the end of his tour of duty, he had a chit for leave to spend a last night in Jerusalem. However, his comrade pleaded with him to let him have the chit as he wanted to see a girl in town. He had fallen in love with her and did not know when he might see her again, so he was desperate. My dad let him have his chit, but sadly the vehicle that took the soldiers into town that night was attacked by terrorists and the seat that the love-struck soldier sat in bore the brunt of the attack and he was killed outright. That could have been my dad's seat.

There were other terrorist attacks—on trains and, famously, on the King David hotel. Among the terrorists were Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir, both of whom went on to hold the highest office in the newly formed state of Israel. The point I am making is that committed individuals and groups who pursue self-determination might at one time be deemed to be terrorists but then perceived as freedom fighters and, ultimately, statesmen. We need look no further than the journey made by the great Nelson Mandela, as well as taking a glance across the water to the island of Ireland.

Andy Slaughter, Labour, on the shift in British public opinion, to viewing Israel as a bully:

I think that the British people have been on the same sort of the journey as the right hon. Member for Croydon South (Sir Richard Ottaway) described—it is certainly true of the Labour movement—from being very sympathetic to Israel as a country that was trying to achieve democracy and was embattled, to seeing it now as a bully and a regional superpower. That is not something I say with any pleasure, but since the triumph of military Zionism and the Likud-run Governments we have seen a new barbarism in that country. We have seen it in the Lebanon invasion, in the attack on the Mavi Marmara and the flotilla, and, above all, in the three attacks on Gaza, Operation Protective Edge, Operation Cast Lead—

Kate Green of Labour emphasizes the American role, and notice Slaughter saying that the Parliament influenced America/Obama on Syria a year ago.

Does my hon. Friend agree that the message sent from the British Parliament

tonight will also be noted by the American Government and the American people, and that although our influence may not be strong directly on Israel, our relationship with America enables us to use its influence with Israel also to convey that sense of horror?

Slaughter:

I agree with my hon. Friend; I think this will be exactly as the vote in Syria was last year.

As I was saying, Operation Protective Edge, Operation Cast Lead and Operation Pillar of Defence have all been, despite how the names sound, attacks by a major military power on a civilian community.

Karen Buck, Labour, talks about Palestinian rage:

My hon. Friend and I went to Gaza together in 2009, in the immediate aftermath of Operation Cast Lead. Does he agree that, in addition to the staggering level of destruction wreaked on Gaza then, which has now tragically been repeated, one abiding story is the frustration and rage that the people feel about the peace process no longer being a realistic option and about how something needs to be done to break the logjam? I hope that we are starting to do that tonight.

Slaughter says public opinion demands action:

The motion is a positive step, but my constituents wish to see more. They would like us to stop supplying arms to the Israelis when those arms are being used for the occupation and to kill people in Gaza. They would like us to stop importing goods from illegal settlements—illegal under international law. They cannot understand why, if the settlements are illegal, the goods should not be illegal as well. The motion does not ask for any of that. It was supposed to be consensual motion that simply proposes giving the same rights to the Palestinians as we extend to the Israelis. This is about equity.

Sarah Champion, Labour, on the dignity of Palestinians and their right to recognition:

The Palestinian people have been arguing for self-determination for more than 50 years and that is a request that we cannot and should not ignore. More than 100 states have already recognised Palestine, joined by Sweden only two weeks ago. It is now our turn. It is our moral duty to treat Palestinians as the people they seek to be treated as. That should not be conditional on negotiations, the views of Israel or those of any other state. It should be conditional only on the views of the Palestinian people....

This is not an issue for the Israelis to decide, even if they want to. It is not an issue for negotiations. It is an issue for the Palestinian people and the Palestinian people alone. Israel should have no veto over the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. This is a right that is not contingent on the views of other states.

There is a practical issue here as well: the recognition of the state of Palestine would mirror our historic recognition of Israel. It has been 54 years since we

recognised Israel. When we did so, we did not ask the permission of the Palestinians or, indeed, any of the surrounding states. The recognition of Palestine should have happened a long time ago.

Andrew Griffiths, Conservative, remarks on the shift in the views of the British public: Gaza has shifted opinion against Israel:

It is remarkable that there has been a shift in tone, and in the concerns of the House, during the debate. That shift should worry the Government of Israel, because it is clearly losing the moral high ground when it comes to the people in Gaza and the Palestinian issue. I have become increasingly concerned about the way Israel is operating since seeing on my television screen pictures of the recent crisis. It is impossible not to feel the suffering and hopelessness of the people of Gaza. It is only right that we should have this debate and discuss the issue. I would not be a friend of Israel if I did not speak out when I saw it doing the wrong thing, heading in the wrong direction and causing the unnecessary deaths of too many Palestinians. It is for that reason that I take part in today's debate.

