

Islamic Diplomacy and the Palestinian Quest for Peace and Independence: An Analytical Perspective

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Abstract

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The Israeli occupation of Palestine is a stain and a black mark on the life of inter-state and international relations in this century. Independence for all nations and countries seems like an impossibility; the UN, as an international institution established to create peace and justice for the world's nations, has failed to fulfill its function. The UN Security Council, responsible for maintaining security, has not offered protection to the Palestinian people. Instead, it has permitted Israel to commit massacres and war crimes against countless lives without reprimand or justice. Similarly, countries around the world seem powerless, able only to condemn without the strength to intervene or stop the situation. This article is written as an effort to explore the opportunities and challenges for the Palestinian state in achieving peace and independence within the realm of international diplomacy. The approach used is based on concepts of Islamic diplomacy, whose main objective is to maintain and create peace among different religious communities and humanity as a whole. This research employs a qualitative methodology with direct fieldwork. The researcher traveled to countries adjacent to Palestine and Israel, including Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and also Indonesia. Although Indonesia is far away, its uniqueness as a predominantly Muslim nation creates an emotional and political affinity with the Palestinian cause. The research results indicate that the primary challenge for Palestinian independence diplomacy is the lack of unity among Arab countries when confronting Israeli and American diplomacy. Most nations prioritize their own national interests over providing direct support for Palestinian diplomacy and independence.

I. INTRODUCTION

The tragedy of the killing of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, Iran, further complicates the path to achieving peace and a ceasefire between Palestine and Israel. Ending the conflict between Palestine and Israel is a crucial gateway to achieving peace between the two nations and serves as a foundational step towards Palestinian independence. Without a resolution to the war from both sides, the dream of the Palestinian people to achieve independence remains unattainable. Independence is a right for all nations and is also a primary interest for every country.

Without peace and independence, a nation cannot achieve happiness and prosperity. In international relations, independence and peace are fundamental concepts. This is why nations engage in diplomacy, with the primary goal of preventing misunderstandings and conflicts, and subsequently cooperating to fulfill shared interests for the well-being of both the people and the state. Similar to Western diplomacy, Islamic diplomacy aims to achieve lasting peace, cooperation, and tolerance. The distinction between Western and Islamic diplomacy lies in their motivations and values. Western diplomacy focuses on logic and national interests as its primary driving forces, whereas Islamic diplomacy is guided by religious values. The guidance provided by God's commands, as exemplified by the Prophet, serves as the primary framework for individual, societal, and national conduct. In Islam, the essential human needs that should be supported by the state are known as “dhoruriyatul khomsah” or 'the five necessities,' which in Ushul Fiqih are termed “maqashid syari'ah” meaning 'the interests and objectives of implementing religious laws. This is crucial and paramount.

Articles discussing the conflict between Israel and Palestine may seem outdated and old, given that Israel has maintained power and occupied Palestinian land since 1948. However, articles focusing on the struggle of the Palestinian people to achieve their independence remain important and relevant until their independence is fully realized. The unjust treatment of Palestinians by Israel cannot be ignored and must be addressed. Humanitarian issues will always be a central concern in international relations, as will issues of war and peace. This is the primary reason why articles about the challenges faced by Palestine in achieving independence are crucial to write and read by all segments of society worldwide.

This article aims to analyze the core issues and challenges facing Palestinian diplomacy in their quest for peace and independence, in relation to the political situations and conditions of neighboring countries like Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, as well as Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority nation with historical and identity connections to Palestine. Thus, the primary question explored in this article is how the challenges of Palestinian diplomacy in achieving their

independence are shaped by the foreign policies of these neighboring countries: Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia.,

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach, with data collected through direct observation by visiting countries such as Saudi Arabia, Syria, Lebanon, and Indonesia. For Egypt, the researcher was only able to collect data from digital news sources due to issues with the visa application process. While visiting these countries, the researcher had the opportunity to engage in discussions with Indonesian diplomats, including the Indonesian Ambassador to Syria, Dr. Wajid Fauzi; the Indonesian Ambassador to Lebanon, H.E. Hajriyanto Thohari; the Indonesian Deputy Ambassador to Egypt, Dr. Aji Surya; and a young Indonesian diplomat in Saudi Arabia, Mr. Ilham Effendi. The insights from these discussions were compiled into a narrative and analyzed alongside the collected data and facts.

