

**Anwar's explanation and 'illusory' Hamas stand**  
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Two days after a rare rebuke by PAS mursyidul am Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, PKR de-facto leader Anwar Ibrahim again took pains to clarify his now-famous statement as reported by the Wall Street Journal (WSJ).

In its interview last month with the paper, Anwar (left) reportedly said he would "support all efforts to protect the security of the state of Israel".

To be fair on him, he was never quoted as saying that he would recognise Israel, as is being alleged by Umno leaders.

Similarly, he was also never quoted talking about the two-state solution, like he is now, whenever attempting to clarify the statement in WSJ.

Of course, the statement was godsend for Umno, hitherto pushed into a corner by the brilliant stage-by-stage exposé involving its Wanita head, Shahrizat Abdul Jalil and her family members, for their obscene abuse of government funds meant for the National Feedlot Corporation.

A statement on committing himself to "all efforts" to protect the security of a state which the Muslims have regarded as a cancer in the Islamic heartland?

Now who would say anything like that unless it is a gaffe, a faux pas, a blunder, or just an honest mistake? It is like snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.

Umno's moral ground

One argument by a section of PKR leaders is that Umno leaders have no moral ground to criticise Anwar over his statement owing to the party's own secret dealings with the Zionist lobby and trade ties, despite spending millions in boosting its image as defender of Palestinians by sending media-embedded delegations to show solidarity with other pro-Palestine groups.

Such an argument is not good enough, primarily because no one - not those who are enlightened about the history of the Palestinian struggle and Muslims who are politically savvy to understand the so-called 'two-state' solution - has any expectation that Umno could be trusted to defend the Palestinians.

After all, isn't Apco, the company hired by Umno president Najib Razak to boost his image, a company helmed at the top by some of the most notorious officials from the Israeli regime?

Yet another defence, as first mooted by PKR's information chief Dr Muhammad Nur Manuty, is that even those in the Islamic movement, namely Hamas, have been supportive of a two-state solution, i.e., recognition of both Israel and Palestine statehood once the former fulfills all demands for peace.

So far this is a practical, realist, and pragmatic solution, bearing in mind that short of exterminating a whole population of Jews who now reside in what is called Israel, one could do little else.

It follows logically then that the state of Israel should also be compensated for its civilised gestures, namely by rewarding it with cessation of hostilities and even recognition from its Palestinian neighbours.

Yet, the fact is that this view is academic at best. It does not reside in the realm of real politik but in a political utopia that is as illusionary as the mirage in the Arabian desert.

For it is unthinkable that in the present circumstances that Israel is in, especially in the wake of the Arab spring which saw the downfall of Israel-friendly leaders, that it would agree to the pre-1967 borders and surrender the fertile lands of Palestine once cultivated by their indigenous Muslim, Christian and Jewish peoples.

Did Hamas say it?

The question now is, did Hamas actually offer any option of recognition for Israel? In his latest explanation following Nik Aziz's remarks, Anwar repeats this claim by Nur about Hamas's stance.

Besides quoting the views of the leaders of Saudi Arabia and Jordan, Anwar also quotes Ismail Haniyeh, the prime minister of the Palestinian Authority representing Hamas:

"If Israel withdraws to the '67 borders, then we will establish a peace in stages.. Number one, we will establish a situation of stability and calm which will bring safety for our people - what (Hamas founder) Sheikh (Ahmed) Yassin called a long-term hudna (truce).

"If Israel declares that it will give the Palestinian people a state and give them back all their rights, then we are ready to recognise them".

Unfortunately, this statement quoting Haniyeh is not accompanied with any source nor any date given.

A quick check, however, reveals that it is a quote from a Washington Post interview with the Hamas leader, six years ago, days before he was set to be appointed as prime minister following Hamas's victory in the polls.

But here is the problem: 24 hours after the Washington Post published the report on Feb 25, 2006, Haniyeh said he had been misquoted, and said what he meant was 'political truce', a cessation of hostilities which frequently flared up tensions between Hamas and the Israeli Defence Force.

"I didn't talk about recognising Israel during the interview with the newspaper," Haniyeh said.

Conditions and counter conditions

In fact, a Hamas spokesperson, Salah Bardawil, told the Jerusalem Post a day later that his movement had a recording of the interview with Haniyeh, to prove that Haniyeh did not make the statements that were attributed to him.

"Haniyeh, in response to a question, said that if Israel met all of Hamas's conditions, he would be prepared to consider 'peace in stages,'" said the Hamas spokesperson.

According to him, when the reporter pressed for further clarifications, Haniyeh explained that he was talking about a long-term truce with Israel. (Jerusalem Post, Feb 26, 2006).

The spokesman also said: "...There is no connection to what the sheikh [Haniyeh] said to the headlines in the newspaper."

And further: "I call on all of the media to be cautious and accurate in the writing of their reports and not to revise the words of the interviewee". (Ynet News, Feb 26, 2006).

One then cannot help but wonder why it is so difficult for Anwar to retract the statement, which has all the characters of a political faux pas that politicians commit now and then.

As much as one has no doubt about Anwar's commitment to Palestine just like most Muslim leaders - despite them not putting money where their mouths are - one is also not convinced with his latest

explanation.

Ever much so when Israel is in no immediate security threat, not even of getting a slap on the wrist by the United States, nor any mild threats from the many illegitimate and unelected Arab regimes surrounding Occupied Palestine.

The only real and present danger faced by Israel is from Iran. The Iranian stance and the statements by its leaders, however, rhetorical they may sound, are the only ones taken seriously by the regime in Tel Aviv.

Indeed, Iran's political and military durability has been the underlying factor behind anxieties over Israel's security.

Meanwhile, Nik Aziz has said that Anwar should either retract his statement, or sue the WSJ for inaccurate reporting. Anwar's explanation today, however, indicates that neither is his option.

So, like Haniyeh in 2006, would Anwar at least say that he did not mean what he stated?

That will be better than hanging on to a statement which Hamas had never said, or to the views of regimes in Jordan and Saudi Arabia - two dictatorships which have yet to get a taste of the Arab Spring that brought down three of their brother rulers, with many more waiting to be relegated to the dustbins of history.

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