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THE OIC AND THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM

The establishment of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference was in response to a shocking event in the history of Islam, namely, the desecration of the Holy Al-Aqsa Mosque in August, 1969. It was not only an affront to the Palestinian people, rendered homeless in 1948, 1956 and 1967 wars, but also posed a grave threat to the preservation of the sanctity and Islamic character of the Holy Mosque, the first *Qibla* of all Muslims. So, the leaders of the Islamic world met at Rabat, Morocco in August 1969 to protest the perfidious act of Israel against the Arab world and to take necessary step against the Zionist entity. This Conference held at the summit level decided among other measures to establish a broad-based Muslim forum called the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC). However, the Palestinian issue remained at the core of the OIC agenda and was recognised as the essence of the whole Middle East crisis. The participants of the first summit conference expressed their firm determination "to reject any solution of the problem of Palestine which would deny Jerusalem the status it had before June 1967."¹

Following the emergence of Israel the Palestinians have been the victims of an inhuman tragedy. A part of the Palestinians is doomed to live under the brutal Israeli occupation while the majority of them took shelter in various Arab states, particularly in Jordan. But what added to their tragic fate is that the homeless Palestinians were not able to ensure their security even in these Arab countries.

1. The First Islamic Summit Conference, *Declaration of Rabat*, 22-25 September 1969, Rabat, Morocco, (General Secretariat, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

They became victims of local politics, intra-Arab rivalries and were expelled from one country to another. After their expulsion from Beirut in June 1982 and recently from Libya the Palestinians were thrown into a state of uncertainty. An objective evaluation of the situation of the Palestinians and the role of the OIC is therefore, of paramount importance. The present paper will be an attempt to this effect. For this purpose, efforts have been made to portray a background of the Palestinian issue in intra-Arab politics, evaluate various deliberations, decisions, resolutions and measures adopted by the OIC regarding Palestine and identify the constraints of the member states in search for the just solution of the Palestinian problem.

THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE IN ARAB POLITICS

Any discussion on the role of the OIC in solving the Palestinian issue is placed in perspective if the problem is viewed in light of the Arab perception of the issue and its place in intra-Arab politics. The Arab world was the main architect of the OIC constituting more than half of the total members² of the Organisation, they have the greatest concentration of economic resources and financial potential. They are also the main group within the OIC having the potential of influencing the activities of the Organization. So the nature and character of the OIC's activities regarding the Palestinian problem will depend largely on how the Arabs perceive the issue and the measures they consider necessary and viable for its solution.

In fact, the Palestinian problem predates the creation of Israel in 1948. The confrontation between Palestinian nationalism and zionism started as early as in the first half of this century when the Jews started their settlements in British-mandated Palestine by purchasing lands from the Palestinian landlords and thus liquidated the Arabs in a very organized way.³ Since most of the Arab states at that time were under colonial rule and preoccupied with their own

2. Out of 42 member states of the OIC, 23 are Arabs—13 are Arab-Asians and 10 are Arab-Africans.

3. W. Khalili, *From Haven to Conquest*, (Beirut) 1971, pp. 841-843.

national liberation struggles, the Palestinian issue did not receive proper attention in Arab politics. After the World War II, the Jewish migration rate into Palestine increased tremendously and the United States took a direct part in settling the Jewish immigrants from Germany in Palestine.⁴ These immigrants formed various terrorist organizations and adopted steps including the killing and threatening of Arab population in Palestine. Though the UN resolution in 1947 divided Palestine into two states, the Arab and the Jewish, the Palestinians were not able to establish a state of their own, while the Jews created the state of Israel for themselves and continued the policy of aggression and atrocities against the Arab people.