I recognise that Israel has a right to defend itself. ... The response must be proportionate.

According to the UN, during this summer's conflict, a total of 2,131 Palestinians were killed. Of those, at least 1,473 were civilians—young, innocent civilians, in many cases. On the Israel side, 66 Israeli defence force soldiers were killed, and five Israeli civilians. I do not believe that that response is proportionate. Israel has lost the moral high ground in the way it acted....

It is impossible not to want to speak out and act when we see such suffering .

Some of the acts committed by Israel were clearly unacceptable. Why was it necessary to blow up Gaza's only power station, leaving already stretched hospitals to rely on generators? Why was it necessary to bomb hospitals and schools, when, as we saw, the threat of loss of life to Israeli civilians was small in comparison? By adding to the suffering of the Gazan people, the Israeli Government have lost the support of the House, and it should cause them great concern.

Lyn Brown, Labour, describes the public groundswell:

Over the past weeks my in-box has been flooded with hundreds of letters from my constituents. Their strength of feeling is undeniable, their arguments are heartfelt, and their conviction is deep-seated—and for good reason. I share those arguments and that conviction.

Of the thousands of letters and e-mails I have received, there is one from Mia Thomas, extracts from which I would like to read today.

"I am a 21 year old medical student and I have just returned from 5 weeks in Ramallah in the West Bank. I am feeling increasingly helpless and frustrated, as every day the death count of innocent Palestinians grows higher and there seems so little we can do about it and our Government will not act decisively..."

Ms Thomas is clearly a brave woman. She came back impassioned, disillusioned and angry. That anger and disillusionment was not just about the

conflict she had witnessed; it was about her frustration that those of us in this House were not giving her a voice. Today I want to give her a voice, in the same way that I believe we must give Palestinians a voice.

Robert Jenrick, Conservative, opposes the motion but cites public opinion:

I am not alone in having received hundreds of e-mails and letters urging me to support this motion. I appreciate the urge to respond to the horrors of the summer in Gaza and the continued, impossibly frustrating impasse.

Jonathan Ashworth, Labour, on the will of the people:

There are times when this House has to send a message—when this House has to speak. I believe that the will of the British people is now to support Palestinian statehood. Many have questioned what is the practical purpose of supporting this motion; well, I ask what is the practical purpose of opposing it. If we oppose the motion, this House will be sending a message that we endorse the status quo, and I do not believe that that is the will of the British people.

Sir Edward Leigh, Conservative, says this is not just the left, it's all who care about suffering. He cites Bethlehem as an inspiration and calls on the Israelis to open their hearts:

My other Damascus moment came when I was standing at the Bethlehem checkpoint and saw the appalling humiliation heaped on Palestinian people. I spoke to a nurse at a hospital I visited as part of a charity I ran. She lived in Bethlehem, just a few miles from Jerusalem. It was just a short walk away, but she was never able to go to the city without enormous difficulties. Bethlehem, of all places, should be a beacon of hope.

I know we will be accused of making a gesture today and I understand the Government's position, but they should listen to the voice of this House. Virtually everybody who has spoken—not just lefties waving placards in Trafalgar square, but virtually every Conservative MP—has said that now is the time to recognise the justice of the Palestinians' case.

I am not speaking in anti-Israeli terms—I am proud to be a friend of that state—but they have to open their hearts. They have to start relaxing controls in and out of Gaza.

Mark Durkan, Social Democratic and Labour Party, emphasizes public frustration at Israeli intransigence:

Where does the international community stand when human rights are sacrificed again and again, and what is its will when international law is violated again and again? Of course, we hear from the Dispatch Box and elsewhere that the Israeli Government are told not to be disproportionate and warned against occupations, and yet the situation continues.

People are increasingly fed up with this screensaver politics, where shapes are thrown, images projected and impressions generated, but nothing real goes on in relation to the substantive issue. People in our constituencies find it

frustrating, but the people for whom it must be most frustrating are those moderate people in the middle east, including those in Israel who know that their security will never come from drenching people in Gaza with bombs, and those in Palestine who know that their peace, rights and liberation will not come through lobbing rockets into Israel.

The importance of the vote, internationally. A Conservative, Crispin Blunt, says he's never been asked for so many international interviews:

As the chief cheerleader of "Get real, United Kingdom" about our place in the world, I say to my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr Lilley), and perhaps to my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) and others who have questioned the importance of this debate, that having had media bids from France, Turkey, al-Jazeera, Channel 4 and the BBC World Service in connection with this evening—unknown for me—I must say to the House that people are listening to the debate, and in the Occupied Palestinian Territories they will be listening very attentively because of our history.

