

WHERE DOES MALAYSIA STAND IN THE GAZA MASSACRE?

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1 DECEMBER 2025



EXPERT BRIEF

WORLD POLITICS

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Introduction

The genocide against the people of Gaza has been worsening every single day. The blockade imposed by Israel on Gaza resulted in severe starvation, during which many people died. This cruelty of Israel had invited major protests and boycotts around the world, despite there still being some states that chose to remain “neutral” or even worse, giving full support to Israel. This solidarity doesn’t just occur in the neighboring Muslim countries; in fact, these countries are the ones that are more silent compared to other countries from farther regions, such as Malaysia, which is more vocal regarding the issue of people in Gaza.

Malaysia is a Muslim country where about 60% of the population is Muslim, a country that practices a constitutional monarchy, and Islam is the official religion of Malaysia according to its constitution. Malaysia has a vibrant civil-society sector that ranges from youth movements, leftist movements, Islamic movements, to humanitarian NGO that mobilize support for international causes, including Palestine.

The Malaysian society, in general, was never silent about Gaza; however, some sects of society, mainly non-Muslim, may not show much of their opinion, and Malay Muslim, Islamic parties, or Islamic NGOs usually monopolized the cause for the Palestinians. However, since October 7th, the support has been wider, coming from various spectrums and levels of society[i].

Malaysian Foreign Policy on Palestine

The support for Palestine has a long history in Malaysia, and the government plays an important role in cultivating it on a societal level. Since the early years of Malaysian independence, it has consistently refused to recognize the state of Israel, despite some Western pressure in the 1950s–1960s. Malaysia, since the early days, has not established diplomatic ties with Israel, unlike some other newly independent states[ii].

Malaysia’s Prime Minister, Tunku Abdurrahman, had once welcomed Israeli Prime Minister Moshe Sharett in 1956 to discuss the possibility of establishing an Israeli consulate in Kuala Lumpur. On 26 August 1957, David Ben-Gurion sent a congratulatory letter offering Israeli representation, but this never materialized[iii]. Later, by the mid-1960s, Malaysia, influenced by the rise of domestic Islamic sentiment and the need for support from Arab and non-aligned countries during the Confrontation with Indonesia, severed its trade and diplomatic links with Israel. Tunku declared in the Malaysian Parliament that Malaysia will not recognize Israel. He criticized Singapore for having Israeli advisors, drawing a parallel to Israel’s geopolitical isolation. From 1966 onwards, the government refused entry to Israelis, and by 1974, all trade and entry permits for Israelis were banned[iv].

Later in the 90s, the time of Tun Dr Mahathir being a prime minister, he had been vocal about the hypocrisy of the West, and America, to the extent of being a strong backer of Israel. His outrage and blatant vocalism had made him be called antisemitic by the Western media. Historically, Malaysia, since the era of Tun Dr Mahathir in the 1980s, has shown its support towards Palestine, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which was invited to have a proper office in Kuala Lumpur, and refused to recognize Israel until the Israeli Government recognized the government of PLO[v]. Malaysia, during this time, had sent a few letters to Israeli Prime Ministers to deny any allegations that Malaysia would recognize Israel. This is to explain that Malaysia remained consistent in not recognizing the Zionist state of Israel. This stance has remained consistent to date, as Malaysia remains one of the countries that does not allow Israeli passport holders to enter the country. Anyone with an Israeli Passport would not be granted a Visa, but acceptance applies to those who receive a letter of approval from the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Today, the Malaysian government, under the leadership of Anwar Ibrahim, shows a very consistent stance in supporting Palestine. Malaysia, not just its people, but also the government and other democratic institutions, play an essential role in advancing this agenda. During his tenure as Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim made several public statements on multiple occasions in support of the people of Gaza. He emphasized that the ongoing Israeli onslaught in Palestine is a pivotal moment that challenges our collective humanity. He lauded Saudi Arabia's leadership in convening a summit and urged action beyond outrage. He also criticized global complacency that enables such violence and underscored the awakening collective conscience of Muslim populations worldwide. He reaffirmed Malaysia's unwavering commitment to justice and solidarity with the Palestinian people[vi].