In the early fifties, after the revolution in Egypt the Palestinian problem acquired a new dimension. President Nasser of Egypt consolidated his influence in the Arab world on the basis of Arab nationalism and intended to train the Palestinians, integrate the Palestinian actions in their struggle against Israel. On the other hand, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan tried to use the Palestinian issue for her own interests. Jordan was the only country that granted its

The Palestinian problem has often been at the centre of intra-Arab rivalry as a consequence of which the Palestinian cause has suffered on various occasions.

citizenship to the Palestinians and sent the young Palestinians to the Gulf countries for earning money which served the kingdom in two ways. Firstly, these young Palestinians would send foreign currency which Jordan needed very much for her economic development. Secondly, since these young Palestinians stayed away from their land their struggle suffered a set back. Jordan occupied West Bank and Arab part of Jerusalem.⁵ But one consequence of this, even if not

4. E. M. Primakov, "Anatomia Blitznevostosnovo Krigica" (Anatomy of the Middle East Crisis), in Russian, (Moscow) 1978, p. 87.
5. Ali Plascov; A Palestinian state? Examining the Alternatives, *Adelphi Papers* (IISS, London), p. 93.

intended, was to render the West Bank and Gaza more vulnerable to Israeli aggression.

Later on, some of the other Arab states intended to play a role regarding the Palestinian issue but instead of coordinating their policies they tried to exert influence on the PLO and use it in their own interests by creating various factions in the PLO. The Palestinian problem became an all-Arab issue only in 1964 when the PLO was formed in an Arab League Summit. But even then the attitude of all Arab states toward the PLO was not identical and unequivocal and in spite of helping the newly emerged organization and consolidating its strength, some of the Arab countries did not refrain from following a policy likely to split the organization. Thus, the "*Saiqa*" was formed in 1967 under Syrian guidance whereas Iraq backed the Arab Liberation Front.⁶

After the crushing defeat of Arabs by Israel in 1967 a general debate arose in the Arab world over defining the relationship between the Palestinian Resistance Movement (PRM) and the Arab governments and peoples. Many Palestinians were against any Arab interference in their struggle. Al Fatah, for example, advocated the idea that there need not be any interference in the affairs of the Palestinians while they would not meddle in the internal affairs of the Arab countries. Many other groups within the PLO argued that the Palestine question was inseparable from other problems that the Arab world was facing and the political situation in some Arab countries had direct bearing on the way the Palestinians sought to conduct their national struggle. Moreover, since all the territory of Palestine was occupied by Israel and the Palestinians had no territory and, hence, base from where they could launch their military operations, they could not avoid the Arab interference.

With the emergence of the PRM as a recognised political and military force in the region in the late sixties, the relation between the PLO and the Arab governments drastically changed. For the

6. *The Middle East and North Africa* 1982-83, Twenty-ninth Edition, (London,) p. 3.

lack of an Arab consensus and the unwillingness of the states contiguous to Israel, the PRM was not able to exercise its power. On the contrary, being victims of intra-Arab rivalries its forces were demoralized and strength weakened. Even on some occasions the Arab regimes acted militarily against them and tried to liquidate them physically. For example, the Palestinians were expelled from Jordan in 1970; again they fell victims to the Lebanese civil war and Syrian clashes in the mid seventies. Following the Lebanese crisis and the eventual expulsion of the PLO fighters from Beirut in 1982, it is alleged by Yasser Arafat that Syria is exploiting the PLO fractional disputes in her own favour. Syria, of course, denies this allegation. According to some analysts the faction fighting against pro-Arafat group is doing so out of its conviction that Arafat failed to provide correct leadership when he agreed to the evacuation of the Palestinian guerillas from Beirut and was on the verge of supporting the Jordanian move to negotiate a confederation of Jordan and West Bank. Another unfavourable event is the decision of Colonel Qaddafi to expell the Palestinians from Libya. However, it appeared in the Rabat Summit in 1974 that the Arabs came to a consensus in recognising the PLO as the sole representative of the people of Palestine, but they were far from unity.⁷

So, it is seen that historically the Palestinian problem had often become the subject of political feuding among Arab states. The Palestinian issue was always in the centre of intra-Arab rivalry and whenever that rivalry had been intensified, the Palestinian cause gained prominence and some Arab states expressed their total support to the Palestinian people but once the leaders reconciled with each other even for a short time, the Palestinian cause appeared to go into limbo.⁸

PALESTINIAN ISSUE IN THE ACTIVITIES OF THE OIC.

