

## OIC: The Role of Pakistan

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### Abstract

*Thus OIC functioned in 1970s more effectively than today's and its membership increased to 57 Islamic countries. OIC being as second largest organization faced the problem of failure not because of external pressure but just because of divergence of interests of member states. This divergence of interests further multiplies in the formation of Iranian and Saudi Arabian alliances and provoked Sunni-Shia differences. These differences helped these countries to establish their hegemony in their respective alliances on one hand and on the other hand these steps and policies made OIC a nominal body.*

*However, a country like Pakistan which had both Sunni and Shai population and enjoying ideological freedom hardly remain out of both alliances and maintained balance of relationships among Iran and Saudi Arabia. Thus Pakistan is the Islamic power that can reinforce the spirit of OIC if the other major Muslim powers support Pakistan. The leadership of the Muslim world establish OIC with the objectives to promote unity among the Muslims on State level, to represent Muslims and to resolve the issues of the Muslim world. But the OIC seems to be moving for failure not because of external pressure but just because of the differences among the member countries i.e Iran and Saudi Arabia. In such circumstances the role of Pakistan is important to produce unity*

*among the Muslim world and re-impose the spirit of OIC i.e. Muslim unity and integration. This paper focuses the possible role of Pakistan for minimization of differences among OIC member countries.*

**Keywords:** OIC, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Muslim World

## ***IC: The Role of Pakistan***

### **1-Introduction**

After the establishment of UN Muslim countries were looking for it to resolve their issues but they found nothing. Many efforts were made for the establishment of an organization that can present and address the issues of Muslims. Since 1924, Muslim Countries had irritated to convey the Islamic Sphere into a distinct international association. However many landmark happenings laid the fundamentals of its concluding constitution, these are:

- 1) The 3<sup>rd</sup> Islamic Conference held in Jerusalem in 1931, in which most of the Muslim intellectuals were participants;
- 2) ) The initial and 1<sup>st</sup>ever consultation of dogmatic influential heads of the states held in 1954 on the month of August. In this conference a bill was introduced and appropriate for commencement of Organization of Islamic Cooperation/Conference (OIC) and
- 3) The *Islamic Summit Conference* which was held in 1969 in Rabat. The conference was aimed at discoursing the Islamic world's teething troubles and welfares.
- 4) In conclusion, the Third such gathering meant for Ministers of Foreign affairs was held during mid 1972the conference ratified and assumed the Commission for the Islamic Forum

Body. This produced hope for a new organization for the solidarity and unity of the Muslim Ummah.

To be sure, in the awakening of the felonious arson committed in contradiction of the *Al-Aqsa* Mosque on August 21, 1969 in Jerusalem, the Domes of States and Administration of Islamic states were unambiguous to establish the First Islamic Conference, which was then held from 22 September to 25 September, 1969 in Rabat; the capital of Morocco. The consequences of this Summit meeting were the manifestation of their cohesion with the people of Palestinian and their pledge to temporary mutual monetary, social and religious collaboration. From March 23<sup>rd</sup> to March 25<sup>th</sup> in 1970, Shah Faisal the King of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was held in Jeddah a city of Saudi Arabia was the 1<sup>st</sup> conference for the ministers of foreign relations, in which it was definite to yield steps for their own shared international collaboration and created a forum for conversation about the foremost topics upsetting the Muslim world (E. Ihsanoglu, 2010).

However, on 28<sup>th</sup> June, 2011, the association would amend its title and symbol and subsequently developed the name “*Organization for Islamic Cooperation*” (MRIF, 2014). At present OIC comprising of 57 Member Countries, the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is vulnerable to all Islamic/Muslim States that deliberate themselves Muslims irrespective of their topographical location. Thirty of Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) members states are initiators, including the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Similarly, the Association grants spectator status to Muslim units and even States like Russia (Castillo, 2014).

Thus OIC functioned in 1970s more effectively than today's and its membership increased to 57 Islamic countries. OIC being as second largest organization faced the problem of failure not because of external pressure but just because of divergence of interests of member states. This divergence of interests further multiplies in the formation of Iranian and Saudi Arabian alliances and provoked Sunni-Shia differences. These differences helped these countries to establish their hegemony in their respective alliances on one hand and on the other hand these steps and policies made OIC a nominal body.

The perception that OIC did not meet the challenges of the Islamic world are correct to maximum extent but the fact that OIC represent the Muslim world can not be ignored in international politics. The challenge of effectiveness is caused by the response of the member states, which had developed differences with respect to their national interests. The challenges such as evaluation and promotion of democratic values, poverty elevation, growth, development, integrity and most importantly promotion of Islamic values and culture might not be handled by a single member state it required a collective effort of the all member countries.

