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[MALAYSIA](#)

## **Is Malaysia becoming a pariah state**

Is Brussels paying attention to Malaysia's vocal support of Hamas?

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*These are the news reports being blocked in Malaysia. Only two nations recognise Hamas - Iran and Malaysia. Malaysia's position on Hamas is beginning to isolate Malaysia diplomatically.*

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## **Is Brussels paying attention to Malaysia's vocal support of Hamas?**

The shock of Hamas' surprise attack on and incursion into Israel on 7 October which systematically targeted and killed more than 1,300 civilians and triggered a war with Israel, quickly reverberated around the world.

Some 100 countries that released an official statement on the matter were split into three camps: those that unequivocally condemn Hamas' undeniable act of terrorism and support Israel's right to defend itself, those that condemn

violence on both sides but decry Hamas, and those who put the blame on Israel and/or outright support Hamas.

Official statements from the state of Malaysia and its Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim echoed sentiments of the small albeit firm latter group, blaming Israel for the confrontation, and not only omitting critical statements of Hamas but outright refusing to yield on the matter at the request of Western countries.

## **Kuala Lumpur among the few**

Indonesia is the only other Muslim-majority nation in Southeast Asia that voiced similar opinions to Malaysia.

In the Middle East and North Africa region, Iran, Syria and Algeria all expressed their support for Hamas while Qatar, Kuwait, Iraq and Jordan condemned Israel.

The United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy stand on the opposite end of the spectrum, whose officials jointly and strongly condemned Hamas and pledged their countries' support for Israel.

*Kuala Lumpur's stance is particularly problematic in light of previous reports that uncovered a training program in Malaysia from 2012 that coached Hamas fighters on how to fly powered parachutes.*



President Joe Biden boards Air Force One for a trip to Israel, October 2023 - AP Photo/Evan Vucci

Member states of the European Union joined a broader Western group of countries as part of a joint statement issued by the European Council.

In a show of unwavering support, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Parliament President Roberta Metsola travelled to Israel on 13 October to express their solidarity.

Kuala Lumpur's stance is particularly problematic in light of previous reports that uncovered a training program in Malaysia from 2012 that coached Hamas fighters on how to fly powered parachutes.

One of the novelties of Hamas' coordinated attack on Israel was the launch of multiple motorised paragliders into Israel, who descended to kill people

indiscriminately, including attendees of the Nova music festival, among whom more than 250 — mostly young — people were massacred.

Hamas militants killed children, women and elderly people on Israel's streets, in their homes, and dragged nearly 200 hostages to the Gaza Strip.

## **Hamas support 'a core foreign policy'?**

Furthermore, Malaysian PM Ibrahim remains the only state leader, besides the regime in Tehran, that acknowledged its ties with Hamas, declaring in the follow-up to the attack that “[Malaysia has] a relationship with Hamas from before, and this will continue.”

The prime minister, his deputy, and the Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs all conflated Hamas' terrorist attack with a legitimate Palestinian resistance movement to settle Palestinians' long-standing historical disagreements with Israel.

“The struggle to liberate the land and rights of the Palestinian people will remain a core priority of the Malaysian government's foreign policy”, according to Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.



A Malaysian holds a placard during a rally to show their support for Palestinian people in Kuala Lumpur, October 2023 - AP Photo/Vincent Thian

Arguments that Hamas' terror attack was justified due to years of frustration in the wake of Israel's security policies towards the Gaza Strip are based on completely dubious foundations.

- [The Israel-Hamas war is the latest proof Russia is a global agent of chaos](#)
- [Brussels, my love? MEPs condemn horrific Hamas attack on Israel](#)

Hamas' Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement from 1988 expressly founded the organisation for the purpose of the obliteration of Israel through jihad, also calling for the killing of Jews and rejecting any and all peace initiatives for the settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Support for and indeed any affiliation with Hamas are contradictory to the EU's most cherished normative principles, which, alongside the bloc's economic prowess, has distinguished the organisation as a steadfast and effective actor in the world.

## **The EU's democratic principles should also apply to Malaysia**

Counter-terrorism constitutes one of the pillars of the EU's External Action and the distinction between the terrorist group Hamas and Palestinian civilians living in the Gaza Strip must be made clear.

The EU's widely known commitment to promoting democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms in all its external relations, including in its foreign economic policies, should also be applied to Malaysia.

*Should the Malaysian government continue to support Hamas, the EU should make it clear that Malaysia's economic relations with the European bloc will suffer as a result.*



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Charles Michel welcome Malaysia's FM Zambry Abdul Kadir in Brussels, December 2022 - AP Photo/Olivier Matthys

While negotiations between Malaysia and the EU on a potential Free Trade Agreement (FTA) have been stalled since 2012, they did finalise a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in December 2022, strengthening cooperation in the areas of trade and investment, energy as well as politics.

Following a period of decline during the years of the pandemic, the value of imports from the EU to Malaysia reached €35.3 billion in 2022, making up 12.6% of all imports and concentrated in electronic equipment, machinery and nuclear components. In turn, Malaysia's exports to the EU grew by a significant 21.8% in 2022.



- [A week into the Israel-Hamas war, the EU continues to struggle with its messaging](#)
- [From crypto to charity: Hamas funded by hundreds of millions of dollars](#)

The EU should emphasise its common values in its economic relations with Malaysia, especially in light of the potential expansion of trade and investment ties between them.

Should the Malaysian government continue to support Hamas, the EU should make it clear that Malaysia's economic relations with the European bloc will suffer as a result.

## **Malaysia, the latest pariah state**

Of course, a corresponding cost of economic restrictions is political in nature.

The insistence of the Malaysian government on its ties with Hamas and its continued rhetorical support for the extremist organisation should result in a degree of political isolation by Brussels and, more broadly, its Western partners, including Washington, a long-standing ally and one of the largest trading partners of Malaysia.

The recognition of Hamas as a legitimate Palestinian resistance movement by Malaysia's government officials not only blurs the lines between militants and Palestinian civilians living in the Gaza Strip but provides a platform for an organisation whose explicit goals are to cause destruction and sow chaos.

With the statements of PM Ibrahim and Deputy Prime Minister Hamidi, Malaysia has joined a small albeit notable group of pariah countries and leaders in granting support to Hamas, including the likes of the radical Islamist regime of Iran, Syria's war criminal President Bashar al-Assad and Algeria's pro-Russian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune.

*The Most Hon. Marquess of Reading Lord Simon Isaacs is the Chairman of the Barnabas Foundation.*

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