

## **NON-ARAB MUSLIM PERSPECTIVES ON PALESTINE AND ISRAEL: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TURKISH AND MALAYSIAN STATE APPROACHES**

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### **Abstract**

This research conducts a comparative analysis of the foreign policies of Türkiye and Malaysia regarding the Palestinian issue and Israel, highlighting both their convergences and divergences in approaches within the broader context of Jewish-Muslim relations. Ankara and Kuala Lumpur maintain extensive and multifaceted connections in various spheres, such as religion, politics, economy, culture, and social issues in the Middle East. The political stances of Türkiye and Malaysia serve as an insightful comparative case study to understand the engagement of Muslim-majority non-Arab countries with the Palestinian cause and the state of Israel. Their diplomatic initiatives consistently advocate for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Additionally, both countries provide humanitarian and developmental aid to Palestinians residing in occupied territories and refugee camps. This study argues that Türkiye's direct support for Palestine is in contrast to Malaysia's indirect approach, with Türkiye's historical ties and formal diplomatic relations with Israel, as opposed to Malaysia's policy of avoiding direct engagement in most-similar case study approach. However, this paper sheds light on how their policies reflect broader trends and tensions in Jewish-Muslim relations in international relations.

### **Keywords**

Türkiye, Malaysia, Palestine Issue, Middle East, Israel.

### **Resumo**

Esta investigação realiza uma análise comparativa das políticas externas da Turquia e da Malásia relativamente à questão palestina e a Israel, destacando tanto as suas convergências como as suas divergências nas abordagens, no contexto mais amplo das relações entre judeus e muçulmanos. Ancara e Kuala Lumpur mantêm ligações extensas e multifacetadas em várias esferas, tais como a religião, a política, a economia, a cultura e as questões sociais no Médio Oriente. As posições políticas da Turquia e da Malásia constituem um estudo de caso comparativo esclarecedor para compreender o envolvimento dos países não árabes de maioria muçulmana com a causa palestina e o Estado de Israel. As suas iniciativas diplomáticas defendem consistentemente uma solução de dois Estados para o conflito israelo-palestino. Além disso, ambos os países prestam ajuda humanitária e ao desenvolvimento aos palestinianos que residem em territórios ocupados e campos de



refugiados. Este estudo argumenta que o apoio direto da Turquia à Palestina contrasta com a abordagem indireta da Malásia, com os laços históricos e as relações diplomáticas formais da Turquia com Israel, em oposição à política da Malásia de evitar o envolvimento direto numa abordagem de estudo de caso mais semelhante. No entanto, este artigo esclarece como as suas políticas refletem tendências e tensões mais amplas nas relações entre judeus e muçulmanos nas relações internacionais.

### **Palavras-chave**

Turquia, Malásia, Questão da Palestina, Médio Oriente, Israel.

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### **Introduction**

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains the most persistent and complicated issue in modern international relations. International actors, including countries with a majority of Muslims, have strong approaches to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Since the beginning of the problem has been principally regarded as an Arab issue, non-Arab Muslim states have usually remained passive observers due to geopolitical distance and ideological alignments during the Cold War. However, the 1969 Al-Aqsa fire spurred non-Arab Muslim states' involvement in Palestine via the newly formed Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) (Hossain, 2012). Although these states primarily deal with the issue through the OIC, they became increasingly sidelined after the 1990s (Rubin and Laquer, 2008) due to the Oslo Accords, predominant by Arab states, diminished the role of non-Arab Muslim nations in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. During this time, Malaysia also presented symbolic support for Palestine, while Turkiye, driven by regime security, shifted towards Israel. However, Turkiye and Malaysia, as two non-Arab modern Muslim-Sunni states have historical, geopolitical, ideological, and cultural deep ties with Palestine. On the other side, they have divergent diplomatic strategies towards the Palestine issue and Israel.

This study argues that Turkiye adopts a pragmatic and direct approach, balancing its diplomatic and economic ties with Israel while strongly supporting Palestine. In contrast, Malaysia maintains an uncompromising stance against Israel, providing indirect support to Palestine through ideological and humanitarian advocacy, primarily leveraging soft power and international platforms like the OIC. By examining these disparate approaches, the research offers a sophisticated understanding of how non-Arab Muslim nations navigate the complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This study did not select Indonesia, Pakistan, and Iran because Turkiye and Malaysia offer more distinctive perspectives on the Palestinian issue.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to be a significant foreign policy challenge for many nations due to the following three factors: its religious background, entanglement



with regional geopolitical rivalries, and the social and humanitarian repercussions of the conflict, such as displacement and persistent violence. (Bayraktar, 2019). Khalidi (1985) and Disntein (1994) examine the Arabs' views of the Arab-Israeli tension, while Mansab (2024) and Nonneman (2003) explore European approaches to the disputed issues between hostile sides. Slater (2002) focuses on American perspectives in the ongoing conflict. Pipes (1987), Kazziha (1985) and Brown (2003) analyzed Arab approaches to conflict. However, this study aims to investigate the two non-Arab Muslim nations regarding the Palestine-Israel conflict over time.

