

## Malaysia's Foreign Policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian Conflicts: 1957-2014

### *Dasar Luar Malaysia berhubung Konflik Israel-Palestin: 1957 -2014*

NURUL NORFATIAH MD YUSOFF, AZLIZAN MAT ENH & AL AMRIL OTHMAN

#### ABSTRACT

*This study discusses Malaysia's stand and commitment in its foreign policy in the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts from 1957 to 2014. Malaysia's foreign policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts is to prioritise security and stability in West Asia and the Middle East. A more critical aspect of Malaysia's commitment is the liberation of the Palestinian land from the Zionist regime's conquest and oppression, strongly supported by the major powers such as the United States and Britain. Although various peace negotiations have been held between Israel and Palestine, such concrete solutions have not been achieved adequately. The objective of this paper is to analyse the role of Malaysia in the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts from 1957 to 2014. This research uses qualitative methodology involving analysis of primary resources such as files, documents, Official Statements of Parliament of Malaysia, speech texts, and newspapers clipping from National Archive Kuala Lumpur and Tun Sri Lanang Library (PTSL). The result of this study proved that Malaysia had played a proactive and consistent role to seek a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts.*

*Keywords: Malaysia; Palestine; United States of America; foreign policy; conflicts*

#### ABSTRAK

*Kajian ini membincangkan pendirian dan komitmen Malaysia dalam dasar luarnya berhubung konflik Israel-Palestin dari tahun 1957-2014. Dasar luar Malaysia berhubung dengan konflik Israel-Palestin iaitu mengutamakan keselamatan dan keamanan di rantau Asia Barat dan Timur Tengah. Aspek yang lebih penting ialah komitmen Malaysia terhadap usaha membebaskan bumi Palestin dari penaklukan dan penindasan rejim zionis Israel yang disokong kuat oleh kuasa-kuasa besar iaitu Amerika Syarikat dan Britain. Walaupun pelbagai proses runding damai telah diadakan antara Israel dan Palestin namun begitu penyelesaian yang konkrit belum dapat dicapai secara mutlak. Objektif kajian ini ialah menganalisis peranan Malaysia dalam konflik Israel-Palestin dari tahun 1957 hingga 2014. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah kualitatif iaitu analisis ke atas sumber primer seperti fail, dokumen dari Penyata Rasmi Parlimen Malaysia, teks ucapan dan keratan akhbar yang diperolehi di Arkib Negara Malaysia dan Perpustakaan Tun Sri Lanang (PTSL). Hasil kajian ini membuktikan bahawa Malaysia telah memainkan peranan yang pro-aktif dan konsisten dalam mencari penyelesaian yang berkekalan kepada isu konflik Israel-Palestin.*

*Kata kunci: Malaysia; Palestin; Amerika Syarikat; dasar luar; konflik*

#### INTRODUCTION

This article examines Malaysia's Foreign Policy towards the Middle East with particular reference to the Israeli-Palestine conflicts. In attempting to evaluate Malaysia's foreign policy, it would be helpful to examine the principles of Malaysian foreign policy in order to safeguard peace in the Middle East, especially in the question of Palestine. Therefore, Malaysia's foreign policy is guided by peaceful coexistence, equality, respect for sovereignty, and the Palestinian people's human rights. In shaping the Malaysians' foreign policy, emphasis was given to the Malaysian government's role since independence in 1957 up to 2014. The

Prime Minister gave humanitarian support and solidarity to the Palestinian struggle as part of the Malaysian government's commitment.

Since independence in 1957, Malaysia has been vocal about the rights of Palestinian people by standing up to the Israeli settlements of Arab Lands. Malaysia's foreign policy towards the Middle East has impacted the formation of Malaysia in 1963. Since then, Malaysia has recognised the importance of the Middle East and has been actively engaging with the United Nations Security Council and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in addressing the situation in the Middle East from the 1970s to the 1980s. The world agrees that the Palestinian people should be supported, and on

November 30<sup>th</sup>, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People has been celebrated annually since 1981. (Anidah Robani 2003).

For the purpose of this essay, my discussion will examine the history of the Israeli-Palestine conflicts that began with the establishment of a Jewish State that wished to be called "Israel" in 1948. Theodor Herzl created the idea for the existence of the Israel State in Palestine in his book, *Der Judenstaat*. The document functions as a support to establish a Jewish "homeland" (Alan Luxenberg 2007). Furthermore, the Jewish people believed that their Lord offered them a 'promised land' *somewhere* in the contested land of Palestine, as mentioned in the *Old Testament*. This has led to inspiring the spirit of the Jewish people to establish the state of Israel in Palestine (Mustaffa Suhaimi 1988).

Besides, when the Ottoman Empire's power in World War I was declining (1914-1918) (Mohammad Khalis Ibrahim & Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor 2019), it also increased the opportunities for the Jewish people to establish their "homeland" in Palestine. Hence, the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I led to Palestine under the British mandate, which was then handed over to Israel to establish a Jewish state. Moreover, some other alliances such as the Soviet Union, Poland and Ireland also recognised Israel's state in Palestine (Hafidzi Mohd Noor 2006). On May 14, 1948, the Israeli first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, held a ceremony in Tel Aviv to declare Israel's new state in Palestine. Subsequently, on May 15 1948, the Israeli government established a Jewish state in Palestine with the help of major powers, namely the British and the United States (Ermy Azziaty Rozali & Azmeel Fakimi Kamaruzaman 2011). As a result of the declaration of the Israel State in 1948, the entire country became destabilised, and since then, the occurrence of combat in warfare has erupted between Israel's Zionist army, Palestinian and Arab fighters with large cities such as Jaffa and Haifa as battlefields.

