

Relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the State of Palestine

Colloquy with Nassir Abdul Karim Abdul Rahim* by CI Team

Azerbaijan as a secular Muslim country attaches a great importance to the strengthening of Islamic Solidarity with other Muslim countries. In the light of weak support from the Western countries on Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Azerbaijan strongly relies on the support of the Muslim states. A differentiated support also is obvious in the case of Israeli-Palestinian dispute. Therefore, the CI team conducted the next serie of their interviews with Ambassador of the State of Palestine to the Republic of Azerbaijan Nassir Abdul Karim Abdul Rahim. The interview's text covered the multiple issues such history of Azerbaijan-Palestine relations, role and importance of Azerbaijan in the Muslim world, Israeli-Palestine dispute, as well as the U.S's recent decision concerning Jerusalem.



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Palestine is eager to benefit from Azerbaijan's experience

1. When was your embassy in Azerbaijan opened, and what are your main activities here?

The Embassy of the State of Palestine was opened in Azerbaijan in February 2011. However, diplomatic relations were first established in 1992. This year we are marking the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Azerbaijan and Palestine. Prior to 2011, when the Embassy became operational, we had non-resident representation. The focus of our Embassy here is obviously the political sphere, while working simultaneously on other different aspects of bilateral relations in order to enhance coordination and cooperation between our two nations across a multitude of fields, including trade, culture, and education. We are also interested in gaining an insight into Azerbaijan's unique experience after independence. Thus, ties are not limited only to the political sphere, but also extend to other different areas.

2. How would you evaluate the overall relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the State of Palestine?

The relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the State of Palestine are excellent and are on a positive trajectory with an increased level of cooperation and coordination, especially in the last few years.

3. What can you say about the geopolitical role of Azerbaijan in the region and its importance, particularly for Palestine?

Obviously, Azerbaijan is located in a very important geopolitical region. But the relationship goes beyond geopolitics, dating back hundreds of years. Azerbaijan and Palestine share history and culture as well as challenges. Azerbaijan has regained its independence, but the Palestine remains occupied. In the long term, Palestine can benefit from Azerbaijan's geopolitical role.

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Strategically located on the crossroads of the historical Silk Road, Azerbaijan connects and bridges West and East. This location potentially provides enhanced opportunities for cooperation, particularly in the field of trade, allowing for shorter routes to the East and Far East. On the other hand, Azerbaijan has been exposed over centuries to multicultural influences from both the West and the East. While deeply proud of its Islamic and oriental heritage, it has been open to embracing and connecting with different cultures. Thus, while providing an excellent example of coexistence between different cultures and followers of different religious denominations,

Azerbaijan has also been a very good representative of Eastern culture to the rest of the world. This helps lay the foundations for constructive cooperation in the wider context between the East and the West. I think from the Palestinian perspective, this is very positive, as Palestine is secular in its outlook, and is a tolerant and inclusive multi-confessional society, just like the Azerbaijan society. We have had some successes, but of course the reality is that Palestine is a state under occupation. This geopolitical reality provides Azerbaijan with an opportunity to bring people and cultures together.

Ambassador: “My family and I feel comfortable in Azerbaijan”

4. How do you think the Azerbaijani society feels toward Palestine, and do you feel settled here?

I feel very at home and comfortable. Azerbaijani society is generous, gracious, welcome, and very supportive of Palestine. This is palpable. My family and I feel very comfortable here. While travelling across Azerbaijan, people generally met us with warmth, and they make you feel very comfortable. You never feel out of place. This reflects the deep-rooted tradition of Azerbaijani hospitality and warmth of character.

5. How do you think Azerbaijani society regards Palestine, and how do they see Palestine?

Azerbaijani society is very supportive of the Palestinian people in the challenges that they face on a daily basis, emanating from the ongoing Israeli occupation - which, as you may know, is the longest occupation in modern history. The support of Azerbaijani society expresses itself in different, tangible ways, reflecting genuine empathy and sympathy.

Azerbaijan is a rising star in the Muslim world

6. How would you describe the position of Islamic world on the state of Palestine? Are there different positions, or is there solidarity in regard to the situation in Palestine?

All countries are different due to the uniqueness of each country. Thus, naturally differences may naturally arise among them on diverse issues. Differences rise even from within members of

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the same family. This has also been the case for Muslim states since the beginning of the establishment of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Muslims and Muslim countries, in general, may have different views. But, there is one issue that they will never differ upon, which is their support for the independence of Palestine. There could be differences sometimes between Muslim countries, but when the question of Palestine is put on the table, everybody agrees on this issue. The solidarity within Muslim countries on the question of Palestine is tangible, and of course, we always look to enhance this support.

