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Terrorism-Analysis

OIC MEET LEAVES AN IMPACT ON EFFORTS TO WIPE OUT TERRORISM

By: Zulkefli Salleh and Abdul Muin Majid

KUALA LUMPUR, April 3 (Bernama) -- An important impact of the just-concluded meeting of Islamic nations here is to kick off discussions on the need for the world community to come to a common agreement on what constitutes terrorism.

In the Kuala Lumpur Declaration issued after their three-day extraordinary session here, the Islamic foreign ministers unanimously resolved to combat terrorism and reject any attempt to link Islam and Muslims to the scourge.

The Sept 11 hijacked plane attacks on the United States by Muslims have sullied the image of Islam and Muslims in general with reports of them being harassed and mosques and other institutions vandalised in many parts of the world.

The ministers did not mince their words in condemning acts of international terrorism in all its forms including state terrorism irrespective of motives, perpetrators and victims.

While the resolve to combat terrorism is an easier task to achieve, getting the world to agree on a commonly-accepted definition of acts of terror and terrorist seems to be an uphill task given the fact that there are too many sensitivities and interests involved.

Nevertheless, what Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad suggested when opening the three-day extraordinary session on Monday that all forms of attacks against civilians be considered as acts of terror and the perpetrators regarded as terrorists has, at the very least, stirred up serious debate among Muslim and non-Muslim countries alike.

He jolted the opening session by throwing the poser. According to this definition, would suicide bombings by oppressed Palestinians amount to acts of terror and the perpetrators, terrorists?

But in the larger context, Dr Mahathir's hypothetical definition also seemed to be unfavourable to certain countries because it would mean that they would be guilty of committing state terrorism.

In addition, he contended that any other parties supporting acts of terror should also be considered terrorists.

A case in point is the escalating Israeli military campaign against the Palestinians in the occupied territories, which prompted the ministers to issue a separate statement expressing their concern and condemnation of atrocities committed by Israeli aggressors against Palestinians.

In the ensuing brouhaha over the prime minister's remarks over suicide bombers, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said certain parties had taken Dr Mahathir's speech out of context, noting that he meant to pose questions with the intention of creating debates.

Those who objected to this line of argument missed the point that Dr Mahathir was trying to make -- that as long as there is a reciprocal feeling of hatred, bitterness and violence towards one another, peace will never prevail in West Asia.

It must be noted that Dr Mahathir also stressed that any attempt to stop new acts of terrorism will have to address and remove the root causes of such bitterness and anger.

Although the meeting shied away from offering any definition on terrorism, it would be presumptuous to conclude that it has fallen short of its objectives.

Taken as a whole, the KL Declaration encapsulates the views of Muslim

countries with regards to international terrorism, with Dr Mahathir's speech adopted as an official document of the session.

In Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar's words, the gathering has successfully synchronised OIC's stand on terrorism in preparation for any international forums on the matter including one that would hopefully be organised by the United Nations (UN).

He said unlike previous OIC meetings on terrorism, the Kuala Lumpur gathering had given the chance to all members to air their views on terrorism and they had shown an understanding of the grave situation facing the Muslim ummah.

Syed Hamid went on to say that even the UN might find difficulties in trying to rein in world opinion to define matters pertaining to the menace.

The Sept 11 attacks have prompted the UN to expedite two new anti-terrorism conventions last year - the first is a Russian-sponsored 20-article draft "Convention for the Suppression of Nuclear Terrorism" which has been languishing at the UN since February 1998.

The second, a comprehensive convention on terrorism, is a 27-article omnibus treaty that will incorporate key elements from 12 existing anti-terrorism conventions into a single document.

The last two UN treaties against terrorism were the 1997 International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings and the 1999 International Convention for the Financing of Terrorism.

At first glance, one tends to conclude that Dr Mahathir's remarks on suicide bombers seems to belittle their deaths but the fact is that Malaysia remains steadfast in its support for the Palestinian cause.

And this point was reinforced when Palestinian Foreign Minister Farouk Kaddoumi sought the good offices of Dr Mahathir.

He wanted the Prime Minister to use his influence on the world stage to stop Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people.

On this matter, Syed Hamid said Malaysia would continue to champion the struggle of the Palestinians at international level and in meetings between Dr Mahathir and world leaders.

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