This article is divided into four sections: Navigating Complexities explores their broader Middle East policies; Turkiye's Policy examines its balance between ties with Israel and support for Palestine; Malaysia's Policy analyzes its firm opposition to Israel and consistent pro-Palestinian stance; and Diverging Paths, Common Ground compares their approaches, highlighting both differences and shared commitments. This paper allows for a comprehensive comparison of the convergences and divergences of how these two non-Arab Muslim countries navigate the complexities of the Palestinian question.

### **Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

This study aims to analyze the Palestine policies of these two (Turkiye and Malaysia) non-Arab Muslim nations, examining the political commonalities rooted in their historical connections and the distinct priorities shaping their roles on the issue. Specifically, the analysis will explore how each country's interpretation of the Palestinian struggle and its perspective on Israel's presence in the region influence their respective policies. Using a most similar systems design (MSSD) (Lijphart, 1971), this study considers Malaysia and Turkiye as two non-Arab, middle-power, Muslim-majority nations with similar normative identities, major pro-Palestinian stances, and membership in Islamic international organizations. Despite these similarities, they differ in their approaches to Israel, which makes them suitable for systematic comparison.

This study employs Role Theory (Holsti, 1970) as its main analytical tool to look at Malaysia's and Turkiye's foreign policies regarding Israel and the Palestinian conflict. The growing field of Foreign Policy Analysis gave rise to Role Theory, which highlights how state self-perceptions, identity constructions, and socially grounded assumptions impact their foreign policy (Hudson, 2005; Hermann, 1980; Breuning, 2007). Role Theory emphasizes the importance of national role conceptions in influencing decision-makers' opinions, policies, and diplomatic behavior rather than considering foreign policy only as a response to material interests or systemic restrictions (Harnisch, 2012). Role theory, which facilitates our understanding and interpretation of states' foreign policies, focuses on the thoughts of elites who determine national policies, their understanding of the international system, and other states' perceptions of their own state's role (Aggestam, 2004, 82). Within the framework of role theory, the identities that states possess are assumed to be a component of politicians' beliefs and domestic politics, rather than a result of their interactions with other states. (Wendt, 1999, 280)

This analytical perspective is particularly important when considering Malaysia's and Turkiye 's approaches to the Palestinian issue and Israel. Both countries are non-Arab, predominantly Muslim countries that actively engage in Islamic multilateral organizations



like the OIC and constantly express their support for Palestinian rights. Despite these similarities, their diplomatic strategies toward Israel and the Palestinian issue are quite distinct. Role theory, which highlights how each state develops and carries out its international role, provides a suitable framework for understanding this divergence.

### **Navigating Complexities: Turkiye and Malaysia's Foreign Policy to the Middle East**

During World War II, Turkiye adopted a policy of non-intervention in Middle Eastern affairs and focused instead on domestic modernization and forged new foreign alignments, primarily with Western nations (Khan, 2015). Following the war, Turkish foreign policy pivoted towards containing Soviet influence. The ideological and territorial ambitions of the USSR posed a significant threat to Turkiye's independence. To counter this, Ankara sought alliances with Western powers. Western anti-communist initiatives, such as the Truman Doctrine (1947) and the Marshall Plan (1948), profoundly impacted Turkish foreign policy. Confronted with Soviet demands regarding the Turkish Straits and the northeastern provinces of Ardahan and Kars (Shamir, 2008), Turkiye sought security guarantees from Western powers. This shift made Ankara the first Muslim-majority country to recognize Israel's independence in 1949 (Smith, 2000). Motivated primarily by concerns over Soviet expansionism, Turkish policymakers also recognized the potential advantages of fostering relations with the American Jewish community to lobby for Turkish interests within the Western power structure. However, this realpolitik decision, which prioritized national security over regional solidarity, alienated Arab states and strained Turkiye's relations with the Middle East for decades.