Israel's Zionist army did conquer not only Palestinians but also launched violent attacks against them. Israel's Zionist violence continued to peak against Palestinians in the villages and towns area. Irgun troops that committed a brutal murder against residents in the village of Deir Yassin on the 9th and 10th April were also responsible for Jaffa's attack. On May 26, the *Haganah* group launched an attack and expelled the inhabitants of the settlements inhabited by Arab tribes from the middle class (Sarah Ozacky-Lazar & Mustafa Kabha 2002). The *Haganah* (self-

defence) is referred to as the Jewish Underground Defense Organization. The organization was established in 1920 by one of its founders, Yitzhak Ben Zvi, the Second President of Israel in Jerusalem (Yehuda Bauer 1966). The purpose is to defend and protect the newly Zionist settlement and the Jewish settlers of Palestine (Bernard Reich 2005). Innocent children, women and parents became victims of the Zionist cruelty. The survivors of Palestine have been refugees in Jordan, Syria, Egypt and Lebanon from 1948 until 2014 (Mustaffa Suhaimi 1988). It is clear from this series of illegal actions committed by Israel against the Palestinian people. It has attracted Malaysia's attention to be vocal about the rights and justice of the Palestinians and insisted on the stand of issues regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflicts since its independence.

From the Tunku Abdul Rahman era until the Datuk Seri Najib Razak's leadership times, Malaysia has always played an active role in finding a long-lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts. However, it was not an easy task to achieve, a task such as creating a sovereign and independent Palestinian State (Dewan Budaya 2002). Thus, the Malaysian government's firm stands in raising voice on the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts by using international platforms like the United Nations, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and others. The world has recognised the role of the Malaysian government as a security agent (Bakri Mat, Zarina Othman & Mohd Kamal Omar 2018). Malaysia is even more regarded as very committed and has been persistent in supporting and fighting for world peace, especially on the Palestinian issues. This demonstrates Malaysia's consistent stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts (Dewan Masyarakat 2009).

#### THE FUNDAMENTALS OF MALAYSIA'S FOREIGN POLICY ON THE ISRAELI- PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

The conflict between Israel and Palestinians is the greatest threat to peace and stability in the Middle East. The Muslim world continues to be in a constant crisis that includes war, terrorism, killing and violation. It had impacted the relationship between Malaysia and the Middle East, especially Palestine. As an Islamic country, Malaysia has established a mutual relationship with Palestine and has no diplomatic relations with Israel (Penyata Rasmi Parlimen 2006). Therefore, the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict is an essential issue in the formulation of Malaysia's foreign policy since 1957. In fact, during the early stages of independence, Malaysia has developed a close relationship with Arab countries, which is the main objective of its foreign policy. Thus, the formation of the foreign policy of the Malaysian government is to prioritise the security of the Palestinians and support the Palestinian's struggle politically and economically (Penyata Rasmi Parlimen 2012).

It clearly shows that Malaysia's Foreign Policy continues to play an essential role in fighting for the rights of the Palestinians. There are four aspects of fundamental principles that form Malaysia's foreign policy related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts. Firstly, Islam as the religion of the Malay people, and their belief in *ummah* and brotherhood, has influenced Malaysia's Foreign Policy (Shanti Nair 1997). Shanti Nair's study of Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy explains the building of the *ummah* and Palestine as the central aspect of its foreign policy (Johan Saravanamuttu 2010). Therefore, *Ummah* has been the fundamental principle in forming Malaysia's foreign policy and its relations with other Muslim countries. Secondly, idiosyncratic Malaysian leadership also contributed to the shaping of Malaysia's foreign policy. Thirdly, the ongoing issues in Palestine also influenced Malaysia in its foreign policy to seek a solution in the Middle East. Finally, the weaknesses of the major powers dealing with the Palestinian conflict contributed to the factor that influenced Malaysia's foreign policy.

### UMMAH

Malaysia strongly believes in maintaining mutual relations with all Muslim countries. *Ummah* in Islam is a multinational and multi-ethnic grouping, bonded together for a common relation and mutual understanding (Koreshi, S.M 2004). Malaysia joined forces with other Muslim countries to seek a solution on the significant issues regarding the *ummah* and the Palestine Question, Al-Aqsa Mosque, and others (Andika AB Wahab & Aizat Khairi, 2020). Based on the principles of the *Ummah*, the Muslim world strongly condemns violence and atrocities by the Zionist regime against the Palestinian people (*The New Straits Times*, October 19, 2003). Being a part of the *Ummah*, Malaysia focuses on essential issues for the Islamic *Ummah*, such as human rights and the interests of the Palestinian people. This is because the issue of the Palestinians is considered

the *ummah's* issue that should concern Muslims worldwide.

On top of that, it is also related to the Muslim brotherhood and *aqidah*. For example, the attempt to liberate the Al-Aqsa Mosque is considered an issue of the *aqidah*. The al-Aqsa Mosque is the first *qibla* for Muslims, and the place of the Isra 'and Mi'raj event took place that must be kept sacred until the Judgment Day (Anidah Robani, 2009). This is a piece of concrete evidence that the Palestinian issue are a significant issue in the Arab States. It is also part of a universal crisis that remains unsolved.

Therefore, the Malaysian government has been conducting friendly relationships with other Islamic countries based on the principles of the *ummah*. At the same time, the issue of Palestine would continue to be the central issue of Malaysia's Foreign Policy for a long time. Malaysia has all along supported Palestine's cause. Malaysia's foreign policy has placed the *Ummah*, as well as the Islamic brotherhood, as an essential basis when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Over the past decades, Malaysia has championed the rights of Palestinian sovereignty and adopted an anti-Zionist doctrine (Siti Daud & Zarina Othman, 2005). This reflects that Malaysia's Foreign Policy is often shaped by the position of Islam as its centre and its active roles in safeguarding the universal peace and call upon the unity of the *Ummah* as a whole. Malaysia has always been fighting on behalf of the Palestinian agenda on all international platforms and has suggested that the UN peacekeeping mission be sent to the affected area to help restore political conflicts and monitor human rights violations. However, the decision to send a security mission can only be made through the UN Security Council, and no other party has the authority to make such a decision. This clearly shows that the state of the *ummah* is the framework for the formulation of Malaysia's foreign policy connected with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Malaysia continues to take a firm stance and an ongoing commitment to putting forth the Palestinian issues until the peace process can be established in the Middle East (Siti Daud & Zarina Othman, 2005).