This study employs concepts from Islamic diplomacy (Abu Zahrah, 1995), such as ta'awun (cooperation), mu'malah bi mitsli (reciprocal dealings), at-tasamuh (tolerance), al-huriyah (freedom), al-'adalah (justice), and al-mawaddah wal man'u fasad (affection and prevention). These concepts will be used to analyze and explain the issues and challenges facing Palestinian diplomacy in its pursuit of peace and independence. Alongside primary data gathered from field observations, secondary data, including digital media reports about Palestine and Israel and the foreign policies of neighboring countries relevant to the Palestinian issue, is also utilized. This data is then selected and analyzed to be presented in a descriptive analysis framed by Islamic diplomacy principles.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The assassination of Ismail Haniyeh in an attack in Tehran, Iran, at the end of July 2024 has stirred global attention. Many suspect that Israel may be behind the killing of the Hamas leader, though no official confirmation has been provided regarding the party responsible for the tragedy. Haris Fadhil reported on detik.com that Haniyeh and his security team were killed at the guesthouse where he was staying after attending the inauguration of Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian. The circumstances of Haniyeh's death remain unclear; initial reports suggested he was killed by a missile, while other reports indicate that he was killed by a bomb smuggled into the guesthouse where he and his guards were staying (Fadhil, 2024).

The killing of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh has further complicated the path to peace between Israel and Palestine. The loss of this leader is unlikely to diminish the resolve of Hamas and other factions in Palestine. It may even bolster the ammunition and fighting spirit of the Mujahideen in Gaza. The hopes for peace, which had been voiced since the October 7th attack, have suddenly vanished. On the Israeli side,

represented by Benjamin Netanyahu, repeated statements have been made rejecting all efforts for peace and ceasefire. According to a report from VoA Indonesia titled “Netanyahu Tolak Tuntutan Gencatan Senjata Hamas” it was reported that the offer to release hostages and agree to a ceasefire was not accepted. Another report, titled “Perang Melawan Terorisme akan Berlanjut Sepanjang Waktu”, mentioned that Netanyahu has firmly closed the door to peace negotiations between the two conflicting parties (VoA Indonesia, 2024).

The attempts at reconciliation and unity between Hamas and Fatah, aimed at enhancing Palestine's leverage on the global stage, seem to have failed. According to a report by detiknews, former Indonesian President Jusuf Kalla met with Ismail Haniyeh in Doha, Qatar, in mid-July 2024 to discuss strategies for achieving peace in Palestine, particularly in stopping Israeli military aggression. Jusuf Kalla also requested Ismail Haniyeh to pursue reconciliation and unity between Hamas and Fatah (Dhani Irawan, 2024). The fragmentation of these two major Palestinian factions, Hamas and Fatah, significantly undermines Palestine's position. The global community is likely to view and judge that if Palestine's internal factions are not united and cohesive, it will be challenging to seek and obtain international support for Palestinian independence in the future.

In contrast, Israel's diplomatic position has been reinforced as numerous countries in the Middle East and Africa have recognized its existence and established relations. According to CNBC Indonesia journalist Thea Fathanah Arbar, at least six countries have normalized relations with Israel. The first was Egypt, following the peace treaty signed on September 17, 1978. Jordan was the second, signing a peace agreement on October 26, 1994, in Arava. The United Arab Emirates normalized relations with Israel in 2020, and in the same year, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco also signed agreements (CNBC Indonesia, 2022). The increasing strength of Israel's diplomatic position, bolstered by its ally the United States in the Middle East, has led to a corresponding weakening of Palestine's position, making the goal of Palestinian independence seem further away.

The situation is made even more challenging by the inconsistency in support from Palestine's neighboring countries, influenced by internal and external factors as well as the political policies of their leaders. Below is a brief overview of the conditions and situations in the countries surrounding Palestine:

A. Egypt

Among the Arab nations, Egypt was the first to recognize Israel. The defeat of Egypt in several wars against Israel and the loss of key territories as a result compelled Egypt to sign a peace agreement with Israel, mediated by the United States. The Camp

David Accords, signed on September 17, 1978, with American assistance, marked this agreement. Misbahul Ulum's article explains that the treaty signing was a strategic move by President Anwar Sadat to resolve Egypt's economic crisis, which had been exacerbated by years of conflict with Israel. The agreement also aimed to regain the Sinai Peninsula, which Israel had controlled since the Six-Day War of 1967 (Ulum, 2019). The result of this treaty and Egypt's recognition of Israel altered Egypt's foreign policy from one of support for Palestine to a more neutral stance. This shift has been detrimental to Palestine, as they have lost the support of a neighboring country.