Throughout the Cold War, Turkiye, as a secular state, viewed the Palestinian cause primarily through a humanitarian lens, eschewing radical political involvement in the Middle East (Aykan, 1993). This stance was further shaped by its participation in the 1955 Baghdad Pact with Iran, Iraq, and Pakistan to counter Soviet influence. However, the pact's fragmentation with Iraq's withdrawal in 1959 and its subsequent transformation into the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) headquartered in Ankara strained relations with Arab states like Egypt and Syria, who viewed Turkiye with suspicion as the West's gendarme in the region (Dinc and Yetim, 2012). For instance, during the 1956 Suez Crisis, Turkiye navigated the competing interests of the United States and Britain regarding Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal (Sever, 1998). Rather, Turkiye's approach to the Arab-Israel conflict prioritized maintaining a balancing act between both the West and the Arab world.

In contrast, events like the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), the Johnson Letter (1964), and the Cyprus Issue all played a role in reshaping Turkiye's Cold War policies and its approach to the Palestinian question. To comprehend Turkish foreign policy toward the Middle East and the Palestinian issue, it is essential to consider both domestic and international factors. Historically, Turkish-Arab relations have been influenced by external factors. Notably, the Arab-Israeli conflict and Turkish-Western disputed views over the Cyprus issue in 1965 have served, at times, to bring these regional actors closer together in pursuit of their respective interests. Arguably, a decline in trust towards Western powers coincided with a gradual improvement in Turkiye's relations with the



Arab world. As Volk (2013, 27) observes, *“Whenever Israel was in direct confrontation with Arab states and whenever Israel was directly humiliating Palestinians, Turkiye was on the side of the Palestinians. Likewise, whenever Arab countries were intimidating Turkish concerns, Turkiye returned to Israel's side”*. So, following the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Turkiye began to diverge from the U.S. Middle East position. It refused Western requests to use the Incirlik airbase for military aid to Israel and instead supported UN resolutions calling for Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories (Abadi, 1995). This shift continued during the 1973 Arab-Israel War, as Turkiye extended support to Palestine and other Arab states.

The domestic politics of Turkiye have played a crucial role in shaping Ankara's foreign policy towards the Middle East and Palestine in particular. Two significant factors in this regard are securitization and the ideology of political elites (Tür and Han, 2011). For instance, the 1980s saw further development under Turgut Özal's economic liberalization policies. Moving beyond the isolationist Kemalist approach, Turkiye adopted a conservative perspective, fostering closer economic ties with the Arab world (Dal, 2012). However, the post-Cold War era introduced new challenges. Turkiye's domestic politics, including securitization and the strategic relationship with Israel, formalized in the 1997 Security Pact, strained relations with some Arab states, particularly Syria (Şafak, 2024). The rise of the Justice and Development Party (JDP) in 2002 initially promised a new era of cooperation with its multi-pronged diplomacy and focus on the East. While this period did see increased cooperation, it was also marked by complex dynamics of competition, particularly evident during the Arab Spring uprisings and the 2017 Qatar crisis.

Malaysia's foreign policy prioritizes autonomy and national interest, guided by principles of peace, justice, and equality. The main objective of Malaysia's foreign policy is to carry out the country's mandate, which serves as an important capacity to protect the country's sovereignty and interests as well as make significant contributions to a just world community through professional diplomatic relations (Dollah, 2020).

Historically, Malaysia's foreign policy has undergone significant transformations. In the aftermath of World War II and the onset of the Cold War (1947-1991), the complex geopolitical environment, particularly the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, significantly influenced Malaysia's political and diplomatic stance (Iannone, 2023). During this period, Malaysia adopted a pro-Western alignment, integrating itself into the US-led anti-communist strategy. However, a shift towards greater neutrality emerged with the establishment of diplomatic relations with China in 1974.

Within the Islamic world, as one of the founders of the OIC, Malaysia, since 1969, has played an important role in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). Its first Prime Minister, the late Tunku Abdul Rahman (1957-1970), was the first Secretary General of the OIC (OIC, 2023a). One of the major steps taken by Malaysia was the signing of the OIC Islamic Charter in 1972. This strategy aimed to project Kuala Lumpur's image on the international stage and indirectly place Malaysia as one of the main and important countries in the third world (Dollah, 2020). Through the formation of the OIC, Malaysia began to collaborate closely and intensely with countries in the Middle East. The OIC is considered an important instrument for increasing multilateral cooperation, which can have a positive impact on the development of Malaysia's foreign policy towards the Middle



East. Malaysia became one of the mediator countries in resolving the Iran-Iraq war (Pertahanan, 2020). In addition, Malaysia also provides full support to the Palestinian people in their struggle to regain their land, which was occupied by Israel.