### MALAYSIAN IDIOSYNCRATIC LEADERSHIP

The element of "idiosyncratic" leadership is the following fundamental principle for the formulation of Malaysia's foreign policy towards the Israeli-Palestine conflict. Idiosyncratic is a concept in which

the Prime Minister is the most important individual involved with foreign policy development. It plays an important factor in forming Malaysia's foreign policy, especially when it comes to the Palestinians' wellbeing. Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the 4<sup>th</sup> and the current Malaysian Prime Minister, has idiosyncratic leadership skills. His idiosyncratic leadership has become an important basis in consideration of Malaysia's foreign policy. On top of that, he considers the value of Islam, the unity among the ummah, and considers the importance of the ummah's reaction towards Malaysia's relationship with the outside world, especially the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. His take on the issues of the Islamic world, particularly on the questions of Palestine, are clear and unlimited, as part of his commitment and priorities (*Utusan Malaysia*, November 19, 2007).

He puts every issue that concerns the interests and welfare of Muslims in Palestine, Malaysia's foreign policy to be paralleled with other vital issues such as the Southeast Asian Nations Organization (ASEAN), the movement of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Commonwealth country. More importantly, the issue of Palestine in Malaysia's foreign policy is not neglected, despite the Malaysian government matter that has always been Tun Dr Mahathir's focus. Besides, his outspoken character has created enmity with powerful nations as the consequence of defending and speaking up against Palestinians' rights and land. Since Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad became the Prime Minister of Malaysia in 1981, many changes have taken place within the Malaysian foreign policy approach. Malaysia's foreign policy under Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad was used to deal with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (*The New Straits Times* October 13, 2003).

Indeed, Tun Dr Mahathir never hesitated to use the regional forums to protest the country with big powers supporting Israel's cruelty towards the Palestinians. The Prime Minister also addressed Palestinian issues at international conferences such as the United Nations, NAM, OIC, and Arab League. He strongly criticised and condemned devious and unsuccessful forces in handling the rebellion in the Middle East. (Karminder Singh Dhillon, 2009). He is the most vocal leader among the other world leaders in demanding justice on international political issues and opposing the violence committed by developed nations like the United States, Great Britain, and their allies against the Palestinians (Chamil Wariya 1989). Famously known and respected because

of his firm and unwavering stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he became an influential leader and became admired by the other world's prominent political figures. It was granted that the role he played on the issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had been proven to be effective (*Utusan Malaysia*, September 4, 2012).

#### THE ISSUES OF PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

The third fundamental principle in the formulation of foreign policy is the issue of the Palestinian people. It is often taken into account as an essential basis in forming Malaysia's foreign policy in conjunction with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is mainly because it involves the ongoing torture and misery that the Muslims have to bear in Palestine. Millions of refugees who flee their homeland face much uncertainty, such as unemployment and health problems. Loss of property and life, including women, children, infants and the elderly, continues. Many innocent children ended up being orphans, and wives became widows after losing their loved ones in combat with the enemies to protect Palestine from being colonised (*Suara Kebangkitan*, November 7, 2014).

From Israel's Zionist atrocities and ethnic cleansing on Palestinians to the occupation since the 66<sup>th</sup> year (1948-2014), it is extreme and can be considered genocide on a mass scale. The Zionist regime continues to attack and kill Palestinians in refugee camps in Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon and Syria without mercy. Public residents in Gaza, the West Bank, and other provinces were cruelly murdered, including children, women, and senior citizens. Violence committed by the Israelis not only sparked a severe threat to international peace, but the regime also violated the UN human rights and charter (*Suara Kebangkitan*, November 7, 2014).

#### THE WEAKNESSES OF THE MAJOR POWERS DEAL WITH THE PALESTINIAN ISSUES.

Another crucial principle of Malaysia's foreign policy is the lack of support among major power countries in addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The weaknesses of the forces in addressing the Palestinian-Israeli conflict have prompted Malaysia to form a more proactive foreign policy to help the Palestinian cause. Most major powers



claim that they are constantly fighting for the long-deserved justice, human rights and freedom of the Palestinian people. However, they did not take any actions or seek any solutions regarding the Palestine crisis, especially if it is related to the Muslims. This can be seen when other Islamic states often propose a resolution to support the Palestinians, and once the resolution has passed, the United States will not abide and refuse to implement the resolution. On the other hand, all the other countries support a fair resolution and favour a Palestinian state, but the United States will use its veto power to prevent it from being implemented (*The New Straits Times* September 14, 1993).

Since 1948, fewer than 60 resolutions have passed on the Palestinian refugee issue. The UN has a base of security forces in Lebanon and Palestine. However, the Israeli soldiers had destroyed it, and more than 100 civilians were killed. Nevertheless, the UN did not act upon it, even though it is a serious offence since it was a military base. Besides, helps that was sent, such as moral and financial support from other Muslim countries, had generally failed to help Palestine. As a major advocate of Israeli patrons, the United States is undoubtedly pulling strings that can affect its interests. For example, the Oslo I Treaty in 1993 was one-sided and only benefited Israel. On top of that, it did not state anything about Palestine land (Persoalan Palestine 1983).

