

Ummah in disarray

Tragic as it is, the three places in the world where armed conflicts have been going on today are Muslim countries, namely Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan. Even more regrettable is the fact that the Muslim Ummah in the rest of the world have been behaving as mere spectators to these conflicts. International Arab and Muslim organizations like the Arab League and the Organisation of the Islamic Cooperation have failed to intervene in these conflicts to stop the spilling of Muslim blood.

The Syrian conflict which has turned the country into a battlefield of proxy wars between world powers has caused such massive destruction that several towns and cities of the country are now nothing more than mere debris; their citizens uprooted and made refugees overnight. Millions of Syrians have sought shelter in neighbouring countries, while thousands of others have migrated to western countries for good as did many Iraqis after the US invasion on that country.

The lot of the poor Yemeni people is far worse. As the civil war rages on thousands of Yemeni families have become refugees in their own country facing an uncertain future. Many have died of disease and hunger with no one to look after them.

The situation in Afghanistan is no better. Ever since the Soviet invasion on that country in December 1979 and later Afghans' war for independence, the country continues to be a battle ground, first of proxy wars between big powers and later of fighting between various factions of the Afghan Mujahideen and the governments installed by the US and its western allies. The country's economy is in tatters while more than three million Afghans are still living in refugee camps in Pakistan and Iran with little hope of their repatriation in the foreseeable future.

Pakistan which has hosted the largest number of Afghan refugees and where more than two million refugees are still living in camps has been pressing the UN refugee agency for their early repatriation but to little avail because conditions in Afghanistan are still far from normal. Large areas of the country, more than 50 percent by some estimates, are ungoverned where all sorts of terrorists and brigands roam free. Taliban, the so called Islamic State and other terrorist outfits are an ever present threat in Afghan cities. Hardly a week passes without any terrorist strike in one or the other city. Even the high security zones in the capital Kabul are not safe from terrorists; all this despite the presence of US troops in the country.

Taking advantage of this sad state of affairs in the Muslim world, usurper Israel and India have been consolidating their illegal possessions of Palestine and Kashmir. While going ahead with construction of more settlements there Israel now intends to annex the whole of West Bank as its own territory. India has unleashed a reign of terror on the Muslims in occupied Kashmir. There are credible reports that Indian rulers have been planning to bring in settlers from outside Kashmir to turn the Muslims into a minority thereby removing the very basis of the Muslims' demand for liberation of Kashmir from Indian occupation.

The Muslim Ummah must rise to these challenges to their freedom by reviving the spirit of the Rabat conference of 1969 and Lahore summit of 1974.

WMC welcomes appointment of Dr. Omar Abdullah Nasseef as Vice President

The World Muslim Congress (WMC) has welcomed the appointment of Dr. Omar Abdullah Nasseef as Vice President of the International Organisation at the Headquarters.

Following is the statement issued by WMC Secretary General Raja Muhammad Zafarul Haq on the appointment:

“World Muslim Congress fully endorses the decision of appointment of Dr. Omar Abdullah Nasseef as Vice President of the International Organisation at the Headquarters. This decision was widely acclaimed as sagacious and timely like his illustrious father Dr. Abdullah Bin Omar Nasseef, was groomed over a long period of time and gained experience for this post. World Muslim Congress welcomes his appointment and prays that he performs his duties wisely and in consultation with the leadership of the Organisation to achieve the objectives of the Organisation.”

OIC calls for international force to protect Palestinians

Israeli occupation forces killed at least 62 Palestinians during protests near the Gaza fence on the eve of 70th anniversary of Nakba Day (the Day of Catastrophe), which coincided this year with the US embassy relocation from Tel Aviv to occupied Jerusalem (al-Quds).

ISTANBUL: The Muslim leaders, who gathered here for a special summit on recent Gaza killings, have called for an international force to be deployed to protect Palestinian people against Israeli crimes.

In a final communiqué issued following an emergency meeting here on Friday, May 18, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) condemned the May 14 massacre of dozens of Gazans as “savage crimes committed by the Israeli forces with the backing of the US administration.”