Malaysia's involvement in world diplomacy, especially in the Middle East region, is evidence that Malaysia takes an important role and participates in resolving problems and conflicts that often occur in the Middle East region. Malaysia is one of the countries in Southeast Asia that has been vocal in calling for Palestinian independence and condemning the brutal Israeli attacks. In this case, OIC has been an important platform for Malaysia since its founding. Through OIC, Malaysia uses its foreign policy to strengthen relations with countries in the Middle East. Furthermore, Malaysia also took part in several important things, such as hosting the OIC Conference in 1974 and 2003 (OIC b) and hosting the Extraordinary Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers on Terrorism in Muslim countries in 2002 (Moktal, 2022).

Under the leadership of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad (1981-2003) as Prime Minister, Malaysia underwent several dynamic changes in its international relations. Recognizing the importance of an active role in fostering closer ties with Islamic nations, particularly those in the Middle East, Mahathir pursued policies to enhance these connections. He notably implemented the Look East Policy, aimed at strengthening economic cooperation with East Asian nations (Hua, 1984). Serving the longest term in Malaysian history (1981-2003), Mahathir capitalized on this tenure to further improve Malaysia's relations with various countries, including those in the Middle East (Jaafar, 2022). Abdullah Ahmad Bedevi (2003-2009) developed the Kuala Lumpur image and initiatives in the Middle East. Malaysia's economic success and image as a modern Muslim nation have fostered closer ties with Saudi Arabia and the Middle East. While religion and history play a role, Malaysia's well-defined foreign policy and shared interests across the region are key drivers of these strong relationships (Harun, 2009). During the tenure of Najib Razak (2009-2018), in contrast to the foreign policy trends observed during Dr. Mahathir's era, he pursued a more moderate stance, emphasizing the importance of improving relations with all countries in the Middle East. This can be evidenced by the implementation of a number of policies with other GCC countries to combat extremism, radicalism, and terrorism over politics and economic relations (Castlereagh Associates, 2019). 24 November 2022, Political Islamist and Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Anwar Ibrahim ascended to office as prime minister in Malaysia. It is important to acknowledge that, alongside the religiously oriented diplomacy, there is a strategic venture to refrain aligning with or being categorized within any certain political or ideological bloc in the Middle East. Despite his past association with the Muslim Brotherhood, there is no indication that Prime Minister Anwar has faced significant obstacles with the influential regional states in the Middle East (Togoo, 2024).

### **Turkiye's Policy on the Palestinian Question and Relationship with Israel**

Turkiye's engagement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was far more closely tied to its relations with Western nations and the Arab world. In 1947, the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine was rejected by Turkiye together with Arab states (Aykan, 1993). Turkiye recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in June 1975 as the only



authorized representation of the Palestinian people. Türkiye was also backing the UN General Assembly resolution in November of the same year, which denounced Zionism as a form of racism and the "fruit" of "this era of power" (Shamir 2008). Moreover, the Turkish government did not accept Israel's annexation plan of Jerusalem in 1980 and criticized and condemned it very seriously (Hale, 2013). Following 1980, the Turkish public's interest in Palestine began to grow. One of the major causes for this is the National Vision Movement (Milli Görüş Hareketi) in Türkiye, which was led by Necmettin Erbakan and takes a political Islamist stance on the regional issues (Uzer, 2017). Türkiye was the fifth country in the world and the first NATO member nation to recognize Palestinians' right to exist on November 15, 1988, when the PLO declared an independent state in exile and adopted all UN resolutions mentioning Palestinians' right to exist (Bayraktar, 2019). On the other side, Türkiye and PLO relations were always reluctant because the PLO sided with the Greek thesis in Cyprus and supported radical leftist terrorists and revolutionary groups such as The Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (DHKP-C), Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) and Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in the Palestine and Lebanon Camps (Makovsky, 1999 and Aras, 1997).

At the beginning of the 1990s, the U.S. had grown less willing to sell weaponry to Türkiye, which led the latter to forge ties with Israel to get a new supply of weapons for its battle against the PKK in southeast Türkiye. National security threats by neighboring countries like Iraq, Syria and Iran shifted Turkish foreign policy to Tel Aviv. Ankara also considered Israel a partner in allying against Syria, a nation that had become more hostile to support terrorist groups toward Türkiye (Walker, 2006). Türkiye also attached importance to her relationship with the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), which was established in 1996 within the framework of the Oslo-I (1993) and Oslo-II Agreements (1995), as well as the cooperation that was focused on improving the living conditions of the Palestinian people. Türkiye supports the efforts of the State of Palestine to be recognized as a state in international forums (MFA, 2023).

