

# REPORT



**Islamabad**  
**Policy Institute**  
*Supporting Dialogue for Peace & Development*

## Dynamics of Muslim World & Future of Palestine: Time to Fight Back

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# **Dynamics of Muslim World & Future of Palestine: Time to Fight Back**

**Webinar Report**

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## Introduction

The longstanding Palestine issue, which revolves around territorial and religious disputes dating back to the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, reached a critical juncture after the normalization of relations between four Arab League countries – Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Sudan and Morocco – and Israel. The normalization process was brokered and actively pushed forward by Trump Administration. Therefore, the change at the White House following presidential elections in November 2020, left the future of Abrahamic Accords uncertain.

Even before President Joe Biden's policy on Palestine got clearer, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu aggressive actions of evicting Palestinians and annexing territory pushed the tensions between Palestinians and Israel to a flashpoint. Israeli police officers cracked down on Palestinian youth inside the Al-Aqsa Mosque and later bombarded and rained missiles on Gaza Strip in which nearly hundred people have been martyred so far.

The Palestine conflict is of great importance for the Muslim world in general, and for Pakistan in particular. The issue shares many commonalities with the legal position of Pakistan on the Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK). In this backdrop, *Islamabad Policy Institute* (IPI) held a webinar to take stock of the developments in the region.

Speakers at the webinar included:

- Prof. Syed Sajjad Bokhari, Executive Director IPI
- Mr. Zahid Hafeez Chaudhry, Additional Secretary and Spokesperson, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Dr. Sabir Abu Maryam, Secretary General, Palestine Foundation
- Mr. Mobeen Jafar Mir, Research Associate IPI

**Prof. Syed Sajjad Bokhari**

- We should look at the different aspects of the conflict including the impact of the Abrahamic accords on the Palestinian struggle, President Biden's Policy with regards to Palestine, the parallels between the struggles in Kashmir and Palestine for the right to self-determination.
- There is a natural and strong emotional attachment to the issue of Palestine, as well as a deep commitment to its just and peaceful settlement. The centrality of the cause of Al-Quds Al-Sharif for the whole Islamic Ummah should be clear to all.
- However, what we have seen over the years is a continued and unrelenting assault on the Palestinian rights and identity by Israel with the help of the United States and its allies. Israel has all along disregarded world opinion about its illegal actions and operated with impunity because of the unflinching American support for its crimes.
- This has aggravated the plight of the Palestinians, who are often confronted with Israeli violence, systematic repression, dislocation, occupation of their lands by the Zionists and discrimination.
- The year 2020, as the UN Special Coordinator for Middle East Peace Process in his report noted, was a year of setbacks for the Palestinians, their institutions, and their economy. Among other reasons, the recognition of Israel by the Arab States – Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Sudan, and Morocco - made Palestinians fear that this development would lead to further weakening of the Muslim world's support for their cause.
- They do not see an imminent end to their sufferings. The current situation has, therefore, left them with no option but to resist the occupation.
- Although the developments of 2020 are unlikely to be reversed, it is now time to think out of the box for resolving the longstanding dispute. The Palestinians should first and foremost initiate an internal dialogue among themselves to develop a new vision for their struggle. A vision that could energize their struggle while bringing together the different factions. There have been various episodes of Palestinian resistance, but a sustainable front is yet to be formed for which unity is crucial.

- Elections in Palestine, scheduled for May 22, could have helped formulate the needed united front, but their postponement by the Palestinian Authority on the pretext of uncertainty about Israel allowing voting in annexed East Jerusalem, would further fuel misgivings among the Palestinian factions.
- The Palestinians should, moreover, in view of the developments over the past few years realize that the Americans cannot be anymore trusted as impartial negotiators. Furthermore, it needs to be driven home that neither the United States nor Israel are dominant global and regional powers respectively. Therefore, the Palestinians should instead of uselessly looking up to Washington, explore options with other influential countries.
- Meanwhile, publics in other countries need to maintain pressure on their respective governments so that international solidarity could be preserved in view of the evolving situation.

**Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri:**

- The issue of Palestine is not only a priority for the government of Pakistan, but it is also very close to the hearts of every single Pakistani. Pakistan's unflinching support to the people of Palestine is as old as the country itself. The government of Pakistan always stands by the Palestinians in their just struggle to secure the right to self-determination.
- Pakistan was among the first few states that recognized the right of Palestinian statehood in 1988. Pakistan has sponsored, co-sponsored and supported every single resolution for Palestine at every international forum, including in the United Nations (UN) and Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).
- Pakistan co-sponsored the United Nations General Assembly Resolution to upgrade the status of Palestine to a non-observer member state of the UN in 2012.
- The issue of Palestine is important to Pakistan for multiple reasons.
  - First, the issue represents one of the most important causes of the Muslim world, and the same issue was a reason for the creation of OIC.
  - Second, we have a principled stance on the peoples' right to self-determination, a fundamental right recognized by as such by international law. Pakistan annually sponsors a resolution in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on the peoples' right to self-determination.
  - Three, the issue carries significance from the human rights perspective. Pakistan has always espoused the cause of supporting the rights of self-determination for every oppressed nation, be it Palestine, illegally held Indian Occupied Kashmir or elsewhere.
- We are deeply concerned about the grave human rights violations which are being endured by the Palestinians for almost seven decades now. A worrisome surge in violence against the Palestinians is also being witnessed in the holy ongoing holy month of Ramadan. Despite the Israeli brutal tactics against the Palestinians, the indomitable courage of the Palestinians in the face of adversity has remained unscathed.
- We support the inalienable rights of the Palestinians and their struggle for their separate homeland, and the government of Pakistan believes that a two-state solution in accordance

with the relevant UN and OIC resolutions with demarcation of pre-1967 borders and Al-Quds Al-Sharif as a capital of a future viable, independent and contiguous Palestinian state is a prerequisite for securing a lasting solution of the conflict.

**Dr. Sabir Abu Maryam:**

- We are in an era, where survival is the main priority because of the outbreak of deadly Covid-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, the virus has been used as a pretext by the United States of America, Israel and India to divert world attention from their crimes. So, it is incumbent upon us in these testing times that we do not overlook the humanitarian dimensions of the Palestine and Kashmir conflicts. The Covid-19 pandemic is aggravating the plight of the Palestinians.
- Zionist Israel is an illegal state from both moral and political perspectives.
- It is crucial for any approach to dealing with Palestine issue that Palestinians get justice. This can only be made possible if the Palestinians get their inalienable right to self-determination. We espouse the same formula for the oppressed Kashmiris in the illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir.
- Founder of Pakistan Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was also an advocate of a free Palestine, so Islamabad always attached great significance to its commitments to the Palestinians by adopting it as a cardinal principle of its foreign policy. Islamabad's support for the Palestinian's right to self-determination also strengthens its position towards the Kashmir conflict.
- The right to self-determination for the Palestinians can only be fulfilled once their right of return to their homeland is ensured in the first place.
- It is a wrong perception that those supporting the Palestinians are against the Jews. The pro-Palestine elements do not harbour prejudice against any religion or nationality. They only demand a just and lawful solution of the conflict. Before 1948, the year when illegal migrants from all across the world started flooding into Palestine through a global conspiracy, there lived Arab Palestinians of all three Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. They were the true representatives of Palestine and should be taken as primary stakeholders in choosing the fate of the disputed land. All those who were illegally sent to Palestine before 1948, during 1948 and in succeeding years, must be returned to their native lands in Europe and elsewhere. But, if the Arab Palestinians decide that those who came here from foreign lands and are ready to live under the Palestinian Arabs, can make the land their permanent abode.



- One thing should be kept in mind that neither Quaid-i-Azam nor any initial foreign policy document of Pakistan mentions the word of ‘pre-1967 borders’ to suggest the parameters of a solution to the Palestinian conflict. Palestine as a whole belongs to the Palestinian Arabs and there is no such legal state as Israel in the world.