It also urged the UN to “form an international investigation committee into the recent atrocities in the Gaza Strip, and enable the committee to initiate field investigation.”

The OIC further demanded “international protection of Palestinian population, including through dispatching of international protection force” in the face of “unchecked crimes” committed by Israel.

Israeli occupation forces killed at least 62 Palestinians during protests near the Gaza fence on the eve of 70th anniversary of Nakba Day (the Day of Catastrophe), which coincided this year with the US embassy relocation from Tel Aviv to occupied Jerusalem (al-Quds).

More than 2,700 Palestinians were also wounded as the Israeli forces used snipers, airstrikes, tank fire and tear gas to target the demonstrators.

In an address to the OIC summit,

Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah underlined the necessity to provide international protection for his countrymen.

“We stress the need for immediate action to help provide international protection for the Palestinian people, who have been suffering for a century from a barbaric and oppressive aggression at the hands of Israeli occupation authorities,” he said.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called for sending “an international peace force to the people of Palestine, who are losing their young children to Israeli terror every day.”

Kuwait circulated among the UN Security Council member states a draft resolution calling for the dispatch of an “international protection mission” to shield Palestinian civilians.

The Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) also convened the same day, demanding an “independent, international commission of inquiry” into the Gaza killings and denouncing “the disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force” by Israeli forces against Palestinians.

The OIC General Secretariat was requested to act immediately to establish an international independent Committee of Experts to investigate the crimes and massacre committed by the Israeli forces against the peaceful and unarmed demonstrators in the Gaza Strip.



It also called for determining the culpability of Israeli officials and communicating the findings to relevant international bodies.

The OIC called upon the UN Security Council, the UN General Assembly, the UN Secretary General, UN Human Rights Council, the special rapporteurs and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to take necessary actions to form an international investigation committee into the recent atrocities in the Gaza Strip, and enable it to initiate field investigation, within a precise time-frame, and ensuring enacting a clear mechanism to determine the culpability of the Israeli officials.

The communiqué also called on the UN Security Council, the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council to uphold their

responsibilities in this regard and invite all countries to mobilise their efforts to bring this issue to their agenda.

It invited all countries to officially recognize the State of Palestine. The OIC also reiterated its rejection of the illegal decision of US President Trump to recognize Al-Quds as the so-called capital of Israel.

It also appreciated the role of the state of Kuwait as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and its immediate reaction to the bloody events in Gaza and its request to the Security Council for an emergency meeting.

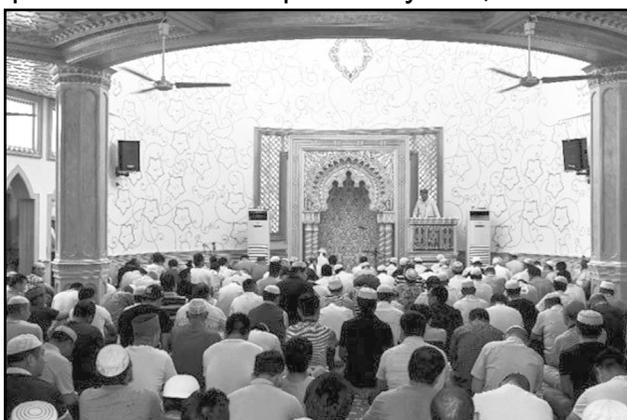
It also commended the resolutions on the cause of Palestine and al-Quds Al-Sharif, the capital of the State of Palestine, adopted by the 45th Session of Council of foreign ministers on 5-6 May in Dhaka. ■

China calls on all mosques to put up national flags

Restrictions on Muslims are intensifying, particularly in the northwestern province of Xinjiang which is home to the mostly Muslim Uighur minority

BEIJING: All Chinese mosques should raise the national flag to “promote a spirit of patriotism” among Muslims, the country’s top Islamic regulatory body has declared, as the Communist Party seeks to tighten its grip on religion.