Although the Islamic Summit Conference was summoned in 1969 by King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, the response of the Islamic

7. Walid W. Kazziha; *Palestine in Arab Dilemma*, (Croom Helm, London) 1979, p. 32.

8. *Ibid*, p. 17.

world was not unequivocal. President Nasser criticised the Saudi plan and favoured to call an Arab League Summit to discuss the issue, considering the fact that the Palestinian problem was purely an Arab issue. Turkey and Nigeria refused to participate in the Conference showing reasons that they were "secular" states. Iran supported the move with some reservations. The Government of Malaysia recommended the formation of a committee to investigate the cause of fire to the Al-Aqsa Mosque rather than call a conference.⁹ In total 35 Islamic states were invited to participate in the Conference but only 25 attended and only 10 delegations were represented at Heads of state level.¹⁰ The First Conference failed to come to a consensus on the Palestinian issue and adopt a joint strategy mainly because of the antagonism between two influential members of the Organization—Saudi Arabia and Egypt. President Nasser did not participate in the Conference, the Egyptian delegation was headed by the then President of National Assembly, Anwar Sadat. The Egyptian delegation insisted in the Conference that the problem of Jerusalem was a part of Arab-Israeli conflict, so it should be solved by the Arab states rather than by the Islamic world,¹¹ whereas the Saudis were insisting on the point that the Palestinian problem was an Islamic issue which should be solved by the Muslims all over the world. Syria boycotted the Conference on the ground that she had no diplomatic relations with Morocco, the host of the Conference and Iraq boycotted it as a protest of not inviting the PLO chief Yasser Arafat in the Conference who attended it as a guest of King Hossein.¹² The Iranian delegation, considering their diplomatic and trade relations with Israel, took a very moderate stand in the Conference expressing its support for the PLO and emphasising the need for the recovery of Jerusalem but did not criticise the acts of Israel in Jerusalem.¹³ Thus the First Summit Conference revealed the lack of unity

9. *International Herald Tribune*, 1 September 1969.

10. *The Economist* (London), 27 September 1969.

11. *Ibid*, 20 September 1969.

12. *International Herald Tribune*, 23 September 1969.

13. L. V. Balkova; Saudi Arabia in *International Relations 1955-1977* (Moscow) 1979 (in Russian), p. 173.

among the Arab and Islamic leaders over the Palestine issue.

Though the Conference at the initial stage of its formation was not able to reach a consensus on the Palestinian issue and to adopt a joint strategy against Israel, gradually the Palestinian issue gained prominence in the activities of the OIC and the member states were able to develop a common feeling and sympathy toward the Palestinians. The First ICFM (Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers) held at Jeddah in 1970 adopted a number of resolutions regarding the Palestinian issue. The Conference :

- Reaffirmed the right of the people of Palestine to struggle for the liberation of their homeland and restoration of their rights.
- Called upon participating states to expand political, material and moral support to the people of Palestine in their fight against Israel.
- Decided to consider the 21st August of every year (the day of burning the Al-Aqsa Mosque) as a day of solidarity with the struggle of the people of Palestine.
- Called upon the participating states for action on an international level in support of the people of Palestine and of their usurped homeland and the Holy places.
- Urged the Security Council to assume its responsibilities and to take strong measures for the implementation of the UN resolutions regarding Palestine.
- Denounced the zionist movement as a racial, aggressive and expansionist movement conflicting with all the noble human ideals and constituting a permanent threat to World peace.¹⁴

In the 4th ICFM held in 1973, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) was, for the first time, recognised as the only legitimate

14. *Final Declaration of the First Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, 23-25 March, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.* (General Secretariat, Jeddah Saudi Arabia).