An association whose place in the past remain limited to representation nominally can not be considered as effective body for the segment of the world full of problems and disorder. Although OIC was confined to discussion and passage of resolution without practical implementation but it provided representation for Islamic World in international affairs and to some extent remain successful and practical. Apart from these facts OIC perform very well by conducting regular meetings and conferences which reflect a hope for Muslim integrity.

However, a country like Pakistan which had both Sunni and Shai papulation and enjoying ideological freedom hardly remain out of both alliances and maintained balance of relationships among Iran and Saudi Arabia. Thus Pakistan is the Islamic power that can reinforce the spirit of OIC if the other major Muslim powers support Pakistan.

There are many Books and research works that are associated with OIC and its role. Some of these are critical toward the role OIC but none of these paid attentions for the role of Pakistan for reunifying and reuniting the member's countries under the umbrella of OIC. This study is important because of its nature as it remain critical on rational basis toward the role of the member's countries of OIC. Having understandings of the role of member's countries the reader will be able to analyse the problem of failure of OIC. Thus this research is important as this work analysis the role of member countries and identifies the reasons for failure of OIC.

This research paper helps the policy makers especially the officials of OIC and member countries to design a policy that will strengthen OIC as this work highlights and analysed different dimensions of functioning of OIC. The study is important for academia as it opens the gates for further issue for new researchers and experts. The research is also important for Pakistani policy makers as the role of Pakistan in OIC and its position among the conflict member is identified.

## **2- Strengths of OIC Members**

The OIC is encompassed of a big topographical area. Although as a whole or collectively the member states are the major economic power of the world. OIC member countries are of great economic potentials. In terms of

exports OIC member countries export 11.7 percent of the world exports and 10.8 percent of the world foreign direct investment (World Bank data).

On the other hand 21 out of 28 World's Least Developed Countries are also OIC member countries. This is alarming contradiction for OIC, as for the collective development OIC must force the member countries for sustainable and shared economic growth (Behzad, 2018).

The above contradiction indicates that some of the member states are attractive for investment while other have still not develop the friendly economic policies to attract investment for growth. The difference of the per capita income is the product of policies of these countries. The main reason for the differences is weak institutions and unappropriated economic policy, while the abuse of power, corruption, nepotism, weak system of justice and lack of continuity in policy further deeper the gaps between rich and poor member states (World Bank, 2016).

To improved understandings of the OIC financial prudence in common, the summary figures to keep in mind The OIC associate countries enjoy 60% of the oil assets, 61% of the gas assets and 30% of the lands on Earth. On the basis of economy OIC member countries have worldwide distinctions some of these are as follows;

- ❖ The highest 10 associate countries of OIC appeal 70% of the world Foreign Direct Investment (FDI),
- ❖ The highest 10 associate countries of OIC assertion 70% of the total manufacture,
- ❖ The highest 10 associate countries of OIC also carry 70% of manufacturing creation,
- ❖ The OIC member states have young population of 54% which is below 24 years,

- ❖ The OIC member states have 23% of the world population,
- ❖ OIC member countries enjoy 60% of the oil assets, 61% of the gas assets and 30% of the lands on Earth,
- ❖ Strategic location of most of the member countries of the OIC is excellent,
- ❖ They enjoy historical pride with multi-cultural societies and identity,
- ❖ Maximum OIC associates have prospective for considerable economic development, particularly in the commercial manufacturing and
- ❖ Monetary business of OIC in overall is minor and narrow, and development rates are great; while in progressive markets financial business is very huge and shallow while development rates are dwindling.

### **3- OIC Internal Affairs and Saudi-Iran Rift**

In regional context the KSA was feeling security threat after the Saddam Hussain government was overthrown by U.S forces. The security threats were further increased Israel attacks on 2006 on Hezbollah in Palestine. These events were followed by the Arab Spring in 2011, which further increased problems for Saudi Arabia. At one hand it swift the regional harmony of the Middle East and on the other hand it also strengthen Iran against Saudi Arabia in the region. In these environments Saudi Arabia reviewed its regional policy to have strong Arab partners not only to rebuff the threat of Arab Spring but also to counter the increasing influence of Iran in Middle East. For this purpose Saudi Arabia formed Arab countries military alleince with the establishment of “*Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulp*” (GCC). The overt objectives of the GCC were to

confront the impacts of Arab Spring and re-establish the supremacy in region (Gause, 2011).

Saudi Arabia was in search of miracle to unite Arab countries under his command to weaken Iranian influence in the region. The Syrian crisis proved to be this miracle for Saudi Arabia to exploit the situation in its favour and against Iran. Saudi Arabia intervened in the Syrian security landscape and further deteriorated the security situation which led to violence. This was aimed to stop Syria from joining Iranian emerging block as well U.S peace keeping process (O'Bagy, 2013).