Flags should be hung in a “prominent position” in all mosque courtyards, the China



Islamic Association said in a letter published on its website.

This would “further strengthen the understanding of national and civic ideals, and promote a spirit of patriotism among Muslims of all ethnic groups”, it read.

Mosques should also publicly display information on the party’s “core socialist values”, and explain them to devotees via Islamic scripture so that they will be “deeply rooted in people’s hearts”, it said.

The China Islamic Association is a government-affiliated body and has the sole power to accredit imams.

The letter comes on the heels of China’s newly revised Regulations on Religious Affairs, which came into effect in February and prompted rights groups to voice concern

for religious freedoms.

The new regulations intensified punishments for unsanctioned religious activities and increased state supervision of religion in a bid to “block extremism” and tackle what Beijing sees as internal threats.

Mosque staff should organise study of the Chinese constitution and other relevant laws — particularly the new religious regulations, the letter said.

They should also study Chinese classics and set up courses on traditional Chinese culture, while being sure to focus only on Muslim sages of Chinese rather than foreign origin, it added.

The goal, it said, was for mosques to become “a solid platform for the study of the party and the country’s laws and policies” in addition to houses of worship, and thereby develop among Muslims “an understanding of a common Chinese identity” with the majority Han.

Islam is one of the five religions officially recognised by the atheist Communist party. The country is home to some 23 million Muslims.

But restrictions on Muslims are intensifying, particularly in the northwestern province of Xinjiang which is home to the mostly Muslim Uighur minority, where there are bans on beards and public prayers.

Authorities say the restrictions and heavy police presence in Xinjiang are intended to control the spread of Islamic extremism and separatist movements, but analysts say the region is becoming an open-air prison. ■

PALESTINIANS POST-ABBAS

Israel eying total control over West Bank

A vacuum in Palestinian leadership is exactly what Israel wants, in order to press ahead with plans to cement total control over the West Bank and end the Palestinian cause

By Haitham Ahmed

The illness of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has once again opened a barrage of questions about the fate of the Palestinian cause amid inter-Palestinian divisions and Israeli voracity for territories in the West Bank, Jerusalem and taking advantage of US support for voiding the Palestinian struggle.

Analysts and observers believe that post-Abbas there will be chaos and bickering among key families, tribes and clans, which is what Israel is waiting for after Abbas exits the scene and the Palestinians have no leader. Tel Aviv will take advantage of this new situation and reward those who cooperate with it through financial support, while imposing a siege and restrictions on those who disagree with it. Annexing Area C in the West Bank would be easier than at any other time due to the political vacuum.

Emad Abu Awad, director of Al-Quds Centre, explained that Israel's settlement plans will never abandon the occupied West Bank territories, since the West Bank is the only option for Israel's urban expansion. Due to current circumstances, Israeli plans to annex Area C has already started by holding onto the West Bank. It will be the graveyard of peace agreements which since the start were an illusion and show Israel's intentions of staying in control of the West Bank.

Abu Awad said the Israeli right-wing always talked about the religious and ideological significance of the West Bank hills,

noting that Neftali Bennet, leader of Jewish Home Party who represents settlers in the cabinet, said the West Bank holds the history of the forefathers and "great Jewish heritage" is located there and can never be abandoned. For Israel's right-wing it is more important than Jaffa, Acre and Haifa. Any influential parties on the Israeli scene, with the exception of the left-wing Meretz Party, strongly support remaining in the West Bank albeit in different shapes and forms with variations on the territories that must remain under Israeli control.

There are those who believe remaining in the West Bank and maintaining control there is a security treasure that should never be compromised because abandoning the higher grounds there puts Israel's security at risk. Others believe that urban expansion is no longer possible without the West Bank which is key to absorbing immigrants and urban expansion.

Major General Gershon Hacoen, a researcher at the Begin-Sadat Centre for Strategic Studies, said the way Yitzhak Rabin divided up the West Bank into areas A, B and C was very clever and with exceptional foresight. He said Rabin knew these areas will remain under Israeli sovereignty, so he transferred areas A and B, which constitute 40 per cent of the West Bank territories and are home to 90 per cent of the population, to the Palestinian Authority (PA) and kept 60 per cent of the territories under Israeli control with



no more than 10 per cent of the population.