representative of the Palestinian people and the member states were requested to sever all forms of relations with Israel and provide the PLO with all facilities including the opening of the PLO offices where it did not exist. The Conference strongly condemned the Israeli policy of judaisation of the occupied land and considered the measures taken by Israel to change human, geographical, socio-cultural and economic land-marks including arrangements aiming at the annexation and judaisation of the Holy city Jerusalem as null and void.¹⁵ To protest the judaisation of Jerusalem and to consolidate the resistance of the Arab inhabitants, the Islamic Solidarity Fund was given the task to restore the Al-Aqsa and El-Ibrahimi Mosques and surrounding buildings and Mosques which had been damaged by the Israeli excavations, to purchase land and demolished houses which were put on sale as exclusive Muslim property in order to prevent

Much of the political activities of the OIC centred around the Palestinian cause which is the essence of the whole Middle East crisis.

the transfer of their ownership and to reconstruct the Arab areas and to set up housing development projects for the Arab inhabitants of Jerusalem.¹⁶ Thus the recognition of the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people was a landmark in their history of struggle against Israel. The decision of the Conference gave an impetus to hold the Palestinian banner high in the fight against the Zionist entity. Thus, the OIC played an important role in the emergence of a united Islamic posture on the Palestinian issue and recognition of the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinians.

15. *Final Declaration of the Fourth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers* 24-26 March 1973 Benghazi, Libya. (General Secretariat, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia).
16. *Final Declaration of the Fifth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers* 21-25 June 1974, Kuala-Lumpur, Malaysia. (General Secretariat, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia).

The 7th ICFM adopted a resolution which called on the member states to issue a special postage bearing the name "The Palestinian Stamp" for the help to the Palestinian people in their struggle. As a symbol of solidarity with the Palestinian people the 10th ICFM suspended the membership of Egypt in the OIC and its various bodies for signing separate peace treaty with Israel in 1979. The Conference also condemned the United States for its policy in the Middle East and denounced the Camp David Accords. It also called on member states to form national committees to enlighten the Muslims on the cause of Palestine and Al-Quds, provide support to the Palestinian Mujahedins in their holy war and to look after the welfare of the families of martyrs of the Palestinian patriots. To help the Palestinian people in their struggle against Israel a special fund called Al-Quds Fund was established in 1976 and the member states were requested to contribute to the Fund. But considering the growing need of financial assistance for the Palestinian people, the 11th ICFM held in 1980, decided to set up a Waqf (Trust) to be named "The Jerusalem Fund Waqf" with an initial capital of one hundred million US dollars. The main purpose of the Waqf was to enhance the financial situation of the Jerusalem Fund and supply it with an annual revenue that would foster the financial potentialities and ensure its continuity in discharging the Islamic mission and fulfilling the objectives which consist in consolidating the steadfastness and struggle of the Palestinian people.¹⁷ Although it was a mark of solidarity with the Palestinian people the suspension of an important member like Egypt from the OIC and her political and diplomatic isolation made the Zionist hands stronger.

Emphasising the importance of the Palestinian issue and the need for its continuous follow up, the OIC decided to set up a special committee called the Al-Quds (Jerusalem) Committee in 1975 and the 10th ICFM, held at Fez in 1979, decided to upgrade the Committee to the ministerial level under the Chairmanship of H.M. King

17. *Report of the Extraordinary Session of Jerusalem Committee, Islamabad, Pakistan, 17 May 1982, P. 20.*