When Pro-Islamic Justice and Development Party (JDP) under the Erdogan leadership ascended to power in Türkiye in 2002, Ankara paid attention to the developments in Palestine. Erdogan responded strongly against the assassination of Ahmad Yasin, who was the leader of Hamas (the US, Canada, the EU, and Japan classified it as a terrorist organization, while Iran, Russia, Türkiye, and Malaysia do not) in 2004. His speeches were appreciated by the Muslim world (Atrissi, 2017). In 2008, in Israel's Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, thousands of innocents were killed by Israel's army, and it caused Türkiye and Israel's relations to deteriorate. Türkiye was one of the leading pro-supporters of Palestinians in Gaza and an anti-Israel figure in the international community. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan consistently used harsh language against his Israeli counterpart, accusing Israel of killing civilians. The Gaza War marked a watershed moment in Turkish-Israeli relations in 2008 (Bayraktar, 2019). Türkiye supported Hamas politically and tried to convince Fatah to cooperate with all functions against Israel's pressure in Palestine. Two significant events dramatically changed Ankara's foreign policy toward Palestine. Firstly, on 29 January 2009, Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan fought during a panel debate about Gaza at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland (Hale, 2013). The second is Israeli soldiers



attacking and killing nine Turkish citizens on the Mavi Marmara flotilla sailing to break the Gaza blockade in the international waterways (Cagaptay, 2009).

These tragic events increased Türkiye's credibility with the Palestinians because of how costly its strong anti-Israeli position was—bloodshed occurred during the fleet raid, and its strategic partnership with Israel was strained, leading to negative military and economic effects (Bakir and Abu Amer, 2012). Türkiye canceled the joint military training and projects with Israel. In this context, Türkiye actively backed the State of Palestine in its bid for membership in UNESCO in 2011. Moreover, Palestine's upgrade of status to a "non-member observer state" at the UN on 29 November 2012 by the overwhelming support of the members of the UN, including Türkiye, constituted a landmark in the recognition of Palestine as a state (MFA, 2023). Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Muhammed Mursi came to power in 2012 in Egypt; Türkiye considered it as a possible friend related to their shared common history and Sunni identity. This new alliance affected Türkiye's aggressive diplomatic position in the 2012 Israeli-Gaza war, in which it collaborated with Egypt and Qatar. However, Türkiye's position altered once the Muslim Brotherhood was deposed in Egypt in 2013. During the 2014 Gaza conflict, Erdogan chastised both Israel and Egyptian President al-Sisi, undermining Türkiye's influence. The Rabia sign, which represents sympathy with the Muslim Brotherhood, became an important aspect of the JDP's rhetoric, firmly embedded in Erdogan's speeches and eventually becoming the party's motto (Sultan, 2020).

For Türkiye, the Palestinian issue is more than just a historical, religious, or emotional one. Due to its sensitivity, Trump's declaration on December 6, 2017, to transfer the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, the Turkish government criticized the US's president decision to any form of agreement concerning Palestinian areas, will not be oblivious to changes in the Palestinian problem (Bayraktar, 2019). Türkiye opposed the normalization between Israel and Arab states, citing concerns about neglecting Palestinian interests. The Abraham Accords in 2020 were perceived as weaknesses, including hasty timing, contradiction with the international community, notably the UN, and a disregard for the two-state solution (Bayrak, 2021). Türkiye's discourses changed at the beginning of the October War in 2023. Türkiye's Foreign Minister, Fidan, said, "There should be a guaranteed mechanism for monitoring, verifying, (and) when needed, enforcing the obligations of the parties in a just peace," and "We must be unequivocal in condemning and resisting the loss of any single innocent life" (Calli, 2023)

Regarding the post-7th October Israeli war in Gaza, Türkiye has engaged in the conflict crisis in all formal and informal ways. President Erdoğan, speaking at the 5th Conference of the League of Parliamentarians for Al-Quds in Istanbul, saluted the brave Palestinian children stand out against oppression and criticized those who have massacred thousands of Palestinians, comparing them to modern-day pharaohs and Nazis. He specifically condemned Netanyahu as the "Butcher of Gaza," stating that this dark stain will never be removed. Erdoğan emphasized that Türkiye will not label Palestinian resisters as terrorists and will continue to support Hamas as defenders of their homeland. He reaffirmed Türkiye's commitment to the Palestinian cause and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state within the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. Highlighting Türkiye's humanitarian efforts, he noted the delivery of nearly 50,000 tons of aid to Gaza and the transfer of 900 Gazans to Türkiye for treatment since October 7



