

WEEKLY ANALYSIS

Issue Number – 480
(July 01-07, 2025)

EXAMINING THE ROLE OF THE ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIC COOPERATION (OIC) IN REFRAMING THE POSITIONS OF ISLAMIC COUNTRIES



Weekly Analysis is one of the CSRS publications analyzing significant weekly political, social, economic, and security events in Afghanistan and the region. The prime motive behind this is to provide strategic insights and policy solutions to decision-making institutions and individuals in order to help them design better policies. Weekly Analysis is published in Pashto, Dari, English and Arabic languages.

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EXAMINING THE ROLE OF THE ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIC COOPERATION (OIC) IN REFRAMING THE POSITIONS OF ISLAMIC COUNTRIES

Introduction

At the recent session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) held in late June 2025 in Istanbul, Turkey, the fifty-first meeting of the foreign ministers of OIC member states, participants focused on alarming developments in the Islamic world, particularly the escalating crisis in Gaza and rising tensions between Iran and Israel. During this session, foreign ministers criticized Israel's policies and called for genuine solidarity among Muslim countries in confronting human rights violations and regional aggression. The President of Turkey, emphasizing the Islamic world's role in shaping a fairer global order, urged an end to divisions and the strengthening of joint diplomacy. Additionally, officials from several Islamic countries, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Pakistan, adopted coordinated positions in support of the Palestinian people and stressed the need for immediate action by the Islamic world. The session concluded with the issuance of a joint statement underscoring justice, peace, and Islamic cooperation as key priorities.

Following the United Nations, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation is the second largest international body in terms of membership and holds a unique position within the international system. Established in 1969 with the aim of defending Islamic sanctities and fostering solidarity among the Islamic Ummah, the OIC has since provided a platform for political coordination, economic and cultural cooperation, and the defense of Muslim rights worldwide. Despite the absence of strategic unity and ongoing internal disagreements among its members, the organization has endeavored to support the cause of Palestine, advocate for Muslim minorities in non-Muslim countries, and combat Islamophobia.

Therefore, this article seeks to examine the historical role of the OIC, the influence of its summits on the policymaking of member states, and to analyze the substance of the final communiqué issued at the most recent session.

THE ROLE OF OIC SUMMITS IN SHAPING THE POSITIONS OF ISLAMIC COUNTRIES

As mentioned earlier, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has held around fifty-one summits so far, focusing on key developments in the Islamic world. Some of these significant gatherings include the very first OIC summit, which took place on September 22, 1969, in Rabat, the capital of Morocco. This meeting was held in response to the deliberate arson attack on Al-Aqsa Mosque by Zionist extremists.

Another important summit was the extraordinary session held in Mecca in 2012, which addressed the violence in Syria. During this summit, Syria's membership in the OIC was suspended. However, following the rise of a new government led by Ahmad Al-Shara, Syria has recently become active in the organization once again.

In 2021, a meeting of foreign ministers was held in Islamabad, Pakistan, to address the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. As a result, the Afghanistan Humanitarian Trust Fund was established under the supervision of the Islamic Development Bank.

In 2023, an emergency summit took place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, where the leaders of Islamic countries gathered to respond to the Gaza war. The summit called for an immediate ceasefire, an end to the blockade, and the urgent delivery of humanitarian aid.



Most recently, an extraordinary session was held to respond to the Israeli military attack on Iran. The summit concluded with a joint statement condemning Israel's actions and calling for an end to the conflict.

These examples show that the OIC regularly holds meetings in response to major developments in the Islamic world. With participation from the majority of its 57 member states, the organization frequently issues joint statements supporting the causes of the Muslim Ummah.

Since its establishment, the OIC has achieved several important outcomes in specific areas. Perhaps its greatest success has been securing recognition as the only international body representing the Islamic world. It has consistently brought together representatives of Muslim countries to take united positions on major issues, such as the Palestinian cause, the plight of the Rohingya, the conflict in Kashmir, and crises in Afghanistan and Syria.

In addition, the OIC has helped establish key institutions, including the Islamic Development Bank and the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO). The organization has also created mechanisms such as special contact groups, emergency sessions, and joint declarations, showing its ability to coordinate collective responses to challenges facing the Muslim world.

Despite these achievements, the OIC continues to face several challenges, which will be discussed below. However, before exploring those difficulties, it is important to ask a key question: Do the OIC's positions actually influence the domestic and foreign policies of its member states, or do they remain largely symbolic?

DO ORGANIZATIONAL STANCES BECOME MEMBER'S EXECUTIVE POLICIES?

Although giving a precise answer to this question requires close analysis of the political behavior and actions of OIC member states, some observations can be made.

On certain issues, especially the question of Palestine, which has always been a central concern for the OIC, some member states do align their national policies with the organization's stance. While the OIC's positions are mostly advisory and non-binding, several Islamic countries, such as Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, and others, have still refused to recognize Israel and maintain no relations with it. In contrast, many other Islamic states have adopted a cautious approach toward Israel, making no significant changes to their policies on the Palestinian issue. Some have even expanded diplomatic or economic ties with Israel in recent years.

There are also other examples where the policies of Islamic countries have shifted in ways connected, directly or indirectly, to OIC discussions. A clear example is the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. After returning to power in 2021, it adopted a balanced policy of cautious engagement with the Islamic world, while emphasizing its political independence. Despite facing isolation from Western countries, Afghanistan has become a regional political and economic partner. This shift may be partly linked to its participation in OIC meetings and dialogue with neighboring countries.