Hassan II of Morocco. A three-member Summit Committee headed by H.M. King Hassan of Morocco was also subsequently set up. These committees have so far held a number of meetings and emphasised the need for close cooperation among the member states with a view to reinforcing the resolutions adopted by the OIC at different levels. The Committee also emphasised the need for contact with the other parties concerned including the West European and North American countries for an early solution of the crisis. The Third Islamic Summit Conference also invited the member states of the European Economic Community to honour their pledge not to extend the application of their bilateral and multilateral economic agreements with Israel to the occupied Palestine and Arab territories.¹⁸ King Hassan, as the Chairman of the Committee, took several initiatives and made a number of contacts. He sent a letter to the French President seeking his help for the solution of the crisis and entrusted his Foreign Minister to address a letter to the Government of Canada for reconsidering the decision to transfer the Canadian embassy in Israel to Al-Quds.¹⁹ The 10th ICFM called on the Muslim states to sever all forms of diplomatic, consular, economic, cultural, sports, tourist and communication relations with Israel on the official and non-official levels and requested the member states to take all effective measures on the widest international level, in the UN and its agencies and international fora to increase the pressure on Israel including the possibility of excluding it from the membership of these organizations and bodies. This Conference also called on the member states to seek to convene an extraordinary session devoted to the consideration of the Palestinian question, with a view to making the arrangements that would lead to the implementation of the UN resolutions calling for the withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories and the realization of the national inalienable

18. *The Third Islamic Summit Conference*, 25-28 January 1981, Makkah Al-Mukarrama/Taif, Saudi Arabia. (General Secretariat, Saudi Arabia).

19. Al-Quds Committee, *Achievements and Perspectives*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Morocco.

rights of the Palestinian people.²⁰ At the initiative of the Islamic states the UN General Assembly held an extraordinary session in July 1980 where a number of important resolutions on Palestine were adopted. The UN Security Council also raised a debate on the Israeli annexation of Jerusalem, denounced the Israeli decision and considered the whole of the legislative, administrative and other measures aimed at modifying the identity of the Holy City as null and void and asked for their immediate annulment. Following the Israeli annexation of Jerusalem in 1980, at the request of the PLO chief Yasser Arafat, the Al-Quds Committee held an extraordinary session at Casablanca, Morocco in August 1981. This session adopted a number of decisions reaffirming the solidarity of the Islamic countries to face the Zionist challenge and to mobilize their efforts and potentialities to guarantee the struggle of the Palestinian people led by the PLO.

This meeting set up a tripartite commission consisting of three members (King Hassan of Morocco, Ahmed Sekou Toure of Guinea and President Ziaur Rahman of Bangladesh) to adopt a political strategy for the solution of the Middle East crisis.²¹ The 3rd Islamic Summit Conference held in 1981 expressed its satisfaction over the activities of the Jerusalem Committee and requested King Hassan to continue his office as the Chairman of the Committee. The Al-Quds Committee is really an active organ of the OIC and it has enhanced the Palestinian cause by its intensive activities at various forums. The impact of the strategy on both West Europe and USA was quite significant. The European leaders at their Luxemburg Council Meeting in early 1980 decided to include the Palestinian issue in the agenda of the Summit and emphasised the need for reviewing the European policy toward the Middle East in general and toward the PLO in particular.²² In their "Venice Declaration" adop-

20. *Final Declaration of the Tenth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers*, Fez, Morocco, 8-12 May, 1979, (General Secretariat, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia).

21. *Report of the Extraordinary Session of Jerusalem Committee*, Islamabad, Pakistan, 17 May 1982, p. 21.

22. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, Vol. XXVI, 1980, p. 30635.

ted in mid-1980, the EEC countries recognised the right to existence and security of all states in the region which implied the recognition of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people including the right of their self-determination. The Declaration emphasised the need for the inclusion of the Palestinian people and the PLO in the process of any negotiations and denounced any unilateral initiative designed to change the status of Jerusalem.²³

Not only the European Community but Japan also reviewed her Middle East policy and intended to develop relations with the PLO and the PLO leader Yasser Arafat was invited to visit Japan. The US public opinion is also changing in favour of the Palestinian people and at present majority of the Americans think that US should recognise the PLO and start direct negotiations with the PLO.²⁴ It was in fact, the US public opinion which compelled President Reagan to come forward with a peace proposal for the solution of the Middle East crisis in September 1982.