(TCCB, 2024). On the other side, Türkiye has disapproved claims of defense-based cooperation with Tel Aviv, affirming that it will not operate in any activity that harms Palestinians. The Defense Ministry stated on April that it is not possible for the Republic of Türkiye, which has always supported Palestine, to conduct any activities with Israel, including military training, exercises, or defense industry cooperation (TRT World, 2024). On 20 April, 2024, Turkish President, following hours-long talks with Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh in Istanbul, encouraged Palestinians to unite amid Israel's war in Gaza (Aljazeera, 2024). In wake of Israel's increased attacks in Gaza, universities, NGOs, and social-political groups in Türkiye organized mass protests to condemn Israel's military intervention in Gaza and to support the Palestinian people (Gungor, 2024; Daily Sabah, 2024). Türkiye also supported Palestinian victims and condemned Israeli attacks in Gaza on international organizations' platforms.

### **Malaysia's Policy on the Palestinian Question and Approach to Israel**

Malaysia has consistently supported the Palestinian struggle and opposed the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land post-1948. The Malaysian government has never established diplomatic relations with Israel but supports a peace plan based on Israel's return to the 1967 borders as per the 1949 Armistice Agreements, with East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state (Parliament of Malaysia). Malaysia's support for Palestine is consistently voiced in international forums, regardless of political factions. Both Hamas and Fatah are treated fairly by the Malaysian Government, even though the official Palestinian diplomatic mission in Kuala Lumpur is under Fatah's authority in Ramallah (Abdulrahmana, 2015). Malaysia's endorsement of the Palestinian people and issue is deeply embedded in its foreign policy, which emphasizes the right to self-determination, as outlined in Article 1(2) of the UN Charter and Common Article 1 of both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966). These international legal provisions underpin Malaysia's steadfast support for Palestinians in their quest for their rights (Yusoff, 2019). Since achieving independence in 1957, Malaysia has prioritized support for Palestinians in its foreign policy, with heightened awareness following the Six-Day War in 1967 (Saidin, 2016).

For decades, Malaysia's support for Palestine has remained unwavering, viewing it as a nation oppressed by Israeli violations of human rights. In 2003, Mahathir addressed the UN General Assembly, attributing many global issues to the expropriation of land in Palestine for the creation of Israel. He reiterated this stance in 2018, identifying this issue as a fundamental cause of regional terrorism (Strait Times, 2018). At the international level, Malaysia has actively supported Palestine from a human rights perspective and has vehemently condemned the egregious violations of international law committed by Israel. In response to accusations of anti-Semitism against Malaysia and particularly against Mahathir, the Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has emphasized diplomatic values and adherence to international law in its public diplomacy messages (Chooi, 2012). Despite the geographical distance from Palestine, Malaysia has maintained its steadfast support by refusing to recognize Israel as a sovereign state. Notably, Malaysia is among the few countries that do not have diplomatic relations with Israel (AP News, 2019). On multiple



occasions, Malaysia has barred entry to Israeli athletes intending to participate in international sports competitions in Kuala Lumpur (Strait Times, 2021).

Another significant motivation for Malaysia's vocal support of Palestine is the humanitarian issue, central to the critique of Israel's indiscriminate actions. Malaysia consistently condemns Israel and highlights the humanitarian violations against Palestinians in international forums. A notable example of this advocacy is the formation of Viva Palestina Malaysia (VPM), a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) dedicated to raising support for the Palestinian people, focusing specifically on humanitarian issues (Koss, 2019). Malaysia-Israel relations are a particularly sensitive issue for Muslims in Malaysia. Malaysia, along with most Muslim-majority countries, has never recognized Israel as a sovereign state and maintains no diplomatic relations with it. Reflecting this stance, former Malaysian Foreign Minister Dato' Sri Saifuddin bin Abdullah, during the 74<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Nakbah Day (May 14, 1948) in Putrajaya, stated, "*Malaysia will continue to express unwavering support and solidarity with our Palestinian brothers and will not even establish relations with Israel.*" (Ahmad, 2022).

At the 15<sup>th</sup> East Asia Summit in Hanoi in Vietnam in 2020, Malaysia's role in advocating a two-state solution was evident. The summit included participation from the United States, represented by National Security Advisor Robert C. O'Brien. Former Malaysian Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin addressed the forum, where he affirmed Malaysia's solidarity with Palestine (East Asia Summit Document Series, 2020). Additionally, the Malaysian government, alongside Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam, issued a Joint Statement condemning the escalation of violence by Israelis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. They emphasized their support for establishing an independent and sovereign Palestinian state and reiterated their solidarity with the Palestinian people (United Nations General Assembly, 2021). Malaysia, along with these countries, demanded an end to Israel's attacks on Palestinians.