#### MALAYSIA'S ROLE IN THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Malaysia has made several attempts to resolve the conflict by ensuring that a just and peaceful treaty can be achieved in the Middle East. Malaysia's role in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is by actively participating in the meetings, negotiations and dialogues through the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the United Nations Resolutions and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The purpose is to continue its role in the pursuit of justice and peace for the Palestinian people. Malaysia's role includes international and regional cooperation, the peace process, protests against the Israeli government, Malaysia's humanitarian visit to Palestine, diplomatic recognition to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), etc.

#### INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

Malaysia has played an active role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by focusing on international cooperation with the United Nations (UN). The highlight of Malaysia's commitment and role to the Palestinian issues was obvious and clear during the UN General Assembly on October 7, 1969. At the time, our Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman had raised the issue of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Baitul Maqdis (Al-Quds). In the history of the world, Tunku Abdul Rahman was the first leader from an Islamic government to fight the Palestinian issue and bring the subject matter to the United Nations. Before that, the issue of Palestine was raised in 1952 on the annual agenda of the UN General Assembly but often neglected since it was only considered as a small problem, which is fleeing refugees. Since 1969, the General Assembly has changed its perspective to acknowledge Palestinians as eligible citizens under the United Nations Charter (UN) (Persoalan Palestin 1983).

Malaysia's role in establishing peace and security in the Middle East can also be seen through Malaysia's stand and commitment in the UN General Assembly: Statement on Palestinian Questions on 18 October 1976. At the General Assembly, Malaysia's Permanent Representation has insisted that Malaysia be firm on humanitarian issues involving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The said Permanent Representative, Tan Sri Zaiton Bin Ibrahim, also clearly states Malaysia's stand on the Palestine issues. He is satisfied with the decision made by the UN to bring the Palestinian issue to more immediate attention, mainly if referred based on Resolutions 3236 and 3376. In 1982, at the UN General Assembly, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad voiced Israel's cruelty to Palestinians during the Sabra and Shatila events. He was strongly speaking up on the issue by accusing Israel of being a Palestinian oppressor with the help of major powers like the United States of America (*The New Straits Times*, April 15, 1982).

In 1986, Tun Dr Mahathir vehemently blamed the UN's major powers and their failures in resolving the issue of terrorism. He also ordered the disgusting and inhumane Zionist Israeli regime's actions to be stopped immediately (Foreign Affairs Malaysia, 1986). To top it off, in his speech during a conference in Kuala Lumpur, he stressed that the Jews had a

ruthless order that they were attacking Palestinians daily. The Israeli army and police have attacked innocent people, unarmed citizens, and children in cradle without the slightest hint of empathy. The weapons used by these gunmen were rubber bullets, which have a high potential for killing (Foreign Affairs Malaysia 1997).

Malaysia also held a special meeting during the United Nations General Assembly (Emergency Special Session) on April 24th, 1997. Malaysia's statement and stand on the Palestinian conflict were conveyed by the Malaysian Ambassador, Datuk Hasmy Bin Agam. He has addressed the issue of Israel's illegal acts of occupying East Jerusalem, West Bank and Gaza and other territories in Palestine. The failure of the United Nations to implement Resolution 377 has resulted in the UN being considered ineffective in solving the conflict in Palestine. To make it worse, even the major powers did not respect the UN's resolutions on the Palestine issue. By the request of the UN's majority vote, the issue is considered critical to safeguarding the security interests in the Middle East. Malaysia is also disappointed with the Madrid Accords agreement, which was affected due to the irresponsible attitude of Israel, which violates the agreement, laws, resolutions, and placement programmes (*Berita Harian*, January 2009).

Besides that, Malaysia also attended the 51st UN General Assembly Review Session in 1997 Regarding Situations in the Middle East: Palestinian Issues. The assembly was held at the request of the Arab League and the Non-Aligned because the Israeli government has decided to build a new settlement in Jabal Abu Ghnein, which is situated in East Jerusalem. Malaysia has successfully drafted the resolution but fails to block Israel's actions from starting new activities in East Jerusalem, including Jewish illegal settlement activities (Foreign Affairs Malaysia, 1989). Malaysia had handed over a protest note to the UN Secretary-General Ban Kim Moo and United States Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice on the issue of the brutal assaults by Israel's Zionist army against the Palestinians on 27 December 2008, until early 2009 (Penyata Rasmi Parlimen 2014).

In 2014, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman said Malaysia has tried to send a note of protest to the United Nations on the issue of a 50-day war in Gaza, Palestine. Concerning the crisis, he urged the United Nations Security Council to order Israel's Zionist army to stop military attacks on the Palestinians in Gaza immediately. Though Malaysia's Permanent Representative to the UN,

the Malaysian government has presented Malaysia's statement during the UNFC emergency meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including Palestine, which was held on July 22nd, 2014. Malaysia once again urged the UN Security Council to immediately stop Israel's assault against the Palestinians, especially in Gaza (Penyata Rasmi Parlimen 2014).

The role of Malaysia can also be seen through the Asia Region Seminar and the Symposium on Non-Governmental Organisations on the Palestinian Issues organised by the UN in Kuala Lumpur, 1989. Foreign Minister Dato' Hasan Haji Omar reiterated Malaysia's stand that Israel's settlement was difficult to achieve without eliminating conditions and unconditional Israeli forces from occupied territories, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (Foreign Affairs Malaysia 1989).

Malaysia has made more comprehensive regional cooperation with the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Non-Aligned States (NAMs) and the Commonwealth countries to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The heads of states and the Islamic governments had gathered to seek a solution to the issue of the burning of the Al-Aqsa Mosque by Israeli terrorists. For example, Malaysia's role is reflected in the Summit of Islamic Countries in Rabat (22-25 September 1969). Tunku Abdul Rahman's speech, "... *Israel's occupation of Palestine is a betrayal of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in the holy city of Baitul Maqdis ...*" (Malaysia's Foreign Affairs Department, 1969). In the Islamic State Foreign Minister's Conference in Jeddah on March 23-25, 1970, Malaysia also had a firm stand on the issue of repression by the Zionist regime against the Palestinians. Tun Abdul Razak (1970) has voiced his firm stand and Malaysia's commitment to continue to provide unwavering support in fighting the country's land and the rights of Palestinians. He also pointed out that Israel's Zionist opposition and the curse is clear and decisive. He also promoted the Muslim ummah and brotherhood concept in coordination with his efforts to help the Palestinians oppressed by the Zionist regime (Foreign Affairs Malaysia 1970).

