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## Waiting on practical steps of Islamic leaders



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**OPINION EXCLUSIVE**

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) held a summit in Riyadh on Saturday to review the situation in Gaza and the crimes of Israel against the Palestinians. The participation of the Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in the summit shows how much the Islamic Republic of Iran is focused on the Palestinian cause.

Given the depth of the crisis created by the Israeli crimes in Gaza, it seems that the summit was a bit overdue. Of course, to hold a summit at the level of leaders needs a ton of groundwork, which may have been a little time-consuming, but it was still expected to happen much sooner than this.

Israel has proven that it wants nothing to do with any international norms and principles. So, it is not afraid of taking destructive steps such as killing women and children. This will to rampage is of course reliant on the support of Western countries, with the United States and the United Kingdom at the top. If it weren't for their support, Tel Aviv wouldn't have dared to commit genocide with such ease.

In contrast to the positions taken by some countries including those in the West, the people around the world did not stand for the Israeli crimes. In recent days, we saw the largest gatherings and demonstrations take place in support of Gazans and stopping the war. These gatherings indicate that the Israeli regime has lost the favor of public opinion in the world.

Israel does not put an end to its crimes despite such widespread protest for two reasons. One, the Israelis suffered a heavy blow from Hamas on October 7, and now they are trying to wreak more havoc and kill people to cover up that tremendous failure. Two, they rely on the support of the US and the UK.

In the meantime, to hold the OIC summit at the level of the heads of state as a show of unity from Islamic countries supporting Palestine is an achievement. However, the summit can be truly effective and game-changing only when it is accompanied by practical steps. Even though issuing a joint statement and making addresses during the summit can fuel anti-Israeli sentiments, it does not alleviate the pain of the people of Gaza.

The Islamic countries have various potentials that can be used to pressure Israel. It is said that more than 70 percent of the crude oil needed by Israel is provided by Islamic countries. A large part of the regime's trade is with Arab and Islamic countries as well. Therefore, in the Riyadh summit, the leaders of the Islamic countries can go over the methods for utilizing these potentials to put pressure on Israel and reach effective solutions.

Two other items should be put on the summit's agenda. Recently, a minister of Netanyahu's cabinet said that using the atomic bomb in Gaza is one of the regime's options. This confirms that Israel does have nuclear weapons. The international community should be worried that such a bloodthirsty regime possesses nuclear weapons without international oversight.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has for thirty years been advocating for a Middle East nuclear-weapon-free zone. I, for one, hope that the Iranian delegation to the Riyadh summit focuses on the Israeli minister's threat and puts the nuclear-weapon-free Middle East on the agenda of the summit, too.

The Islamic world has ample opportunities and potential to change the course of the Gaza war if there's a will to do so among their leaders. There's an English saying, "Where there's a will, there's a way."

To find a way and help the people of Gaza and Palestine requires a will on the part of the Islamic countries.

The Iranian president hit out at the United States for providing financial and military support to Israel. Undoubtedly, the US government is the mastermind and main accomplice of Israel's crimes, Iranian president said, adding that claims of legitimate self-defense is the history's bitter irony. He was referring to remarks by US officials who have claimed that Israel is acting in legitimate self-defense following Hamas' October 7 attack on the occupied territories.

Raisi also said that US officials, in their statements, claim that they are not seeking to expand the scope of the conflict but, in action, they provide the fuel needed for Israel's war machine. He urged the leaders of

Muslim countries to adopt a decisive decision on the situation in Gaza.

"Islamic governments should designate the army of the occupying and aggressor regime as a terrorist organization," Raisi told the summit.

### Boycott Israel

He called for "cutting any sort of political or economic relations with the Zionist regime" as important steps to be taken by Islamic countries.

Implementing a "trade boycott against the Zionist regime, especially in the energy field, should be prioritized," he added.

He also called for an end to the blockade imposed on the Palestinian territory by the Israeli regime, which has restricted the entry of water, fuel, electricity and

medicine to the besieged territory since the beginning of the conflict.

The Iranian president said the crimes committed by the regime in Gaza are a clear example of war crimes and crimes against humanity, and called for setting up an international tribunal to prosecute the leaders of the US and Israeli regime.

Raisi also urged nations that have ties with Israel to sever them and called for greater support for Palestinians.

The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain normalized ties with Israel in 2020, and Saudi Arabia has been in talks with the regime's officials for months to normalize relations.

Raisi said that if it were not for the resistance of the people of Gaza and the

West Bank and Lebanon, today many Arab and Islamic countries would be engaged in a war with the Israeli regime.

Iran is the main supporter of the resistance movements in the region. Raisi was among dozens of leaders who attended the joint Islamic-Arab summit in Riyadh.

### 'Unmatched genocidal war'

The Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said at the summit that Palestinians are facing an "unmatched genocidal war", and called on the US to pressure Israel into halting its offensive on Gaza. Abbas said Palestinians needed international protection in the face of Israeli attacks.

Turkey's President Recep

Tayyip Erdogan, who also addressed the summit, has been quoted as saying that an international peace conference should be convened to find a permanent solution to the conflict between Israel and Palestinians.

"What we need in Gaza is not pauses for a couple of hours, rather we need a permanent cease-fire," Erdogan said in his address to the summit in Riyadh.

Egypt's President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi called for an immediate sustainable cease-fire in Gaza "without restrictions or conditions".

"The policies of collective punishment of the people of Gaza...are unacceptable and cannot be justified by self-defense or any other claims. They must be stopped immediately," he said.

"resentment". Macron said Israel had the right to protect itself after the Hamas attacks, but he added: "These babies, these ladies, these old people are bombed and killed."

Following Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel, in which now the regime says the death toll had been revised to around 1,200 from a previous estimate of 1,400, Israel's allies have defended the country's right to protect itself. But now, into the second month of war, there are growing differences in how many feel Israel should conduct its fight.

The US has been pushing for temporary pauses that would allow for wider distribution of badly needed aid to civilians in the besieged territory where conditions are increasingly dire. However, Israel has so far only agreed to brief daily periods during which civilians are able to flee the area of ground combat in northern Gaza and head south on foot along the territory's main north-south artery.

Since these evacuation windows were first announced a week ago, more than 150,000 civilians have fled the north, according to UN monitors.

### London's weekly protests

Since Hamas's attack,

there has been strong support and sympathy for Israel from Western governments, including Britain's. But the Israeli military response has also prompted anger, with weekly protests in London demanding a cease-fire.

In London, a large pro-Palestinian march kicked off on Saturday following scuffles nearby between far-right protesters and police, who launched a major operation to avert clashes between the two rival groups.

The pro-Palestinian march drew counter-protesters from right-wing groups to the capital on what is Britain's day of remembrance for war veterans.

Organizers have said the rally on Armistice Day could be one of the largest political marches in British history.

A Palestinian flag has been wrapped around a first world war memorial near London's Wellington Arch. Protesters were later seen by PA reporters climbing the statue, with one holding a megaphone and shouting: "Free, free Palestine".

AP, AFP, Reuters, and the Guardian contributed to this report.



Children react during the funeral of the Faojo family, killed in Israeli bombing on Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on November 11, 2023. ● SAID KHATIB/AFP



Former Labour party leader Jeremy Corbyn (2nd right) joins protesters with placards and flags taking part in the 'National March For Palestine' in central London on November 11, 2023. ● HENRY NICHOLLS/AFP