Saudi adopted dual policies for Arab countries and Iran. Arab states were dealt with a flexible policy to encourage them against Iran to reduce Iranian influence in the region. The result of these policies were increasing heated against Shia and Iran which ultimately led to Yemen crisis as a result of Iran-Saudi confrontation. In Yemen "Sunni are the majority in Yemen, while there is also significant Shia population. Iran backed Shia population in the name of sectarianism against the head of the state. The situation remains out of government control and Saudi Arabia attacked Yemen. The K.S.A involvement in Yemen was the result of Iranian interference in Yemen. Saudi attack on Yemen was followed by mobilization of Sunni; whom had already participated in Syrian war, against Bashar ul Assad. Similarly Saudi hoped to undermined the Iranian security in Iran also by supporting the moderate segments of the country" (Schmierer, Jeffrey, Nader, Nazer 2016).

With a weak civil society radical Islamist in Yemen found social space and exploited the concerns of Shia majority against Sunni minority government. This proves a flash point for both Saudi Arabia and Iran. Iran was supporting the Shia majority to overthrow the Sunni government to



increase its influence in the region and also to reduce the Saudi Arabian sphere of influence. However, in these situations Saudi Arabia wanted to maintain peace in Yemen but the situation was not under the control of Saudi as Iran proves more influential in the case of Yemen (Matthiesen, 2015).

In the political tormeile of Yemen Saudi Arabia with the help of Arab countries and America tried to maintain peace through military interventions but the situation were not normalised. Thus Saudi Arabia and allies put pressure on Abdullah Saleh to handover the government to Shia at the coast of peace in the country. It was a flixable policy and moderate role of Saudi Arabia to establish peace in the region (Thiel, 2012).

However, this further increased the Iranian influence as government was handed to Shia in Yemen. This forced Saudi Arabia to have a strong action to minimize Iranian Influence and opted for a joint military action of Arab states. "Saudi Arabia declared war against Hutias which was a clear offence by Saudi and allies. This offence was a clear massage for America. America is involved in political and structural changes in Middle East. But Saudi offence with the support of Arab allies sent a message for America to retain its structural change policy. On the other hand Iranian outflow was controlled by nuclear agreements which was concluded among Iran and America, Russia, China, U.K, France and Plus Germany (P5+1). Although P5+1 ignored the political instability of Middle East at the cast of Iranian nuclear deal, which kept Iran in Isolation. In the case if Iran remain successful in breaking isolation it will further increased Iranian influence in Middle East. The Yemen policy of Saudi Arabia reflects that Saudi is the only power of the region that can have a check on Iranian influence in Middle East" (Gause, 2015).

On the other side Iranian influence saw decline in Baghdad as compare to Yemen. Similarly in Syria and Lebanon with the intervention of the international powers the Iranian influence was decreased as compare to Yemen. Saudi Arabian policy to counter Iranian influence in Middle East reflected that Saudi have no understandings of the Iranian influence in Yemen and also have no idea that how to deal with Houthis to establish peace (Mohseni, 2015).

Looking to the Iranian policy; prior to the rise of Arab Spring Iran opted to have flexible policy in Middle East to establish good terms with Shia Muslims of the region. This allowed Iran to have strong relations with Shia population of the Middle East and also to establish political ties with Iraq, Syria and other Shia populated countries. The start of Arab Spring increased the Iranian consciousness with a threat of transportation of the movement to Iran (Firas, 2011).

Apart from Syria and Yemen Saudi Arabia and Iranian rift and the promotion of sectarianism can be seen in Bahrain also. There in “Bahrain the population composition is different from that of Yemen, more than 70 percent of the Bahrain population is Shia and are ruled and controlled by minority Sunni. Iran remain concern for Saudi Arabian and even for other Arab and non-Arab Sunni states in Bahrain as timely protest were seen in Bahrain and these mentioned countries interffair. Beside this the GCC and the Arab Alliens also denounced the Iranian involvement in these countries especially in Bahrain where the Iranian regime was blamed for organizing protest against the government” (Ulrichsen, 2015).

The location of Bahrain is important for the regional security as it can easily disturbed the equilibrium between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The Shia in majority was supported by Iran to rise against government, which

was Sunni dominated government. Iranian support was aimed to install Shai government with friendly relation. This will ultimately increase Iranian influence in an important location of the region. This increased the concerns of Saudi in the region. Beside Saudi Arabia, allies also remain concern with the situation of Bahrain as with Shia government Iran in Bahrain it can manipulate Middle East (Hinnebusch, 2014).

However, Saudi cannot be blamed singularly for promotion of sectarianism as in Egypt Iran adopted a policy that reflected complete contradiction of its previous versions. In Egypt Iran backed Morsi of Ikhwan-ul-Muslimeen, with whom Iran has clear ideological differences. This was just a part of Iranian policy to increase its influence by exploiting every anti-Saudi segment of the Muslim world (El-Labbad, 2014).