Malaysia's role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be seen in 1971 when Malaysia held a Non-Aligned Movement Consultant Meeting (NAM) in Kuala Lumpur to discuss the Palestinians' issue' political rights. The meeting resulted in the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) invitation, as a special guest to attend the Non-Aligned Ministers' Conference (NAM), which will be held in August of the same year in Guyana. It aims to give the PLO

international recognition as a legitimate political party to form a sovereign and independent state (Foreign Affairs Malaysia 1971).

The role of Malaysia can also be seen through Tengku Ahmad Rithauddeen's speech at the Islamic Organization Conference Meeting in Sana'a, December 22, 1984. As long as the Palestinian issues do not find a permanent solution, peace can not exist in West Asia (Foreign Affairs Malaysia 1988). He continues his support of the Palestinians who are struggling to gain independence and their rights. Malaysia recognised the establishment of an independent Palestinian state and was declared by the Palestinian National Council (PNC) on November 15, 1988 (Foreign Affairs Malaysia 1988).

Besides, Malaysia played a significant role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in establishing peace in the Middle East region. For example, on December 13th 1994, under the leadership of Tun Dr Mahathir, Malaysia criticised and condemned the Israeli Zionist regime, which was not sincere towards establishing peace with the Palestinians and other Arab countries at the 7th Islamic Summit in Casablanca, Morocco. He expressed disappointment: (Foreign Affairs Malaysia 1997). *"Most of us, I believe, are unhappy with the progress of the peace process in Palestine. The Israelis have been dilatory and insincere. But wrecking the peace process will not get us anywhere. Indeed, if the sabotage succeeds, it will force us to begin all over again. And how can we believe that the strategy which got us nowhere after decades of costly struggle will achieve success if we begin again? I appeal to all Palestinian patriots of all shades and political leanings to unite and strengthen their resolve so that the smell gains that they have made can be consolidated and enhanced. In time, you will achieve your objective"*(Foreign Affairs Malaysian 2003).

On December 9th, 1997, Tun Dr Mahathir once again asserted his disappointment over the failure of the Oslo Agreement to resolve the Palestinian issue. He states that: (Foreign Affairs Malaysian 2003). *"This summit takes place at a time when the world is subjecting the ummah to the new threats and pressure. The Palestinians continue to remain by, and large refugees and the promises of Oslo are in tatters. Acknowledged statehood for Palestine seems as distant as ever unless Palestine takes unilateral action, a move which will surely result in unnecessary bloodletting."* Malaysia's hosted the 10th OIC Summit in Putrajaya, Kuala Lumpur, on 11-18 October 2003. During the conference,

Malaysia, under the leadership of Tun Dr Mahathir has voiced the issue of the rights of Palestinians. He states that: (Foreign Affairs Malaysian, 2003). *"To begin with, the governments of all the Muslim countries can close ranks and have a common stand if not on all issues, at least on some major ones such as Palestine. We are all Muslims. We all oppressed. We are all being humiliated. But we who have been raised by Allah above our fellow Muslims to rule our countries have never really tried to act in concert in order to exhibit at high level the brotherhood and unity that Islam enjoins upon us. During the OIC summit, October 17, 2003, Tun Dr Mahathir criticised: "These are facts of history and to tell me that I can not mention these facts of history is to deny me my right to free speech. I hope, please do not distort and misinterpret me"* (The New Straits Times October 17, 2003).

Furthermore, Malaysia was one of the first to take action in the Joint Statement of ASEAN Foreign Ministers - The GCC in Singapore on June 1 2010, in the immediate aftermath of the Flotilla tragedy. The Israeli Zionist regime attacked the Mavi Marmara ship, headed for Gaza carrying humanitarian aid on May 31st, 2010. Malaysia had strongly condemned the brutal acts of the regime under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government, which has acted on the Flotilla's humanitarian aid convoy. The aftermath of the tragic incident included the deaths of nine crew members, and others onboard were injured. On top of that, convoy members have also been kidnapped and treated like criminals (Jonathan Bernis 2019).

Thus, Malaysia has decided to urge the UN Security Council to penalise Israel's actions rather than simply making a weak statement on the issue. Malaysia also works hand in hand with the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Arab League and the other Muslim countries to support human rights, international humanitarian law and the UN Charter on the issue of the Flotilla tragedy. Besides, Malaysia has forwarded its proposal to the UN Security Council to refer to the Flotilla tragedy situation and obtain the International Court of Justice (ICJ) Advisory Opinion. Malaysia had also asked Turkey to consider taking action under the *Rome Statute*, the International Criminal Court (ICC), so that the Israeli could not stop any humanitarian aid from being sent to Palestine, particularly in Gaza. This is in line with the UN Security Council Resolution 1860, debating the issue of cruel attacks



by the Israeli Zionist regime on a Freedom Flotilla convoy that was carrying humanitarian aid (Penyata Rasmi Parlimen 2010).

### CONTINUING THE PEACE PROCESS

One of the most crucial roles of Malaysia is to ensure long-lasting peace in the Middle East by taking initiatives to urge fellow Muslim countries to push forward their efforts towards the peace process. For example, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi called upon the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) to help the Palestinians lessen their struggle. The Foreign Minister insisted that Israel should not be allowed to deny the rights and homeland of the Palestinians. ( Malaysia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1991) "*We can no longer tolerate Israel,*" he said when he addressed the OIC Foreign Ministers' meeting in New York in October 1991. *The text of his speech published here mentions the peace process being developed in the Middle East is a historic opportunity to solve Palestinian problems. The ongoing peace process gives hope to the end of the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian confederation*" (Koleksi Keratan Akhbar UMNO - Kementerian Luar 1985-1991).

