

Baku in the OIC on Palestine

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On 02.05.2024, at the preparatory meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member-states' foreign ministers within the framework of the upcoming 15th Islamic Summit, the head of the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry, among other speakers, addressed the meeting. In his speech, Jeyhun Bayramov said that his country supports the “two state” principle in the context of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: *“Azerbaijan advocates solving the Palestinian problem - a matter of concern for the entire Islamic world, - and constantly provides assistance to neutralize the consequences of the catastrophe suffered by Palestinians during the confrontation”*.

Actually that this is not the first such statement by Azerbaijan on the OIC platform; however, Baku prefers not to publicize such wording on other international forums. Moreover, other AzR officials, including those from the Foreign Ministry, interpret the events in Gaza in a completely opposite way. In particular, AzR Ambassador to Israel, Mukhtar Mammadov, has repeatedly stated the legitimacy of Tel Aviv's actions in Gaza. The events in Palestine are presented and analyzed in the same way by almost entire Azerbaijani media, political scientists, and members of Ilham Aliyev's political team.

Against the background of the sympathies of Azerbaijan's power nomenclature towards Israel, Minister Bayramov's statement in support of the Palestinians in Gaza looks unnatural. It could be explained by Baku's attempt to balance interests in its relations with the Islamic world and the Israeli-Western coalition, but Bayramov's rhetoric about his desire to help the Palestinians is radically at odds with Azerbaijan's practical actions.

As ARVAK has written repeatedly, Azerbaijan, along with Kazakhstan and Gabon, is the main supplier of oil to Israel, which in turn uses it to carry out the operation in Gaza. The volume of imported Azerbaijani oil is constantly growing, and its importance for Tel Aviv can hardly be compared with the value of the humanitarian aid that Baku will provide to the survivors of Gaza.

As for Bayramov's declared support for the pro-Palestinian “two-state” principle, it cannot be called a “bold initiative” from Baku's lips, since that narrative is supported by many countries from the Western coalition of Israel's allies. It is possible that after the end of the hostilities in Gaza, Tel Aviv itself will be forced to accept this principle, albeit on the condition of a favorable border demarcation.

Thus, Bayramov's statement is deeply dissonant with the real behavior of Baku on the Palestinian-Israeli track and has no value within the context of Azerbaijan's relations with the “Islamic solidarity” countries. It cannot dispel the doubts of the Iran-led most active pro-Palestinian Muslim states about the sincerity of Azerbaijan's position.

At the same time, however, it will hardly serve as a reason to suspend Azerbaijan's membership in the OIC, since this organization is, in fact, the only universal platform for contacts and interaction of all Muslim countries, and preserving the appearance of its unity and effectiveness is extremely important for Tehran and its closest allies on the threshold of a new round of global confrontation with the collective West.