

# Mahathir, OIC Meeting Condemn Israeli Terror

by Michael Billington

The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) held an Extraordinary Session of Foreign Ministers on Terrorism, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on April 1-3, attended by 52 of the group's 57 member nations. The agenda was dominated by the Israeli re-occupation of Palestine. Before the Conference, Dr. Abdelouahed Belkeziz, the Secretary General of the OIC, released a statement denouncing the "brutal attack being waged by the Israeli forces against the Palestinian people and their National Authority, at a time when the Arab nation has reached out in peace to Israel in an initiative which has won the consensus of the whole world, and only hours after the Palestinian President declared an unconditional cease-fire and his readiness to cooperate immediately to ensure the success of Anthony Zinni's mission to implement the Tenet recommendations and those of the Mitchell Report."

Opening the Conference, host Malaysia's Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad appealed to Israel to recognize that a new Holocaust against the Palestinians would not defeat them, any more than the Nazi Holocaust defeated the Jewish people (see *Documentation*). Dr. Mahathir also said that the United States was "doing right in terms of getting the world to act against terrorists," a goal, he said, which has the support of the whole world. However, "unfortunately, the U.S. government has supported the actions of the Israeli government, which amounts to terrorism, and it is difficult for the world to unite against terrorists when there is ambiguity or double standards. We must have only one standard."

Dr. Mahathir had hoped that the Conference would adopt a standard for the definition of terrorism, which could then lead to an international conference to establish a universal standard. His own proposal was that any intentional targeting of civilians must be condemned as terrorism, including the Israeli destruction of cities and indiscriminate killing, as well as the Palestinian suicide bombers, although he insisted that addressing the *cause* of the desperation that leads people to such acts, rooted in the brutal and illegal Israeli occupation, is the only way to end them.

This definition was not accepted by the Conference, however, which refused to accept any implication that the Palestinian resistance to the occupation was itself an act of terrorism, as argued by Sharon in justification of his drive to

liquidate the Palestinian leadership. Instead, the Conference decided to forward the matter to the entire United Nations for further discussion. The Conference did resolve that "Israel's terrorist and aggressive practices, posing a threat to international peace and security and dragging the region toward an all-out war, necessitate immediate action by the UN Security Council to apply Chapter VII of the UN Charter."

In regard to U.S. unilateral saber-rattling against Iraq, Iran, and Syria, the Conference resolved: "We reject any unilateral action taken against any Islamic country under the pretext of combatting international terrorism."

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## Documentation

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*The following are excerpts from Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad's speech to the Organization of the Islamic Conference Foreign Ministers Conference on Terrorism in Kuala Lumpur on April 1:*

Fighting terrorists is not like fighting another country. We can flatten the enemy country until nothing is left of that country. It is entirely possible to do that now, and it has been done. But we can still miss the terrorists, for we do not know who they are and where they are. They may not be in the country we have destroyed. They may be elsewhere; they may even be in our own country. . . .

We already know that it is entirely possible for freedom fighters struggling against oppression to be mistaken for and to be deliberately labeled as terrorists by their oppressors. Thus Jomo Kenyatta, Robert Mugabe, Nelson Mandela, Sam Nujoma were all labeled as terrorists, were hunted and faced jail sentences if they were captured. But we know that today they are accepted as respected leaders of their countries. Clearly today's terrorists may be re-designated freedom fighters tomorrow and today's freedom fighters may become terrorists the next day depending on circumstances. If we hunt everyone whom some people refer to as terrorists, we may be doing a great deal of injustice.

On the other hand, misguided people and countries may harbor and support terrorists, believing them to be fighting for a legitimate cause. In the liberal Western countries there are quite a few terrorists' cells working in support of terrorist organizations in other countries. They are not too different from Afghanistan, which provided a haven for the al-Qaeda terrorists.

So how do we identify terrorists? How do we distinguish freedom fighters from terrorists, how do we determine which government should be condemned for acts of terrorism or harboring terrorists? . . .

I would like to suggest here that armed attacks or other forms of attack against civilians must be regarded as acts of