At the same time, he worries about other Israel's agenda that will prevent the peace effort. Furthermore, the Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territories are now another obstacle that will delay the peace process. Malaysia is concerned about this and urges the international community to support the Palestinian struggle against the Israeli Zionists. He also urged OIC members to show their sincere stance in support of the Palestinian struggle (Koleksi Keratan Akhbar UMNO-Kementerian Luar 1985-1991).

Meanwhile, Malaysia continued its peace negotiations on the Palestinian issues and Arab-Israeli conflict through Foreign Minister Anifah Aman's action, sending a protest note to the United Nations regarding the 50-day war on Palestine, which broke out on July 8, 2014. The war has caused death, injury and school destruction in the Gaza Strip. The United Nations Relief and Employment Agency (UNRWA), which Israel has targeted several times, was also damaged heavily. Palestinians are reportedly living in poverty after their homes have been destroyed due to the Zionist regime attacks. The Minister of Housing and Public Works, Mufeed al-Hasayna, said the process of *shipment of construction materials was delayed due*

*to the closure of the borderline in the Gaza Strip. "A total of 42,000 homes need to be reconstructed in the region, but we only have enough material to build 900 homes"* (Penyata Rasmi Parlimen 2014).

In this regard, Malaysia urged the United Nations Security Council to urge the Israeli regime to stop the military attacks on Palestinians in Gaza immediately. Though Malaysia's Permanent Representative in the UN, the Malaysian government has delivered a statement during the UNFC emergency meeting on the situation in the Middle East and including Palestine, which was held on July 22, 2014. Malaysia also condemned their vicious military assault on Palestinians, especially in Gaza.

### PROTEST AGAINST THE ISRAEL GOVERNMENT

Even with the rising incidents of violence and terrorism in the Middle East, Malaysia still maintains to seek negotiation solutions and protest against the Israeli Government. For example, on November 21 1986, Malaysia with Indonesia and Brunei protested against President Chaim Herzog's visit to Singapore. His visit to the region was aimed to eradicate anti-Israel activities carried out by Libya and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Besides, Singapore, the Philippines and Thailand are all ASEAN members who have diplomatic relations with Israel. Therefore, the presence of the Israel President has called for protests by political groups and students in Malaysia and Brunei (Koleksi Keratan Akhbar UMNO-Hubungan Politik dan Diplomatik 1966-1990).

Malaysia even went ahead and cancelled the youth and sports culture activities planned with Singapore. This is due to Singapore's decision to allow the visit of Israel's President, Chaim Herzog. The opposition pointed out that Malaysia would never recognise the Jewish government and oppose the Zionist policies of Palestine. On November 20 1986, Johor State Action Committee (JBRM) chairman, Datuk Razak Ahmad handed over a protest note to Chaim Herzog for the Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir, who also condemned Israel's acts of violence against Palestinians (Koleksi Keratan Akhbar UMNO-Hubungan Politik dan Diplomatik 1966-1990).

Chaim Herzog is expected to take a 19-day visit to Asia and the South Pacific. However, he is forced to cancel his visit to the Philippines due to the problems faced by President Corazon Aquino. Reports from



Manila said Aquino considered Herzog's visit unsuitable at the time because he was involved in a peace talk with Islamic fighters, seeking autonomy powers in the Southern Philippines. Demonstrations and protests from Malaysia have affected Herzog's visit to Asia. This clearly shows that Malaysia plays a significant role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Despite Malaysia's protest against the visit of the Israeli president to Singapore, it would undoubtedly affect Malaysia-Singapore diplomatic ties, but Malaysia will not allow Israeli Zionists to threaten security in the Asian region. Malaysia's stand and commitment to the issue of Palestine continue until the Zionist regime stops the oppression and tyranny of Muslims in Palestine (Koleksi Keratan Akhbar UMNO-Hubungan Politik dan Diplomati 1966-1990).

#### MALAYSIA'S HUMANITARIAN VISIT TO PALESTINE

Malaysia realised that a more comprehensive effort was necessary. The role of Malaysia was continued by an active political dialogue on a bilateral and humanitarian visit to Palestine. For example, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak made a one-day humanitarian visit to Palestine in January 2013. He writes history as the first Prime Minister of Malaysia to set foot on the Palestinian land. The purpose of the Prime Minister's visit to Palestine is to consult with the country's leaders on possible steps that could be taken in the peace negotiations and on the current situation. At the time, Palestine confrontation of the Israeli military attacks on Gaza and the West Bank was necessary as it showed the support Malaysia has for the Palestinian struggle. During his visit, Datuk Seri Najib Razak expressed support for Hamas and Fatah and was ready to become the middleman to form a unity government as soon as possible (Berita Harian January 23, 2013).

He hoped that more Muslim leaders from around the world would do the same. This struggle is not only for the Palestinians but also for the *Ummah*. At the same time, he was impressed by the perseverance of the Palestinians in the face of Israeli aggression in their land, and it could be considered an extraordinary moral victory. Through the visit, he and his delegates could see the destruction caused by the Israeli military on targets such as mosques and schools with no military importance. In the brief visit, Datuk Seri Najib was accompanied by his wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, Foreign Minister

Datuk Seri Anifah Aman, and the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Jamil Khir Baharom (Aman Palestine 2010).