7. How would you evaluate the status of Azerbaijan, particularly in the Islamic world?

Azerbaijan is a rising star in the Muslim world. In a short period of time, the country has managed to gain respect and appreciation within the Muslim world, due to its success in terms of the rapid development of the country as well as its principled policies and pragmatic approach in tackling a multitude of issues. Azerbaijan has managed to move forward steadily while asserting the stability and the security of the country during very difficult era.

Nagorno-Karabakh conflict should be solved on the basis of international law

8. What can you say about Palestinian perceptions of and the Palestinian position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict? Do you think there is or should be solidarity among Muslim countries regarding this conflict?

The Palestinian perspective on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is that the four UN resolutions, which basically represent international law, should be implemented. The borders of the Republic of Azerbaijan should be maintained within their internationally recognized outline. I think Azerbaijan is successfully pursuing a peace process through the OSCE Minsk Group, which I think is the best approach to resolve the conflict peacefully on the basis of international law. I think the existence of the solidarity on that issue is important among Muslim countries. It is important in the context of the Muslim world as well as the international community to have unified conviction to resolve differences and conflicts peacefully and in accordance with international law by adhering to its spirit and letter collectively not selectively, which is essential prerequisite to safeguarding and nurturing human civilization.

9. What kind of role can Azerbaijan play in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

Since the very beginning of its independence, Azerbaijan has provided unwavering support to Palestine in all international fora and organizations, as well as hosting multiple of conferences in Baku on the question of Palestine and in support of the establishment of the independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital. In addition, Azerbaijan has provided financial aid Azerbaijan at various junctures. It has been playing a very important role in supporting Palestine. On the other hand, Azerbaijan has its own relations with Israel. This could help bring Israel's to attention the importance of resolving the Palestinian issue. Therefore, Baku's relations with Israel could potentially have positive influence on Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Donal Trump's decision on Jerusalem will boost solidarity of the OIC countries

10. Recently, the U.S. President Donald Trump made a statement that the U.S. recognized Jerusalem as a capital of Israel. This caused a political/diplomatic disarrays and a negative reflection in the world, notably from the Muslim states. In your opinion, why Donald Trump made such a critical step? Whether it is associated with the U.S's internal dynamics or foreign policy confusion?

I think it has to do with both, first, to garner and maintain support from the core of his grassroots base - the Evangelicals, who many of them would happily describe themselves as Christian Zionists, - not to be confused with the majority of Christian denominations which don't subscribe to this way of thinking and oppose it. Second, a staggering lack of appreciation of the well-defined and recognized historical, cultural and political factors that influence and guide international issues.

11. Following D.Trump took the office, his unpredictable steps in the U.S. foreign policy had been criticized even by its closer allies. These steps, are believed, weakened the U.S. position in the Middle East, while strengthened the position of its rival. Thus, in your opinion, how it will affect the U.S.'s reputation and Middle East policy?

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would like to present themselves as a serious super power guided by fairness and the rule of international law and institutions. Whereas, they now abundantly understood and transparently palpable to all that they do not practice what they preach, when they violate international law in such flagrant and impulsive fashion against the will of the rest of the international community. Regrettably in my opinion, it doesn't bode well for the US, the Middle East and the rest of humanity and the world.

12. After this decision, the Muslim states reacted in a negative way to that. In response to the decision of D.Trump, the OIC member states have gathered in Istanbul, where they adopted a resolution condemning the decision. Do you think whether Trump's decision consolidated the solidarity among the Muslim states?

I think we saw a rare and a spectacular collective indignation and condemnation from all member states of the OIC against Trump's declaration, due to the reasons I mentioned above, and added to it the perceived insult by all members of the organization, as Trump has shown total disrespect to the cultural and spiritual feelings of 1.8 billion Muslims. I hope this will enhance a concerted sense of purpose to cooperate in all fields for progress and development between all OIC states, and to continue the work and cooperation with the rest of the world to serve all humanity by building bridges and establishing universal sense of justice, peace, fairness to all, as well as respect of international law.

Concluding remarks (by CI Team)

Azerbaijan supports the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of two-state principles with recognition of East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine. In solidarity with Palestine, Azerbaijan had attended at the extraordinary summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Istanbul on December 13, 2017. In support of Palestine and its capital the holy city of Al-Quds (East Jerusalem), Azerbaijan had hosted many conferences in the past and had contributed \$5 million for the development of the holy city's infrastructure. Palestine has always stood next to Azerbaijan in supporting Baku's stance for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and its territorial integrity.