With the transition from Mubarak to Mursi and then to Sisi, Egypt has experienced various crises, leading to economic recession. The Egyptian pound has depreciated, causing a sharp increase in the cost of essential goods. Consequently, the Egyptian government has prioritized domestic issues over active participation in foreign affairs. This is why Palestine seems to be fighting its battle alone, as Egypt, its closest neighbor, is more focused on its internal problems.

B. Lebanon

Lebanon was one of the five Arab nations that declared war on Israel when the state of Israel was first declared. As described by Widya Lestari Ningsih, following David Ben-Gurion's declaration of Israel's establishment on May 14, 1948, the next day, five Arab countries—Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon—declared war. These countries were subsequently defeated by Israel, with parts of Lebanon even being occupied by Israeli forces. During the Six-Day War on June 5, 1967, Lebanon also participated, but once again, the combined Arab forces faced defeat. Continuous conflicts have occurred between Israel and Lebanon, involving both Palestinian fighters based in Lebanon and armed Hezbollah members backed by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. To manage the situation and ensure security along the Israel-Lebanon border, the UN Security Council established UNIFIL through Resolution 425, which continues its duties to this day (Ningsih, 2023).

Currently, Lebanon is a failed state. According to Puspaningrum, President Michel Aoun vacated the presidency on October 30, 2022, without a successor, amid a nation deeply divided and grappling with a prolonged financial crisis (Puspaningrum, 2022). The absence of a president has made it difficult for Lebanon to pursue an effective foreign policy. The government struggles even to maintain a 24-hour electricity supply domestically, demonstrating the substantial challenges facing the upcoming Lebanese government. If there is no significant progress in Lebanon in the coming years, the prospect of active support for Palestine will remain elusive. This implies that Palestine might again be left to fight for its independence on its own.

C. Syria

In addition to Lebanon and Egypt, Syria was another Arab country that engaged in confrontation and declared war the day after the establishment of Israel. To this day, the conflict between Syria and Israel continues, though not as intensely. Reporting by Novi Christiastuti reveals that Israeli missiles targeted two airbases in Syrian territory in late July 2023. While no casualties were reported, the attacks indicate that the conflict between the two nations has not ended. Israel believes that Hezbollah forces based in Syria and Lebanon remain a significant threat (Christiastuti, 2024).

The U.S. government's boycott of Syria since 2011 has severely impacted the Syrian government. This boycott has made it difficult for Syria to achieve economic stability. Similar to Lebanon, the Syrian government struggles to provide 24-hour electricity to its citizens. When a country faces domestic challenges, its active role on the international stage diminishes, as it focuses more on internal issues.

President Bashar al-Assad's leadership remains under threat. It is not improbable that, following the defeat of ISIS, other armed groups with similar intentions might emerge to challenge the official government. The economic and political instability in Syria has diminished its role in the issue of Palestinian independence, making its involvement seem almost negligible.

D. Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia, a significant player in the Middle East, views the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a collective responsibility of all Arab nations and the Muslim community. This responsibility has been enshrined in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy since 1943, making the Palestinian-Israeli conflict a continuous priority for the Saudi government. Saudi Arabia has formulated peace initiatives in 1982 and 2002 to address the issue of Palestinian independence (Ramdhani, Hamad, Tadjoedin, 2007). The 1982 and 2002 initiatives outline two key approaches for Saudi Arabia: first, to align with other Arab nations, and second, to establish relations with the United States to encourage it to act as an impartial mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, the U.S. has largely favored Israel.

The U.S.'s failure to act as a neutral mediator highlights Saudi Arabia's difficulties in fulfilling its foreign policy mission. Factors obstructing Saudi Arabia's plans include pro-Israel lobbying affecting U.S. decisions, U.S. dominance over Saudi Arabia in political, military, and economic spheres, and the socio-cultural differences that have impeded full support from the Saudi public. Furthermore, the limited pro-Palestinian influence in Saudi Arabia, due to restrictions on public expression and decision-making, has led the Kingdom to rely on U.S. initiatives (Hakim, Hassan, Rauf, Shambazy, 1999).