At the same time, he said Malaysia supported the consolidation of the West Bank under Fatah and Gaza under Hamas to form a joint government in Palestine. Meanwhile, Gaza Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh said the visit of Datuk Seri Najib was the first foreign prime minister, from outside the Arab countries to visit Gaza. On his visit to Gaza, Datuk Seri Najib was awarded the Honorary Doctorate by Al-Aqsa University to support the Palestinian cause. In his speech, the Prime Minister announced that Malaysia offers scholarships and venues for eligible Palestinian students to pursue studies in Malaysia at the first degree and postgraduate level (The Star, January 24, 2013).

This clearly shows that the visit by Malaysia's Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib to Palestine has strengthened Malaysia's role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as well as, opened the eyes of the world community to Malaysia's concern for the suffering of the Palestinians and the need to repress the Israeli Zionist regime over Palestine. The intrusion by the Zionist regime is unacceptable and contrary to all the United Nations policies.

#### DIPLOMATIC RECOGNITION TO THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION (PLO)

Malaysia continues its role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the diplomatic recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Following the issue of violation of sovereignty and independence in Palestine, Malaysia has taken steps by giving diplomatic recognition to the PLO. Israel's Zionist regime and major powers did not recognise Palestinian political movements such as PLO, Fatah, Bridged al-Aqsa, Ikhwan Al-Muslimin and Hamas, which made it difficult for Palestinians to regain their homeland. Therefore, Malaysia has granted diplomatic-grade recognition to the PLO to grant them the right to self-rule and determine their future without the intervention of other powers. Tun Dr Mahathir declared Palestine as an independent nation in November 1988. Malaysia is the earliest country to recognise the Palestinian state. After the Recognition (Foreign Affairs Malaysia 1988), the first country in Southeast Asia and the second in the world.

Malaysia's support was also given to Al-Fatah's political party when the Al-Fatah Movement Office was set up in Kuala Lumpur. The Malaysian government recognises the Al-Fatah political movement to enable them to carry their duties. The Palestinian Aid Committee was formed several times to raise funds to support Palestinians. The Malaysian government also donated more than \$75,000 to the PLO (Foreign Affairs Malaysia 1970). It is clear that Malaysia plays a constant role and commitment concerning the Israel-Palestinian conflict, especially as the Palestinian issue is not just the issue for the Palestinians, but it is even more about the issue of the ummah. Malaysia's stance to continue to support the cause of the Palestinian people and to provide whatever relief to alleviate the burden of their suffering (Penyata Rasmi Parlimen 2012).

#### PROTEST AGAINST THE MAJOR POWERS

The Malaysian Government, through NGOs, strongly condemned and protested against the major powers for their continuing support towards the Israeli government. Malaysia's concern for protecting the Palestinian people is undoubtedly at top priority, especially for women and children. For example, the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM) has sent a letter to the United Nations Secretary in New York to take serious against the Israeli's attack on Lebanon in 1982 and against major powers such as the United States who had been double standards when it comes to human right abuses against the Palestinians. The Secretary-General submitted a resolution to investigate the massacre of innocent civilians in Beirut and a withdrawal of the Israeli troops from the Lebanon territory. However, it was unsuccessful. Meanwhile, ABIM called on Javier Perez De Cuelar, the UN Secretary-General, to immediately act for peace and urged the immediate withdrawal of the Israeli troops from Lebanon. In a sending letter to PLO leader Encik Yasser Arafat located in Damshek, ABIM congratulated his leadership firmly on continuing the holy struggle of the Palestinians and asserting ABIM's solidarity and brotherhood against the PLO in opposing the accursed Israeli violence (Penyata Rasmi Parlimen November 5, 1982).

Encik Kamaruddin Mohd Nor, ABIM's Vice-President, called on the Islamic councils to urge the Muslim countries to support the Palestinian struggle

and condemn Israel's Zionists violence. On behalf of ABIM, he advised that the OIC headquarters in Jeddah oppose the Israeli Zionist either through diplomatic fields or military fields. Besides, ABIM also sent a protest note to the US Ambassador to condemn Israel's actions in Lebanon. On July 4, 1982, ABIM sent a protest note to the United States Ambassador to support Israel's action in Lebanon. According to Encik Kamaruddin Mohd Nor, the Vice President of ABIM, the protest note represents the sentiments of Muslims to protest the United States. They also called on Muslims throughout the country to provide relief to ease the burden of Israeli Zionist acts towards the victims in Lebanon. Subsequently, he has also established a telegram to the Head of the Palestine Liberation Organization (Yasser Arafat), expressing ABIM's support (Koleksi Keratan Akhbar-Isu-isu Palestine/Bantuan Malaysia July 1975-1983).

#### CONCLUSION

Malaysia's foreign policy towards the Israeli-Palestine conflict is shaped by the fundamental principles that include ummah as its main concern by emphasising ummah, peace, humanity, justice, equality, and sovereignty the making Malaysia's foreign policy. As a country with a large Muslim majority and multi-ethnic population, Malaysia is also active in giving its cooperation to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Commonwealth and the United Nations Security Council. Through these organisations, Malaysia has sought to promote the spirit of *ummah* and solidarity among Muslim countries to find a fair solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Although we still failed to liberate Palestine from the Israeli occupation, Malaysia's commitment and role in championing the fundamental rights of the Muslims continued. The government also provided concrete support to the Palestinians and criticised Israel to stop the atrocities committed against the Palestinians.

Furthermore, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) such as Aman Palestine, the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM) and Mercy are very committed to carrying out their duties to assist the Palestinians. This is because they carry out various activities to raise funds for the finance of the

Palestinians. These bodies present the donations to Palestinians in various forms such as food, medicine and education to ease the burden of the Palestinians while ensuring the Palestinians can continue with their lives. Malaysia will continue to support the people's struggle and the Palestinian leadership in their quest to establish an independent and sovereign nation regardless of which party the Palestinians choose.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research is funded by Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (GGPM Research: GGPM-2019-033).