I am immensely proud to have my name on tonight's motion after that of the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris), and I also support the amendment ...

And Blunt then says that Palestinians have gotten an "appalling deal from history:"

The Palestinian negotiating position, in the words of Saeb Erekat, is nothing: the Palestinians have nothing to give in the negotiations. The one thing that we can give them by this vote this evening is some moral and legal authority for their position. Even if it is only a small amount of moral and legal authority, it can begin to help the Palestinian moderates face down those who think violence against Israel is an intelligent course of action. Violence has, of course, been an utter and complete disaster for the Palestinian cause. Israel responds, as we have seen in Gaza, with disproportionate force—I use that term advisedly. The explanation for Israeli action simply does not stand the test. The Israeli Government, faced with the political problem it has in bringing a settlement, has all too often not sought to find the ground on which to deliver that settlement. By this vote tonight, we can give the Palestinians, who have had an appalling deal from history, a little bit of moral and legal authority.

Diane Abbott, Labour, dismisses the anti-Semitism charge:

When we have these debates, there is sometimes a tendency to imply that being against any policy of a particular Israeli Government at a point in time makes a person anti-Israel, anti-Jewish and even an anti-Semite. Let me say this: I represent Hackney, one of the historical centres of the Jewish community in this country. We had the oldest synagogue in the country in Brenthouse road, and there is an impressive roll-call of illustrious persons of Jewish origin who came out of Hackney: Moses Montefiore, Nathan Mayer Rothschild, Jack Cohen, Alan Sugar and Harold Pinter. I think that is one of the finest roll-calls in the country, and I deprecate the suggestion that just because somebody disagrees with the Israeli Government at any point, that makes them anti-Israeli. Of course I support the Israeli people and of course I support the right of Israel to exist, and I believe that that is mainstream public opinion. But it is also mainstream public opinion that something must be done to move the peace process forward, because the peace process is effectively stalled, and it is also mainstream public opinion that the public were horrified by what they

saw—the sights and the killing—in Gaza over the summer, and I think the British public will be very disappointed if we do not have a decisive vote on these matters today...

I believe that the time for justice for the Palestinians has come and the time to recognise Palestinian statehood is tonight in this House of Commons, and I believe that our own constituents, and above all Palestinians overseas, are looking to this House tonight to do the right thing.

Lisa Nandy, Labour, describes British shame at not supporting Palestine:

If not today, then when will this country and this House give the Palestinian people the hope that things will get better? Too many Palestinians can see, as I can, that this process is not a negotiation between equals. The current situation, to which the UK remains wedded, allows Israel—in practice if not in principle—a right of veto over Palestinian statehood. In what sense can those negotiations be called meaningful?...

It shames us in Britain, with our historical obligation to the Palestinian people, that 135 nations have now taken the step of recognising Palestine while we remain among the handful of states in the United Nations that refuse to join them. Half the population of Gaza is under the age of 18. Their lives are characterised by suffering, humiliation and despair.

Lilian Greenwood, Labour, emphasizes the importance of Gaza:

More than 60 years of history frames today's debate, but this summer's violence in Gaza is very much in our minds. All of us were horrified by the images we saw from Palestine this summer. We saw shocking images of dead and wounded civilians—men, women and of course children—shattered homes and wrecked lives. I am sure that we were also appalled by the indiscriminate rocket attacks on Israeli civilians from positions within Gaza. We cannot stand by and allow this conflict to continue. Sadly, it seems that the window of opportunity for a two-state solution is narrowing. That is why it is time to show political leadership in an effort to break the impasse, providing, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) said, a bridge to negotiations.

Britain recognised the state of Israel in 1950. Recognising Palestine now is about equality of treatment. It is about sending a message that a peaceful lasting solution depends on both parties, Israel and Palestine, coming to the negotiating table as equals. It is about sending a message to Israel that it should recognise the state of Palestine as the state of Palestine has recognised Israel. It is about sending a message to Palestinians that gives them hope that freedom is possible, resolve in rejecting the path of violence that brings no solutions and belief that a diplomatic and political settlement can be reached.

Mike Gapes, Labour, emphasizes the historic moment, even as a supporter of Israel, and calls on the U.S. to listen:

I have been denounced as some kind of Zionist child killer by certain people in e-mails and on Twitter. I was even attacked today when I said I was going to vote for the motion by somebody who thought, "No, he can't possibly be." The fact is that this is an historic moment because the Palestinian people need a way out of the despair they face. We as an international community—the United States must also heed this message—must help the moderate forces in Fatah by getting their strategy, which is to take the issue internationally, to

provide the way forward.

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