

STATEMENT BY THE RT HON LORD DAVID OWEN, FORMER FOREIGN SECRETARY, ON  
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The UN General Assembly voted for the partition of Palestine and the British Mandate ended on 14 May 1948. Even before the State of Israel was announced war had erupted in the Middle East and has stayed intermittently ever since.

It is hard to exaggerate the gravity of the situation today in Gaza and now in the Lebanon. The UN Security Council has met and it followed the usual pattern with the UK Government and others abstaining on the Resolution because it did not embrace the complexity of the divisions that exist on the ground and which so far have prevented any real meaningful settlement or peacekeeping deployment.

It is time, firstly, to recognise why Israel was invaded by Hamas from Gaza on 7 October 2023. Scarcely three weeks before, on 17 September, there had been a three-year review of the success of the Abraham Accords whereby the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco had pursued peaceful negotiations with Israel and the way seemed clear for a further expansion and significant progress affecting the whole of the Middle East. Hamas had one single major objective – to destroy the Abraham Accords. They must not be allowed to succeed.

Now the basic conflict has opened up a new front between Hezbollah and Israel involving Lebanon. Active conventional diplomacy led by the US over many months has failed here as in Gaza.

The UN now has two specific tasks.

First, the UN should be seen to back the approach involved in the Abraham Accords which should be endorsed in full now by the Security Council and there is no objective reason why Russia or China would have difficulty in this regard. Putin has been a frequent visitor to Israel and is knowledgeable and has been constructive on many of the issues.

Second, the UN should urgently despatch a well equipped UN force to hold both sides of the border between Lebanon and Israel. It should be manned by troops from countries who own and have experience of handling ground to air missiles and be authorized to use them. Cynics will say this is impossible, peacekeeping cannot succeed where such sophisticated weaponry is being used by the combatants. The answer is that there are a number of countries other than the five permanent members with such weapons who are also proven peacemakers and many of whom I worked with in the Balkans.

The UN peacekeeping ethos is still up to the challenge of modern sophisticated weaponry, the question is are the member states ready to live and operate in a modern environment. I believe they are.

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