#### REFERENCES

- Alan Hart. 2005. *Zionism: The Real Enemy of the Jews*. Neha Publishers & Distributors.
- Alan Luxenberg. 2007. *The Palestine Mandate and the Creation of Israel, 1920-1949 (Making of the Middle East)*. Mason Crest Publishers.
- Aman Palestine. 2010. Kuala Lumpur: National Archives of Malaysia.
- Andika AB Wahab & Aizat Khairi. 2020. Smuggling of Rohingyas from Myanmar to Malaysia: A Threat to Human Security. *Akademika* 90(3): 27-37.
- Anidah Robani. 2009. *The Palestinian Issue: A Malaysian Perspective, 1957-2003*. Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press.
- Bakri Mat, Zarina Othman & Mohd Kamal Omar. 2018. Anjakan Paradigma dalam Kajian Keselamatan Insan di Asia Tenggara. *Akademika* 88(1):193-207.
- Berita Harian*. 2009. January 14.
- Berita Harian*. 2013. January 23.
- Berita Harian*. 2014. August.
- Bernard Reich. 2005. *A Brief History of Israel*. Washington D.C: George Washington University.
- Chamil Wariya. 1989. *Dasar Luar Era Mahathir*. Petaling Jaya: Penerbit Fajar Bakti
- Dewan Budaya*. 2002. Kuala Lumpur.
- Dewan Masyarakat*. 2009. Kuala Lumpur.
- Ermy Azziaty Rozali & Azmeel Fakimi Kamaruzaman. 2011. Perang Dunia Pertama, Deklarasi Balfour dan Kesannya Terhadap Palestin. *International Journal of West Asian Studies* 3(2): 19-39.
- Foreign Affairs Malaysia. 1969.
- Foreign Affairs Malaysia. 1970.
- Foreign Affairs Malaysia. 1971.
- Foreign Affairs Malaysia. 1982.
- Foreign Affairs Malaysia. 1984.
- Foreign Affairs Malaysia. 1986.
- Foreign Affairs Malaysia. 1988.
- Foreign Affairs Malaysia. 1989.
- Foreign Affairs Malaysia. 1991.
- Foreign Affairs Malaysia. 1997.
- Foreign Affairs Malaysian. 2003.
- Hafidzi Mohd Noor. 2006. *Israel: Kenapa Dunia tidak boleh Mengiktirafnya Satu Sorotan Sejarah 1917-1948*. Kuala Lumpur: JIM International & JIMedia.
- Johan Saravanamuttu. 2010. *Malaysia's Foreign Policy: the First Fifty Years: Alignment, Neutralism, Islamism*. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Karminder Singh Dhillon. 2009. *Malaysian Foreign Policy in the Mahathir Era 1981-2003*. Singapore: NUS Press.
- Koleksi Keratan Akhbar- Isu-isu Palestin/Bantuan Malaysia. 1969-1973. July.
- Koleksi Keratan Akhbar-Isu-isu Palestin/Bantuan Malaysia. 1975-1983. July.
- Koleksi Keratan Akhbar UMNO - Kementerian Luar. 1985-1991.
- Koleksi Keratan Akhbar UMNO - Hubungan Politik dan Diplomatik. 1966-1990.
- Koleksi Keratan Akhbar UMNO-ABIM. 1984-1988.
- Koreshi, S.M. 2004. *Diplomat and Diplomacy: Story of An Era 1947-1987*. Kursheed Printers.
- Mohammad Khalis Ibrahim & Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor. 2019. Perkembangan Islamisasi di Turki Era Erdogan (2002-2010): Pendekatan, Usaha & Cabaran. *Akademika* 89(1): 45-55.
- Mustaffa Suhaimi. 1988. *Palestin: 40 Tahun dalam Neraka Zionist*. Petaling Jaya: Najdi Publication.
- Penyata Rasmi Parlimen. 1982. November 5.
- Penyata Rasmi Parlimen. 2006.
- Penyata Rasmi Parlimen. 2010.
- Penyata Rasmi Parlimen. 2012.
- Penyata Rasmi Parlimen. 2014.
- Persoalan Palestin. 1983. Kuala Lumpur: National Archives of Malaysia.
- Sarah Ozacky-Lazar & Mustafa Kabha. 2002. The Haganah by Arab and Palestinian Historiography and Media. *Israel Studies* 7(3): 45-60.
- Shanti Nair. 1997. *Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy*. London: Routledge.
- Siti Daud & Zarina Othman (pnyt). 2005. *Politik dan Keselamatan*. Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- Suara Kebangkitan*. 2014. November 7.
- The New Straits Times*. 1986.
- The New Straits Times*. 1982. April 15.
- The New Straits Times*. 1993. September 14.
- The New Straits Times*. 2003. October 13.
- The Star*. 2013. January 24.
- Utusan Malaysia*. 2014. July 18.
- Utusan Malaysia*. 2007. November 19.
- Utusan Malaysia*. 2012. September 4.
- Yehuda Bauer. 1966. From Cooperation to Resistance: The Haganah 1938-1946. *Middle Eastern Studies* 2(3): 182-210.
- Nurul Norfatihah Md Yusoff  
Center For History Politics and Strategic Studies  
Faculty of Social Sciences And Humanities  
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia  
43600 Bangi Selangor  
Malaysia  
Email:nor\_fatihahyusoff90@yahoo.com



Azlizan Mat Enh (corresponding author)  
Center For History Politics and Strategic Studies  
Faculty of Social Sciences And Humanities  
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia  
43600 Bangi Selangor  
Malaysia  
Email:azlizan@ukm.edu.my

Al-Amril Othman  
Center For History Politics and Strategic Studies  
Faculty of Social Sciences And Humanities  
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia  
43600 Bangi Selangor  
Malaysia  
Email:amril@ukm.edu.my

Received: 2 February 2021

Accepted: 27 August 2021