Additionally, Malaysia has committed a total of RM200 million (approximately \$47.2 million) in humanitarian aid to support this effort. The Malaysian government also formally issued a statement reiterating Anwar's main points, which ended with a plea to the "international community to take decisive action to prevent ethnic cleansing" and the expulsion of the Palestinian population in Gaza[vii]. Anwar Ibrahim himself had also led the large pro-Palestine Rally in Kuala Lumpur, even though it potentially risked straining the government's relations with its closest Western partners[viii].

In terms of Malaysia's relations with Hamas, Malaysia has maintained open political engagement with Hamas. It refuses to designate it as a terrorist group and maintains diplomatic relations with the political bureau. Malaysia had hosted Hamas political leaders on a few occasions, such as Ismail Haniyeh[ix]. The Palestinian Cultural Organization Malaysia

(PCOM) in Kuala Lumpur, which has been widely described as close to Hamas, has also received considerable support and funding from Malaysia, garnering substantial backing from many prominent figures in the country[x].

The effort and support are not just a one-person show in Malaysia; even in its legislative branch, the Malaysian Parliament has established the Parliament Caucus for Palestine. The primary objectives of this caucus are to discuss parliamentary policy, initiatives, the stance of members of parliament, and the collection of petitions to further support the Palestinian issue. The Parliament Caucus for Palestine's chairman, YB Syed Ibrahim Syed Noh, said: "Other than that, the main objectives of this caucus are also to create a better awareness regarding the struggle of the Palestinian people, the massacre, the killing and to provide a better understanding for Malaysian MP's and Malaysians as a whole about the real issue happening in Gaza. This Caucus consists of MPs from different parties, not just government but also opposition parties, and it also goes beyond Muslim MPs[xi]".

He also added that this caucus had moved further beyond Malaysia. The Parliament Caucus for Palestine had furthered the effort in establishing bigger solidarity from Members of parliament from other Southeast Asian countries, such as Indonesia, Thailand, and Brunei. This effort is solely to further the awareness of other Muslim majority Southeast Asian countries, like Thailand or Vietnam, to gain support and spread awareness on the real issue happening in Gaza, which goes beyond religion; it is, in fact, the crisis of humanity and a genocide occurring there. Malaysia, along with other Muslim countries, is also involved in the Parliament for Al Quds and Palestine. Syed Ibrahim is also one of the members on the Board of Directors representing Southeast Asian countries[xii].

Boycott Movements, The Unstoppable

Various news articles discussed the impact of the boycott movement in Malaysia since October 7th. Malaysia, under the BDS Malaysia initiative, is one of the countries working closely with the BDS committee globally and has garnered international media attention for its efforts towards a boycott movement. In Malaysia, Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) Malaysia, had launched a campaign, and recently caught the attention of the masses as it mobilized the people massively[xiii], the popularity had roused up since McDonald's Malaysia sued BDS Malaysia for "false and defamatory statements" that it says hurt its business, seeking damages amounting to 6 million ringgit (1.31 million dollars).[xiv]

Recently, companies that are well known for showing support towards Israel have faced considerable backlash. McDonald's and Starbucks, for example, have received tremendous backlash from Malaysians as a lot of their branches in Malaysia closed due to boycott

movements. According to Starbucks, the financial report for the third quarter, ending March 31, 2024, revealed a staggering net loss of RM29.76 million (approximately \$ 7.02 million), a stark downturn from the previous year's profit of RM15.94 million (roughly \$ 3.76 million). This decline, attributed to a significant 38.2% drop in revenue, is directly linked to the boycott of Starbucks over perceived ties to Israel. Malaysians are now showing solidarity more at the checkout counter than on the streets, and the effectiveness of these boycott movements is growing day by day, making it unstoppable[xv].