Similarly, on December 6, 2017, when the United States under President Donald Trump recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, significant protests occurred at the US embassy in Kuala Lumpur. Demonstrators called for the US to rescind its statement and urged the Malaysian government to take immediate action to support Palestine (Razif, 2018). During these protests, notable Malaysian politicians such as former Prime Ministers Najib Razak and Mahathir Mohamad participated, condemned Trump's decision and expressed their support for Palestine. These leaders, along with various Malaysian NGOs supporting Palestinian independence, have built a strong transnational network aimed at promoting Palestinian independence and assisting relevant actors in realizing this goal (Ridzuan and Majid, 2023). In coordination with Turkiye, on 27 July 2019, former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad emphasized the need for Malaysia and Turkiye to collaborate to keep the Palestinian issue prominent despite efforts to downplay it (D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation, 2019). Similarly, on 12 May 2021, the President of Turkiye discussed the Palestinian issue with the King of Malaysia and the Emir of Qatar, highlighting the need for unity against the oppression faced by Palestinians due to Israeli attacks on the al-Aqsa Mosque (Mulia, 2021).

Malaysia's longstanding anti-Israel stance has intensified in the context of the 7 October Gaza War. Kuala Lumpur's hostility toward Tel Aviv is impacted by both international and domestic reasons. Internationally, the Malaysia supports Palestinian rights in to assist



Islamic values. Domestically, it uses anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian rhetoric to strengthen its influence and position among the Muslim-majority population (Redlich, 2024). On 17 October 2023, the Malaysian Government called on the international community to prevent massacres and ethnic cleansing by Israel against the Palestinian people. During the Ministerial Question Time (MQT) in Parliament, Prime Minister Ibrahim reiterated Malaysia's firm stance on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, demanding an immediate cessation of hostilities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs). He condemned all forms of violence against women, children, and civilians by any party and expressed his dismay at the global silence and inaction in the face of Palestinian suffering in Gaza.

On 22 October 2023, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim met with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Istanbul to discuss various issues, including the Palestinian situation. Malaysia, along with other Islamic countries, pledged to support Turkiye's significant decisions and policies to establish a sovereign Palestinian state (Harian Bernama Malaysia, 2023). On 24 October Ibrahim also participated Malaysia Islamic Youth Organization's protest with his 16.000 citizens to solidarity with Palestine and condemn to Israel (Reuters, 2023). He said *"It's a level of insanity ...it's the height of barbarism in this world"*.

On 31 October 2023, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim addressed in the parliament that *"Malaysia strongly rejects all forms of terrorism and categorically condemns the actions of killing innocent lives and taking women and children as hostages in Palestine."* On March 2023 Anwar Ibrahim, during the Germany and Malaysia diplomatic meeting, told that *"What I reject strongly is this narrative, this obsession, as if the entire problem begins and ends with the 7th of October. It did not begin on the 7th October and did not end with the 7th of October. It began four decades before that and continues daily"* (Lagardien, 2024). Additionally, he condemned Western countries, including the United States, for failing to act against Israeli oppressors in a television program aired on Arab News (2024). As of 2024, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has received complaints from the Palestinian Authority and several international human rights groups alleging Israel of war crimes in the West Bank and Gaza. Following the intensification of the confrontation between Israel and Hamas on October 7, 2023, this judicial process gained quickness (ICC, 2024). Turkiye and Malaysia have closely monitored the ICC proceedings and expressed their support for Palestinian rights under international law. Turkiye supports legal applications to the ICC for Palestine, and Turkish President Erdoğan urged for international action, citing proof of Israeli war crimes (Hürriyet Daily News, 2024). Anwar Ibrahim, Malaysia's prime minister, supported the ICC's probe into Gaza and called for sanctions and a quicker legal procedure (Anadolu Agency, 2024). On 8 June 2024, Malaysia and Turkiye together with other six members of D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation Organization in Istanbul issued a joint declaration to call an immediate ceasefire and lift US veto to full membership of Palestine in at the UN, and enforce international pressure on Israel's violation in Gaza (D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation, 2024).