The recent shift in Saudi domestic and foreign policy following the Vision 2030 declaration has further complicated the focus on Palestinian independence. The Kingdom has redirected its priorities towards sustainable development and boosting national revenue beyond the oil sector, slowly reducing its oil dependency. While economic challenges were significant for Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria in their support for Palestine, Saudi Arabia's change in focus from leading Arab and Islamic nations in the fight for Palestinian independence to pursuing economic independence and reducing oil dependency has reshaped its global stance.

E. Indonesia

Despite not being an Arab country and being geographically distant from Palestine, the Indonesian government and its people are strongly committed to supporting Palestinian independence. This commitment is rooted in shared identity as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world and its historical experience of colonization, which parallels the plight of Palestine. This is why the founders of Indonesia enshrined in the 1945 Constitution that independence is the right of all nations and that colonialism must be eradicated as it is incompatible with humanity and justice.

Another foundation for Indonesia's active role in advocating for Palestinian independence is its foreign policy of "free and active." "Free" signifies neutrality towards both Western and Eastern blocs, while "active" denotes active participation in global peace efforts.

Despite Indonesia's official support for Palestinian independence, there are challenges. Not all Indonesians have a uniform understanding of the issue; some see the Palestinian situation as purely a religious concern rather than a matter of human rights and justice. Additionally, there are a small number of Indonesians who actually support Israeli actions in Palestine. In mid-July 2024, a group from Indonesia's largest Islamic organization visited the Israeli president, which, despite being condemned by the majority of Indonesians, shows that public diplomacy and Israeli propaganda have effectively created divisions within Indonesian society regarding the Palestinian issue.

The UN's Failure to Deliver Peace and Justice for Palestine

Palestine's struggle for independence through UN diplomacy has hit a dead end. The efforts to gain international recognition for independence have faltered, and attempts by the UN to stop Israel's military aggression in Gaza have continually been blocked by the United States. Mahdi Muhammad highlights that UN Security Council resolutions on Gaza have proved nearly meaningless. MSF USA Executive Director Avril Benoit further explains that the resolutions are ineffective: "The resolutions fail to meet Gaza's immediate needs, such as a ceasefire. The resolutions are so

inconsequential that the lives of Gaza’s residents are considered worthless” (Muhammad, 2023).

This is not an isolated case. As reported by Al-Jazeera’s Shakeeb Asrar and Mohammed Hussein, there have been at least 34 US vetoes on resolutions concerning Israel and Palestine between 1954 and 2023 (Asrar, Hussein, 2023):

UN SECURITY COUNCIL

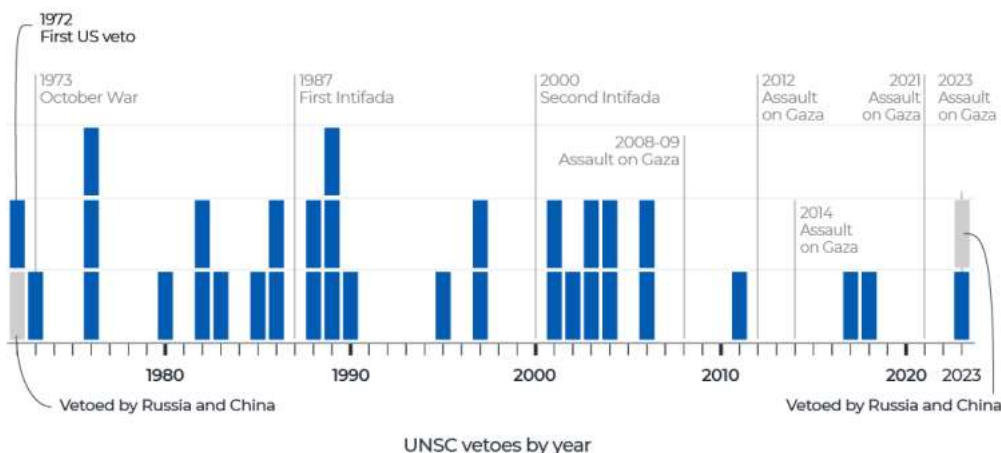
A history of US vetoes protecting Israel

The United States has used its veto power 34 times to strike down resolutions about the situation in Palestine to protect Israel from facing censure or accountability for its violations of international law.