Malaysians don't stop boycotting at the checkout counter; they go beyond and target social media influencers and artists who are silent about the issue in Gaza. In 2024, the movement called "Blackout 2024" emerged, aiming to raise awareness among the masses about Malaysian artists who were being blocked and called out for collaborating with brands known to support Israel. The movement was first inspired by the US Blockout 2024 (spread by using the hashtag #Blockout2024), which was an online movement to block the social media accounts of celebrities and organizations associated with their silence or support for Israel in the Gaza war. The Blackout 2024 in Malaysia was successful, considering that some artists decided to terminate contracts with certain brands to continue speaking out about the people in Gaza[xvi].

Political Parties, NGOs, Civil Society, and the Mobilization of the Masses

The issue about Palestine and Gaza, and the reception of Malaysians back then, usually had its own market in particular groups of Malaysians, such as human activists, political activists who are more conservative or more Islamic-oriented, and Malays. However, recently, the awareness about the genocide happening in Gaza in Malaysia has become more diverse and widespread. These days, different levels of society have gained attention of this issue and have become more vocal and taken a solid stance siding with Palestine. From 2023 to 2025, Malaysians have demonstrated solidarity through various means, one of which is particularly noteworthy: the mass mobilization taking to the streets. There is a series of demonstrations conducted by Malaysians that never seems to stop.

Between October 2023 and today, Malaysia has witnessed sustained public mobilizations in support of Palestine, often centered around Kuala Lumpur and the US Embassy. On 13 October 2023, a Friday protest outside the Embassy set the tone for broader weekend actions, culminating in the 22 October civil society-led rally at Dataran Merdeka, which drew thousands. Two days later, on 24 October, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim addressed a packed crowd at Bukit Jalil's Axiata Arena during the "Malaysia Stands with Palestine" mass rally. From December 26 to 31, 2023, activists staged "Aksi Bertindak: Kepung Demi Palestin," a week-long sit-in near the US Embassy, which later drew police scrutiny[xvii].

On 13 January 2024, over 1,000 participants and 33 NGOs joined the Global Day of Action for Gaza rally. This momentum carried into 27 February–2 March, with the “Himpunan Solidariti Demi Palestin” rally organised by MAPIM and other coalitions. Protests continued into late 2024, including an October 1 statement urging the police to drop charges against seven demonstrators, and the 12 October “Himpunan 1 Tahun Taufan Al-Aqsa” march, marking one year since the October 7, 2023, incident. These actions reflected Malaysia’s deep and persistent public solidarity with the Palestinian cause[xviii].

Even in 2025, Malaysia witnessed several high-profile street protests reflecting solidarity with Palestine and opposition to figures seen as pro-Israel. In May 2025, over 1,000 people joined the Nakba 77 march in Kuala Lumpur to commemorate the 77th anniversary of the 1948 displacement of Palestinians. Participants chanted slogans such as “Free Palestine” and “Stop the genocide,” emphasizing Malaysians’ continued support for the Palestinian cause[xix]. Later, on 18 July 2025, dozens of people gathered in front of the US Embassy in Kuala Lumpur for a “Reject Nick Adams” protest, protesting the nomination of conservative commentator Nick Adams as the US ambassador to Malaysia. The protesters, including youth leaders and representatives of political parties, cited his record of Islamophobic statements and pro-Israel stances that were seen as contradictory to Malaysian values. Organizers warned that Adams would “face us every week” if appointed. The protest involved the submission of memorandums to embassies and received media coverage from Reuters, Al Jazeera, and the South China Morning Post, while DAP leaders in government also called for an official rejection of the nomination. These events demonstrate how street activism in Malaysia remains closely aligned with foreign policy priorities, combining the voices of civil society and political actors in defense of the country’s pro-Palestinian stance[xx].

Malaysians, through NGOs, have done more than demonstrate and protest. They addressed the root cause, sent help, and conducted projects for years to achieve more sustainable and long-term benefits that can help the people of Gaza. My Care, one of the leading NGO in humanitarian works, had conducted a project called the “Bina Semula Gaza (BSG)” (Rebuild Gaza). The project is a long-term initiative by MyCARE in strategic partnership with Surau Pusat An-Nur Country Heights (SPANCH) that aims to help the people of Gaza rebuild their lives after the conflict.