## **Different Ways and Common Ground: Turkiye and Malaysia's Policies on the Palestinian and Israel**

Two prominent non-Arab Muslim nations, Malaysia and Turkiye, have different but similar stances on the Palestinian problem. Although both nations strongly support Palestinian rights, their strategies for responding to diplomacy are very different. Turkiye's approach is defined by direct engagement and pragmatic diplomacy. Historically, Turkiye continued diplomatic relations with Israel. However, Turkiye has also stood up as a key supporter for Palestinian statehood, supporting international recognition initiatives and providing significant humanitarian aid. Under the President Erdogan's leadership, Turkiye's pro-Palestinian stance has enhanced, particularly following the Gaza wars in 2008. By striking a balance between ideological commitments and strategic goals, Turkiye chose to maintain commerce ties with Israel despite its outspoken criticism.

Malaysia has a strong anti-Israel stance, refusing to recognize Israel or build diplomatic relations. Based on Islamic sympathy and humanitarian campaigns, its foreign policy places significant value on its unwavering support for Palestine. Malaysia employs its position in the UN and OIC to object to Israeli policies and advocate for Palestinian statehood. Global action is encouraged by leaders such as Anwar Ibrahim and Mahathir Mohamad, who argue against Western backing for Israel. Unlike Turkiye, Malaysia uses soft power rather than direct engagement to impose economic restrictions on Israel and organize pro-Palestinian protests. However, with a focus on using international justice systems like the ICC to hold Israel responsible, both nations have increased their diplomatic and humanitarian efforts. The main differences between Turkiye and Malaysia are based on their approaches to engagement. Turkiye's strategy combines pragmatic diplomacy and active engagement, keeping relations with both Israel and Palestinian groups while promoting Palestinian sovereignty. Malaysia's approach is more rigorous and ideological, preferring a total boycott of Israel and prioritizing moral and humanitarian advocacy before direct political action. While both states support the Palestinian cause, Turkiye pursues a more sophisticated, strategic approach, whilst Malaysia pursues a consistent, steadfast pro-Palestinian posture in its foreign diplomacy.

## **Conclusion**

Turkiye and Malaysia, two non-Arab developed countries in the Islamic world, presented both similarities and differences in their approaches to the Palestinian issue and relations with Israel in this study. *Malaysia usually is a more vocal stance* frequently criticizing Israeli policies towards Palestine, *but is more practical than Turkiye, at least does not recognize Israel or have formal* relations with it. While Turkiye plays a more active role for instance, in mediation, hosting Hamas and PLO leaders and providing humanitarian assistance. *However*, Turkiye recognized Israel diplomatically in 1949 to safeguard national interests during the Cold War and largely avoided involvement in Arab world issues until the 1960s.

Turkiye also advocates for a negotiated resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on UNSC Resolutions 242, 338, 1397, and 1515, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative, and the Road Map, promoting two states living side by side within secure



and recognized borders. Malaysia also endorses these UNSC Resolutions in international forums but refrains from establishing diplomatic relations with Israel to firmly oppose Zionist policies in Palestine. Malaysia's foreign policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is straightforward, emphasizing the ummah, humanitarian concerns, strong leadership, and criticism of the superpowers' handling of the conflict and human rights issues. Both Turkiye and Malaysia, as members of the United Nations, D8, and OIC, vocally support Palestinian independence in various international forums. While Turkiye takes a more confrontational and implement pro-Islamist strategy, Malaysia emphasizes peaceful advocacy through international organizations such as the OIC and ASEAN.

Both countries passionately support Palestinian independence, but their methods reflect varying degrees of participation and ideological objectives. Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East, particularly Palestine, is shaped by its own governments and varies with the ideological orientation of its ruling parties, being more proactive during conservative administrations and more reserved during secular ones. In contrast, Malaysia's position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has remained steadfast and consistent across various administrations, from the tenure of Tunku Abdul Rahman to Anwar Ibrahim. Malaysia actively advocates for a just resolution to the conflict, consistently articulating its stance in domestic and international forums. Additionally, Malaysia supports Turkiye's pro-Palestinian position while upholding non-interference principles in other nations' internal policies. It also engages in bilateral cooperation with countries like Turkiye to address international crises, including the Palestinian issue. Turkiye and Malaysia maintain strong relationships with the PLO and Hamas concerning the Palestinian cause. Both countries' conservative policymakers utilize the Palestinian issue to bolster their positions against secular opposition parties in local political competition. For political Islamist leaders like Erdogan and Anwar Ibrahim, the Gaza conflict is also a significant event for enhancing their stature within the Islamic world. Substantially, Malaysia focuses on strong discursive but keeps a distance, while Turkiye actively and closely engages in the situation.

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