In addition to the regular sessions of the ICFM and the Jerusalem Committee, two extraordinary sessions of the ICFM were held to discuss the Palestine issue, the first in July 1980, in Jordan at the request of the PLO and the 2nd in September 1980, in Morocco at the request of the Jerusalem Committee. In the first session the Islamic leaders expressed their deep concern over the Israeli aggression in Palestine and its decision to annex Jerusalem and to make the Holy City the capital of the Zionist entity. In his inaugural speech at the first extraordinary session King Hossein of Jordan said, "The biggest challenge levelled at the Islamic *Ummah* is there, before us, in Palestine and around it, and should awaken in the hearts of the true believers, the desire to sacrifice, to struggle and to toil."²⁵ The session also reaffirmed the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, particularly :

23. *Ibid*, p. 30634.

24. *Newsweek*, 6 August 1982, p. 10.

25. Inaugural speech of H. M. King Hossein of Jordan at the *Second Extraordinary Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers* 11-12 July 1980, Amman, Jordan.

- their right to the territory of their homeland, Palestine;
- their right to return to their homeland and recover their property as stipulated by the UN resolutions;
- their right to self-determination, without foreign interference;
- their right to exercise freely their sovereignty over the territory of their homeland—Palestine and to establish their independent national state on their national soil.²⁶

The 2nd session considered that any country supporting the Zionist aggression against the Palestinian people and the Islamic Holy Places was an enemy of Islam and the Muslims. The Conference also reaffirmed, "the commitment of all Islamic states to sever all forms of relations with any country that supports or contributes to the implementation of Israel's decision to annex Jerusalem and declare it as the capital of Zionist entity."²⁷ Although the two sessions were dedicated to the Palestine issue, a close evaluation of their resolutions and decisions reveal merely a repetition of the earlier ones.

A Committee of five legal experts was set up to consider the measures adopted by the Zionist enemy, as a "War Crime" in occupied Palestine. The session also called on all countries of the world to suspend the bilateral and collective economic agreements with Israel. At the initiative of the Islamic countries the UN Security Council adopted a resolution in 1980 which called on, "those states who have established diplomatic missions at Jerusalem to withdraw such missions from the Holy City."²⁸

The Palestinian issue was also in the centre of all deliberations in the 3rd Summit Conference which was held in 1981, decided, "to utilize all economic capacities and natural resources of Islamic states to undermine the Israeli economy, to block the flow of financial,

26. *Final Declaration of the Second Extraordinary Session of The Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers*, 11-12 July 1980, Amman, Jordan.

27. *Final Declaration of the Third Extraordinary Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers* (Al-Quds, Al-Sharif Session), 18-20 September 1980, Fez, Morocco.

28. *The Bangladesh Observer*, 27 May 1982.

economic and political support to Israel, to seek to change international political position in favour of the Palestinian people and to support the Palestinian Liberation Organization.²⁹ Considering the importance of the Palestinian problem, its growing complexity and the urgency of immediate solution, the Third Summit Conference (also concurrently termed as the Palestine and Al Quds Session) decided to create the post of a fourth Assistant Secretary General for Palestine and Al Quds Al Sharif Affairs which earlier was looked after by the Political Affairs Division. This was a positive step forward in furtherance of the Palestinian cause and indicated the special importance attached by the OIC to the Palestinian problem.