In short both Iran and Saudi Arabia adopted policies to promote division among the Muslim for safeguarding their individual interests in Muslim World. The result of their mutual confrontation also divided Muslim in Shia and Sunni sects. This is also reflected on state level among the OIC member countries which make OIC ineffective.

#### **4- Possible Role of Pakistan for Strengthening OIC**

Muslims do not need a new platform. They need to reinvigorate the existing one. The Middle East has become an epicentre for terrorism and war. It is sending shockwaves all across the world. The internal players - all members of the OIC have failed to resolve the issues and have they paved way for external players to interfere in the region. The latter have their own vested interests so a solution from their end is not possible. If a tenable solution is to be found, it has to come from within the internal players themselves. These states need to come together and draft a road

map for sustainable peace in the region. They need a common ground, a common platform. The OIC must provide this platform.

For decades, Pakistan's domestic subtleties and exterior restrictions have shaped a flexible equilibrium in relations with Iran as well Saudi. The relations remain balanced on top of intra-Arab conflict, which was a necessity of time and was not a choice of Pakistan. However, Saudi Arabian relations seem stronger because of Saudi support for economic sustainability of Pakistan. Iran being as neighbouring Muslim state also have worm relations with Pakistan for which Pakistan may be facing pressure from Saudi as well from U.S front. Apart from this Pakistan had and have manage balance relations with both Islamic powers; wither it was Iran-Iraq war, Iranian Nuclear Programme and even the recent Iran-Saudi rift Pakistan tried to mediate or kept balance relations with both countries.

However, under Zia government unhesitatingly received Saudi financial support for the Afghan jihad to spend as they saw fit and dispatched significant numbers of troops to protect the Kingdom on the condition that their expenses be paid by Saudi Arabia. While remaining very close with Saudi Arabia politically, Zia never openly confronted revolutionary Iran in the 1980s. Fearing the spread of revolutionary zeal onto Pakistani soil, Zia tried to anticipate the revolution by his own dose of Islamization, all the while supporting Iran in the war against Iraq to a certain degree. Yet, as the CIA foresaw correctly, if the war went badly for Iran or if Iran had been dismembered earlier during the revolution, Zia certainly would not have abided by the 1975 military agreement with Iran and would only have protected" Pakistan's own interests. In the meantime, "Pakistan began to contribute troops and advisors to the Saudi armed forces from the late 1960s onwards and won recognitions from the

Kingdom, but it never allowed its soldiers to fight for Saudi Arabia outside the Kingdom. The First Gulf War provided another example. The second civilian government in the post-Zia period, the Nawaz Sharif government, decided to sail against popular wishes and send troops to Saudi Arabia to protect the Kingdom from possible Iraqi onslaught. Yet, again, with decision-making divided later due to dissent from Chief of Staff Mirza Aslam Beg, the Pakistani troops remained inside the Kingdom and never came under enemy fire.

After the rise of Taliban in Afghanistan, Pak-Iran relations remain odd over the question of Afghanistan. In 1990s Iran was sanctioned by Western Powers and was at the top of list for being attack. It was Pakistan who requested West to not attack Iran. It was because Pakistan was not in the position to have another unstable neighbour which was to further burden the refuges. Similarly Pakistan had a significant portion of Shia the attack on Iran was pushing Pakistani Shia for war which was unmanageable for Pakistan.

The historical accounts are evident of Pakistani conduct over the an age, it can be said with confidence that Pakistan will retain a balance policy for strengthening relations with all the Muslim countries of the World. Although there exist danger of sectarianism which can be sparked either by Saudi Arabia or Iran but Pakistani policy makers will not produce divergence of interests with both states. Being as an important member of OIC; Pakistan time and again mediated intra-Muslim issue and even of Saudi Arabia and Iran. Thus the hope of the Islamic World is Pakistan for strengthening OIC.

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largest organization faced the problem of failure not because of external pressure but just because of divergence of interests of member states. This divergence of interests further multiplies in the formation of Iranian and Saudi Arabian alliances and provoked Sunni-Shia differences. These differences helped these countries to establish their hegemony in their respective alliances on one hand and on the other hand these steps and policies made OIC a nominal body.

To conclude; a country like Pakistan which had both Sunni and Shia population and enjoying ideological freedom hardly remain out of both alliances and maintained balance of relationships among Iran and Saudi Arabia. Thus Pakistan is the Islamic power that can reinforce the spirit of OIC if the other major Muslim powers support Pakistan. The leadership of the Muslim world establish OIC with the objectives to promote unity among the Muslims on State level, to represent Muslims and to resolve the issues of the Muslim world. But the OIC seems to be moving for failure not because of external pressure but just because of the differences among the member countries i.e Iran and Saudi Arabia. In such circumstances the role of Pakistan is important to produce unity among the Muslim world and re-impose the spirit of OIC i.e. Muslim unity and integration.

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