BSG targets several critical aspects, namely Home Rehabilitation, where it aims to assist the most affected groups, such as single mothers, orphans, and the disabled, with repairs to their homes to ensure basic protection and comfort. The Health and Medical Rehabilitation also provides medicines, equipment, sponsors treatment costs, and maintains health facilities. This also includes assistance such as giving prosthetic legs for the disabled,

organizing “Free Health Days,” and offering vehicles for mobile treatment, all in the context of its strategic fundraising efforts. MyCARE set a clear fundraising target of RM500,000 (approximately \$120,000) for the initial phase, with plans to increase to RM1 million (roughly \$238,000) based on popular demand. Since the conflict erupted on 7 October 2023, MyCARE has channeled nearly RM7 million (approximately \$ 1.6 million) to Gaza, including the purchase of ambulances, tents, food, medicine, and other essential items. Overall, BSG connects physical assistance (repair of houses and health facilities) with strategic fundraising efforts and community awareness campaigns[xxi].

Challenges

Despite being a country that is well known for its foreign policy stance towards Gaza and recognizing the Hamas leadership in Gaza, there are some issues relating to Mossad agents. Malaysia is a place for some Palestinians to stay for safety reasons. More often than not, Palestinian scholars or important figures were invited to visit Malaysia for campaign projects, conferences, or courtesy visits. Mossad, however, has its agents hovering around in Malaysia, and some of them are even Malaysian Muslims. In 2018, a Palestinian Islamic scholar was killed in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on his way to the Fajr Prayer. He was shot to death, and it is believed that a European Mossad agent[xxii] killed him. Other than that, in 2022, it was reported that the Israeli intelligence agency, Mossad, is considered to be behind the kidnapping of a Palestinian man, who was kidnapped in a “snatch-and-grab” operation in Kuala Lumpur on September 28. The victim was abducted by four men, taken to a house on the outskirts of the city, and interrogated for 24 hours via video call by officers believed to be Israeli, about his links to the Hamas organization and his skills in software development. However, Malaysian police managed to rescue the victim after another Palestinian man, who was also being sought, managed to escape and contact authorities[xxiii].

In 2024, however, Malaysian authorities managed to arrest a 36-year-old man suspected of being an Israeli intelligence agent in an operation at a hotel in Kuala Lumpur. The young man is believed to have entered the country using a fake French passport but surrendered his Israeli passport during questioning. He was found in possession of six firearms. Based on initial investigations by the Inspector-General of Police, the suspect allegedly entered the country not for personal reasons but was suspected of being involved in a foreign intelligence operation. The case led authorities to increase security for the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, and other national figures[xxiv].

Recently, in 2025, Malaysian Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, said that the country has been targeted by the Israeli intelligence agency, Mossad, because of Malaysia’s firm stance on Palestine and Gaza. As evidence, he cited an arms smuggling case involving a local couple who allegedly worked with Israeli agents. Anwar stressed that the government has identified various

threats from foreign intelligence agencies and has taken additional security measures, including enhancing surveillance capabilities by the Home Ministry. Malaysia remains steadfast in its stance on humanity and national sovereignty, despite pressure, including the possibility of additional tariffs by the United States.[xxv]

Conclusion

In short, Malaysia's stance on Palestine has matured into a comprehensive, whole-of-society foreign policy, rooted in religious life, parliamentary action, civic networks, and consumer power. Even though Malaysia is a country geographically located far from Palestine, the cause of Palestinian freedom has always been close. Recent issues regarding the two-state solution, as stated in the New York Declaration, which has already gained support from Türkiye, the EU, and other Arab countries, have yet to be addressed by Malaysia.[xxvi] Malaysia considers the declaration to be very biased as it demands Hamas to disarm and let the PLO rule Gaza. This demand is not aligned with Malaysia's foreign policy. Malaysia takes a cautious approach in having a stance in this New York declaration, as Malaysia has supported the self-governance of Palestinians in Palestine since day 1, and condemns the genocide committed by Israel. The New York declaration, on the other hand, seems to punish Hamas, but turns a blind eye to what Israel has committed, which is far from worse[xxvii].

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