The 13th ICFM held in 1982 extolled the glorious resistance and heroic steadfastness demonstrated by the Palestinians in Lebanon. At the initiative of the Islamic states a photo exhibition on the massacre of the Palestinians in Sabra and Shatila was held at the UN headquarters in New York. The Conference also called upon the General Secretariat of the OIC to finalise the project of establishment of the Islamic Bureau for Military Cooperation with Palestine, decided to proceed with the plan for establishing the Islamic Bureau for the Boycott of Israel.³⁰

It will appear from the above discussion that the Palestinian issue was at the centre of the political deliberation of the OIC and was considered the essence of the whole Middle East crisis. A number of resolutions have been adopted in various forums of the OIC condemning Israel and supporting the Palestinians in their struggle. Special committees, funds and organs have been established and an Assistant Secretary General has been appointed to deal with the core problem of the *Ummah*. The international prestige and status of the Palestinians have been increased significantly. Now the PLO is recognised by 117 countries and has diplomatic relations with 86 countries.³¹

29. The Third Islamic Summit Conference, *Makkah Declaration*, Makkah Al-Mukarrama/Taif, Saudi Arabia. 25-28 January 1981, (General Secretariat).

30. *Final Communiqué of the Thirteenth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers* 22-26 August 1982, Niamey, Niger.

31. Information received from the PLO office in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

It is a full member of the Arab League, Non-aligned Movement and has an observer status in the various bodies of the UN.

Despite these efforts on the part of the OIC, the Palestinian people continue to remain in a state of flux. The prospect of the realisation of their inalienable national rights including a state of their own in their homeland is becoming bleaker day by day. The recent expulsion of the PLO fighters from Beirut, the subsequent tragic events in Lebanon and the acceleration of the process of illegal Israeli colonization of the West Bank and Gaza are all testimonies to this fact. The question that agitates the minds of many people today is how far have the measures adopted by the OIC regarding the Palestinian issue been effective to influence the events in the region.

CONSTRAINTS OF THE OIC

An analysis and evaluation of the activities of the OIC regarding the Palestinian issue reveals that the resolutions, decisions and measures adopted at various levels on Palestine reflect the sincere feelings and concerns of the member states. The Palestinian cause was at the centre of the activities of the OIC. But a close scrutiny of the facts and realities shows that the member states of the OIC encounter certain constraints which limit their capabilities to realize their objectives. The constraints they face are of various nature which may be cited as (i) intra-Arab rivalry which manifests itself in the form of difference in national interests, economic, diplomatic and ideological; (2) little or no leverage to bring pressure to bear on the West and primarily to the United States, the principal ally of Israel; (3) Israeli intransigent attitude towards various peace initiatives in the Middle East.

(1) The Arab members of the OIC are not homogeneous in their size, population, economic, political and military capabilities. Their international obligations are also not identical. Each country has its own compulsions dictated by its national interests. Although the Palestinian issue is a common concern of the Arabs in particular, their approach to its solution happens to differ. This difference in

national interests sometimes leads the Arabs into conflicting situation. So, owing to the divergence of interests among the Arab states the OIC finds it difficult to hammer out a solution leading to the creation

Cherished objectives are not always achieved by virtue of heart-felt cares and concerns. But facts of life sometimes constrain good mind.

of a sovereign national state for the homeless Palestinians. Almost in all resolutions the member states expressed their concern over the Palestinian issue, criticised and condemned the Israeli acts of aggression. But the lack of unity among the Arabs and largely within the OIC makes the implementation of its various resolutions, decisions and measures difficult and hence, weakens the Palestinian cause. Thus, the situation, difficult as it is, has been further compounded by growing differences within the ranks of the PLO recently taking the form of escalated armed conflicts between two factions in Lebanon.

The attitude of the OIC member states toward the PLO is not identical. While majority of the Arab states appear to support the PLO under the leadership of Yasser Arafat, a few are understood to back the smaller Palestinian fractions including the radicals. Although the non-Arab member states, by and large, tend to share the viewpoints of the moderate Arab states, the disunity in the ranks of the Arab member states around the issue serves as a substantially limiting factor of the potential of the OIC in upholding the Palestinian cause.