34 US vetoes | 1954-2023

Related to the Israeli-Palestinian situation

■ US veto
■ Other permanent member veto



Source: UN Security Council | October 26, 2023

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This means that the struggle for Palestinian independence through diplomacy at the UN has reached a dead end, as long as the United States applies double standards to the Israel-Palestine issue.

Palestinian Right to Independence from the Perspective of Islamic Diplomacy

Just as for all nations, independence is a fundamental right for every nation and human being, including the Palestinians. In Islam, there are at least five primary human needs that must be met, known as dhôriyatul khamsah: the right to practice religion, protection of life, property, family, and the freedom to think and express oneself. Since the declaration of the State of Israel on Palestinian land, which included the occupation of significant portions of Palestine and continuous aggression in other areas such as Gaza, these five basic needs of the Palestinian people have been severely compromised due to ongoing occupation and oppression.

The primary goal of Islamic diplomacy—to achieve justice and peace—will be undermined if the independence of a nation is not granted. Delving deeper, concepts of international relations in Islamic diplomacy such as ta'awun (mutual assistance in righteousness), mu'amalah bi mithli (reciprocal dealings), at-tasamuh (tolerance), al-hurriyah (freedom), al-'adalah (justice), and al-mawaddah wal-man'u fasad (affection and prevention) cannot be fully realized if a nation's sovereignty is still dependent on the authority of another state. This is the reality faced by Palestine.

The problem, however, is that nearly all neighboring Arab states, such as Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and others, have yet to unite to defend and liberate Palestine. On the surface, the issues faced by these neighboring Arab countries appear to be political and economic. However, the fundamental problem lies in the fragmentation and disunity among these nations due to differing national interests. In the framework of Islamic diplomacy, the primary vision and mission for every nation should be unity and the welfare of the ummah, based on the command of Allah SWT in Surah Ali Imran, verse 103. When divine commands are ignored, corruption and injustice become pervasive.

Thus, the greatest challenge for Arab countries and all nations concerned with humanitarian issues is to open their eyes and hearts to agree on stopping all acts of injustice that rob the rights and independence of the Palestinian people. If nations remain focused solely on their own interests and turn a blind eye to the genocide in Gaza and Palestine, then the peace and justice hoped for by all countries and peoples will remain a mere utopia.

IV. CONCLUSION

The primary obstacle to Palestinian independence lies in the disunity among Arab countries and the broader international community. While individual nations express support for Palestine, their efforts are often hindered by internal conflicts, economic limitations, and a shifting global landscape. The inconsistency in support for

Palestine, particularly from neighboring Arab countries like Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, further complicates the situation. Although these nations share cultural and religious ties with Palestine, their domestic issues and evolving foreign policies limit their ability to provide substantial aid.

The case of Egypt exemplifies this challenge, as its peace treaty with Israel in 1978, driven by economic necessities, resulted in a more neutral stance toward Palestine. Similarly, Lebanon, grappling with internal political turmoil and a lack of a unified government, faces significant limitations in actively supporting Palestine. Meanwhile, Syria's ongoing internal conflict and economic instability render its involvement in the Palestinian issue almost negligible. Saudi Arabia, once a prominent advocate for Palestine, has shifted its focus toward economic diversification and reduced reliance on oil, impacting its regional influence and ability to prioritize Palestinian independence.

The failure of the United Nations to secure peace and justice for Palestine, largely due to consistent US vetoes on resolutions concerning Israel and Palestine, further underscores the complexities of achieving a resolution. From the perspective of Islamic diplomacy, the lack of unity among nations, particularly within the Muslim world, contradicts the core tenets of cooperation and mutual assistance. The inability to prioritize the collective well-being of the ummah, as emphasized in Islamic teachings, perpetuates injustice and hinders the fulfillment of fundamental human rights for the Palestinian people. Until nations prioritize the principles of justice, unity, and human dignity over individual interests, the prospect of a peaceful and independent Palestine remains a distant hope.

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