**Mobeen Jafar Mir:**

- The advent of the Joe Biden administration in US had generated hope and optimism about progress on the Palestine issue but it all proved rather hollow and short-lived. Recent developments have made it clear that the Joe Biden's administration is a least willing administration to solve the Israel-Palestine conflict.
- An indication of President Joe Biden not keeping the Palestine dispute on its priority list is its delay in naming a special envoy to the dispute. Even the preceding president of US Donald Trump, who was accused and lambasted world over for adopting pro-Israel policies, had named Jason Greenblatt in his initial days to initiate talks between Israelis and Palestinians.
- There is a democratic rupture in Israel, which is on its way to have its fifth election within a span of two years, and the Palestinians were to hold their parliamentary and presidential elections in May and June respectively, yet the Biden administration is so grossly involved in its antagonism with China that all the rest appears insignificant to it. This lack of attention may turn things from bad to worse for the already deserted and abandoned Palestinians.
- The prevailing worrisome trend in the Biden administration can also be corroborated by the fact that the Biden administration has so far appeared unwilling to denounce illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank and has used the term 'Israel, Gaza and West Bank' for the disputed tracts of lands instead of reverting to pre-Trump usage of 'Israel and the Occupied Territories' for the Palestinian parts under incessant encroachment by Israel.
- The Biden administration has taken no practical step to restore diplomatic channels with the Palestinians. In December 2017, the Palestinian officials had halted engagements with the US officials in the wake of the Trump administration's illegal, unilateral decision to announce Jerusalem as a capital of Israel and moving the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. President Joe Biden instead of addressing the concerns of the Palestinians, telephoned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu after becoming the president and is yet to talk to Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas.

- It was also hoped that the Biden administration would re-open the US Consulate General in Jerusalem which was shut down by the Trump administration. The Palestinians had expressed deep concerns about contacting the US embassy in Jerusalem which predominantly deals with the Israelis. The US Consulate General was a sole diplomatic conduit available to the Palestinians to voice their concerns. Unfortunately, the Biden administration did not fail in letting the Palestinians down here as well.
- President Joe Biden's announcement to reverse the decisions taken by his predecessor had generated optimism and a ray of hope for the Palestinians. However, he is yet to condemn the statement made by former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who had legitimized Israeli settlements in the West Bank. The disputed region of Golan Heights of Syria was illegally bestowed upon Israel by the Trump administration. President Joe Biden has also not signalled any possibility of rescinding the decision and has indirectly endorsed the illegal Israeli settlements and expansionist designs.
- The controversial so-called Great Deal of the Century, a brainchild of Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, was criticized for being increasingly in favour of Israel. The present US administration seems to have extended its blessings to it without taking Palestinian concerns into consideration. The Great Deal of the Century laid the foundation stone for the so-called Abrahamic accords where multiple Arab states restored diplomatic ties with Israel. The accords, it was believed, would open new avenues for a lasting solution for the conflict, but no substantial result has so far been secured from it. The Biden administration has not so far hinted at expanding the Abraham accords. It proves that the expectations attached to the Abraham accords have not materialized.

**Conclusion:**

1. The incessant political, economic and diplomatic support extended to Israel by the US has emboldened the Zionist regime to prolong the repression of the Palestinians with impunity.
2. The Abraham accords are a grave setback for the just Palestinian cause. They weaken the unanimous front of Muslim states and undermine any possibility of reaching a lasting solution of the conflict.
3. The prevalent divisions among various Palestinian factions are a stumbling block in forming a strong, united front against the Zionist regime and provide an opportunity to agents of chaos to further their interests in the absence of a strong resistance.
4. The US has lost its credibility as an impartial negotiator. It is time the Palestinians stopped pinning their hopes on the US alone and looked beyond to other states, especially the emerging powers in Asia, that have deep interests in maintaining peace and stability in the region.
5. The UN has failed to live up to its commitments and provide justice for the Palestinians.
6. The issue of Palestine carries great significance for Pakistan. It stands in line with Pakistan's demand for the right of self-determination for the Kashmiris. The commonalities between Palestine and Kashmir can be in no way brushed aside. Pakistan's stance on Palestine will have a direct bearing on its position on Jammu and Kashmir.
7. The Palestine conflict holds primary importance for the Muslim world and compromising the cause will create disharmony among the Muslim world in the long run. Pakistan has a foremost responsibility to espouse the cause of the Palestinians and beef up a global campaign to impress upon democratic states to play their role. It will highlight the just struggle of the Kashmiris and help them in choosing their future through their legal right of self-determination.
8. The Covid-19 pandemic is being used as a smokescreen to divert attention from the mass atrocities in Palestine, Kashmir and other parts of the world. The world cannot afford to take an eye off from these grave human rights violations.
9. The Biden administration is deliberately ignoring the Palestinian conflict, which provides a carte blanche to the Israelis in their notorious agenda of expansionism. With the withdrawal of

the US forces from the region followed by its intensifying rivalry with China and more engagements in the Indo-Pacific region, the Palestine conflict will be placed on the backburner.