Meanwhile, Israel has started to register land in Jerusalem in its name, which had been forbidden since the occupation of the holy city in 1967 due to the Absentee Property Law. The National Bureau for Defending the Land and Resisting Settlements belonging to the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) said the occupation continues to take advantage of the US' position on Jerusalem, and Washington's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of the "Israeli" entity in order to grab more land and property belonging to Palestinians. The bureau's weekly report on settlements said the Israeli Mayor of

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Jerusalem Nir Barkat is planning to begin "a new game of grabbing more land and property belonging to Jerusalem residents by levelling land in occupied East Jerusalem and registering them in the land registry office."

Experts believe this would mean confiscating Palestinian land and property under the pretext of assets belonging to "absentees". Mounir Oda, an expert on Israeli affairs, said Tel Aviv passed several laws against Palestinian residents to expel them from the holy city, including cancelling Jerusalem residency, destroying homes, suspending laws that support their presence in Jerusalem in order to bring in Jewish immigrants and expanding

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settlements.

Oda continued that the Knesset is always trying to grab land at every opportunity, most recently by trying to register land in Jerusalem that is unregistered, which accounts for some 96 per cent of the city.

Jamal Omar, an expert on Jerusalem, said that registering Jerusalem property is a law that is torturous even though it may appear benign, because it will open a Pandora's box since Jerusalem residents do not have full proof of their property ownership, and many live overseas. Others are living outside the Separation Wall running through Jerusalem and therefore this measure aims to take control of the city and officially confiscate more land.

"What is occurring by changing the names and historic sites in Jerusalem by the occupation is a type of forgery which carries criminal charges for Israeli officials," asserted lawyer and expert on international law Anis Qassem. He said meddling with any antiquities or historical sites would be a war crime and desecration and sabotage heritage. Qassem said that antiquities are protected by international law and The Hague Treaty of 1907.

Discussing the "deal of the century", political analyst and professor at Bir Zeit University Nashaat Al-Aqtash said the initiative is planned for implementation with Hamas not Fatah, since leaked reports about the 2014 deal reveal an offer to create a statelet in Gaza, while the West Bank remains under limited self-rule without any change. Thus, pressure is mostly on Hamas to accept the deal. The group is also under Arab, Palestinian, US and Israeli pressure to accept

the deal to end the Palestinian struggle. He added that once Hamas accepts the deal under any pretext it will be a fait accompli.

Al-Aqtash believes Abbas will not call for a meeting of the Palestinian Legislative Council and therefore if he exists the scene it is possible that the PLO would put forward Saeb Erekat as an interim president since he is secretary general of the PLO's Executive Committee. Hamas could also use legal justifications for the second deputy of the

Israel has started to register land in Jerusalem in its name, which had been forbidden since the occupation of the holy city in 1967 due to the Absentee Property Law

Legislative Council Ahmed Bahr to replace Abbas if the latter, as chairman of the council, is absent. This would result in two councils and two entities, which is what Israel wants to see happen.

There are three key facts, he continued. First, Abbas will not call a meeting of the Legislative Council since Hamas is a dominant member of the council with one third of the seats. He explained if the council meets, Hamas will immediately change key legislation and the political structure. Second, that Gaza was handed over to Hamas and it foolishly became embroiled in it, "which is what led us to this endless disaster". Third, that Abbas rejected the deal of the century but only because the PA is not part of the deal. His rejection should have ended division immediately, especially since Hamas honoured its responsibilities, but the PA is still procrastinating. Abbas, 82, spent one week in hospital in Ramallah starting 20 May where doctors said he came for tests after ear surgery five days earlier. But the next day they announced he has pneumonia. In February, Abbas, who is a chain smoker, was admitted to hospital in the US for tests during a visit to address the UN Security Council. ■

Courtesy: Al Ahram Weekly