(2) All of the member states of the OIC are also developing countries of the Third World. Some of the OIC members are LDCs and their aid dependence and trade relations are with the West, firstly, with the United States.³² On the other hand, the oil rich Arab states

32. The OIC member countries have historically been dependent for their external trade upon the industrial countries of the West. More than 80 percent of exports and imports of these countries are with industrialised nations while trade links within the community is very weak. For details, see Islamic Development Bank, *Seventh Annual Report 1981-82* Jeddah, Saudi Arabia 1982, p. 25.

for their oil export and technical assistance to meet the growing requirements of their development projects, are dependent on the West and Japan. One of the OIC countries is a member of NATO while some others have security arrangements with West Europe or the United States.³³ As a result their negotiating strength is placed under obvious constraint.

(3) The Organization of the Islamic Conference is based on particular principles aimed at achieving certain objectives. The prime objective is to promote the solidarity within the Islamic *Ummah*, to recover the Palestinian and Arab territories from the Zionist occupation. But the main obstacle in realizing this is Israel which is a formidable economic and military power in the whole of the Middle East region. The OIC resolutions against Israel have been unanimous, but the harsh reality is that after the neutralisation of Egypt the other Arab states are not capable to confront Israel militarily. Taking advantage of this, Israel constantly pursues a policy of physical elimination of the Palestinians, a policy of expansionism and aggression against the Arab world. The intransigent attitude of Israel toward the Middle East crisis, occupation in Lebanon, continuous Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza tantamount to the rejection of all resolutions, decisions and peace initiatives.

The Reagan Peace Plan of September 1, 1982 which recognised a "Self-government by the Palestinians on West Bank and Gaza in association with Jordan" favoured for an undivided Jerusalem and called on Israel to freeze all settlements in West Bank and Gaza.³⁴ The Arab League also at its Fez Summit in Morocco in 1982 called the Security Council to provide guarantee for peace among all the region's countries including the Palestinian independent state.³⁵ A close scrutiny of these two important proposals reveals that there was an implicit recognition of Israel in them. But she rejected both of them. Israel continues to blatantly violate the norms of

33. For details see; *The Military Balance* 1982-83 (IISS, London), 1982.

34. *Middle East Review* 1983, (World of Information, London), p. 13.

35. *Dawn*, (Pakistan), 11 September 1982.

international law and morality, to destabilise the peace and security in the region. Israel remains the stumbling block towards a just and peaceful solution of the Middle East crisis in general and the Palestinian problem in particular.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Since the Organization of the Islamic Conference is an international organization and the members have different social, political and economic patterns, it is obvious that they will have different internal, regional and international compulsions. So it is quite logical that their international behaviours will also be very much guided and dictated by their national interests, geopolitical factors and international alignment obligations. But inspite of all these, the member states of the OIC in course of their activities have developed a common strategy regarding the Palestinian issue. The resolutions and decisions adopted at various levels of the OIC regarding the Palestinian issue were always unanimous and the solidarity with the Palestinian brothers is regarded as a cornerstone of foreign policy of all the member states. A close analysis of all the decisions and resolutions adopted by the OIC at different times regarding the Palestinian issue shows the concern of the *Ummah* and the sincerity of the member states in solving the inhuman tragedy of our age. Furthermore, the Organization not only consolidates and coordinates the efforts of the member states but also cooperates with other international organizations and agencies with a view to finding out the early solution of the core problem of the Middle East. A number of centres have been opened by the OIC in different countries particularly in Western countries to step up the publicity of the just cause of Palestine and create a broader public opinion in favour of the Palestinians against the intransigent attitude of Israel toward them.

The member states should further intensify the public relation activities in favour of the Palestinians all over the world, particularly in Europe and the U.S. If the present moral pressure as reflected

in the various resolutions and decisions adopted by the UN and its Security Council can be reinforced by a similar pressure in the form of a public opinion in the western world, particularly in the US, in favour of the just cause of the Palestinians and the Arabs, it may prove to be an effective strategy in compelling Israel to accept the just and peaceful solution of the Palestinian problem. Any viable solution of the Palestinian issue is, however, conditioned by closing of the ranks of the Palestinians themselves as well as those of the Arab states for the cause of their shared interest.