Another significant development is the gradual improvement of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran in recent years. The restoration of diplomatic ties between these two major countries could represent an important turning point in reducing sectarian tensions and strengthening cooperation and unity within the Islamic world.

Yet despite these positive examples, significant obstacles and challenges remain, preventing the OIC from fully achieving its goals. Some of the key challenges are discussed below:



Structural Weaknesses of the OIC: Perhaps the most serious obstacle to implementing OIC statements and resolutions is the organization's lack of legal and institutional mechanisms to oblige member states to act on collective decisions. Although the OIC has officially endorsed major initiatives, such as forming a unified Islamic army, creating an Islamic Court of Justice, establishing a common Islamic market, or imposing sanctions against Israel, these proposals have never been put into practice and have remained merely declarations.

Moreover, the OIC suffers from a lack of clear, project-based planning. Instead, it often focuses heavily on periodic meetings without follow-up mechanisms. The absence of an independent oversight body within the organization has further reduced the effectiveness of its actions. All these structural challenges limit the OIC's influence and contribute to the non-implementation of its resolutions.

Diverging Political and Strategic Interests: Another fundamental obstacle to OIC unity is the divergence in political and strategic interests among member states, despite their shared religious and cultural ties. Member states often pursue different, and sometimes conflicting, foreign policies, relationships with global powers, and regional alliances.

For example, varying relationships between OIC members and major powers like the United States, China, and Russia, combined with economic interests and geopolitical rivalries, lead to contradictory positions. This can be seen in the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia over issues such as Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon. Additionally, the strategic closeness of some members to Western alliances, for instance, Turkey's relationship with NATO or the economic dependence of many Gulf states on the United States, poses significant challenges to Islamic solidarity and leads to contradictory positions on major issues affecting the Muslim world.

Direct and Indirect Pressure from Western Powers: A further significant challenge facing the OIC is the direct and indirect pressure exerted by Western powers, especially the United States, on its member states. These pressures can be economic, security-related, or media-driven. Some Islamic countries rely financially on Western aid, while others depend on Western investments. Meanwhile, some governments fear political sanctions if they adopt strong positions against Israeli aggression or human rights violations affecting Muslims.

Such external pressures restrict the independence of decision-making among Islamic countries and undermine the OIC's ability to serve as a genuine representative of the collective will of the Muslim Ummah.

A LOOK AT THE CONTENT OF THE LATEST OIC SUMMIT DECLARATION

As previously mentioned, the most recent summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) was held on June 21 and 22 of this year in Istanbul, Turkey. This summit was convened to discuss alarming developments in the Islamic world, particularly Israel's recent attacks on Iran, Syria, and Lebanon, as well as to strengthen Islamic unity in the face of regional and international threats.

Although the summit's resolution consists of 33 articles addressing various challenges facing the Muslim Ummah, the main themes focused on condemning Israel's brutal actions in the region, supporting the Palestinian people, and emphasizing the need to strengthen collective diplomacy among Islamic countries. These key points were reflected in the final statement of the summit, known as the "Istanbul Declaration."

For instance, Article 6 of the declaration explicitly condemns Israel's actions in Gaza, stating:

"We condemn the actions of Israel, as the occupying power, in using starvation as a method of genocide by preventing the entry of humanitarian aid and obstructing the operations of United Nations humanitarian



organizations, with the aim of forcibly displacing the Palestinian population. In this regard, we reject any forced displacement of the Palestinian people, demand the immediate opening of crossings and borders, the unimpeded and adequate delivery of humanitarian aid, and the protection of Palestinian civilians.”

This statement, along with previous OIC resolutions since its founding, demonstrates that the issue of Palestine has been the central focus of the OIC’s political and moral mission. The organization has consistently condemned Israel’s occupation and aggressive actions. However, despite nearly two years of escalating violence, Israel continues to commit atrocities against the oppressed people of Gaza, while the OIC’s response has largely remained limited to condemnation without calling for concrete action from its member states.

Meanwhile, Article 13 of this year’s declaration addressed Israel’s military attack against Iran, stating:

“We strongly condemn Israel’s aggression against the Islamic Republic of Iran, emphasize the urgent need to halt Israel’s attacks, and express deep concern about this dangerous escalation, which threatens the region’s humanitarian, economic, and environmental stability.”

Nevertheless, just a few days later, when Iran carried out a missile strike on the U.S. Al-Udeid base in Qatar, which caused no damage or harm to Qatar, the condemnation from Islamic countries over Iran’s actions attracted more media attention than criticism of Israel’s earlier attacks.

It is also important to note that although Afghanistan was not a primary focus of the latest summit, it still received significant attention as an important side issue. Countries like Malaysia and Kyrgyzstan raised the topic of Afghanistan’s integration into the international community during side meetings and diplomatic discussions. Earlier, in a meeting between the Head of the South Asia Department at Turkey’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the OIC’s Special Envoy for Afghanistan, both sides emphasized the need for continued constructive engagement with Afghanistan’s current government and called for Turkey’s effective support for the Afghan people across political, economic, and humanitarian dimensions.

At this summit, more than 40 foreign ministers were present in person, reflecting the high level of participation and underscoring the importance and sensitivity of regional developments—especially Israel’s aggression against Palestine and other Muslim nations.

CONCLUSION

An examination of the role of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) shows that it has played an important part in shaping discourse, guiding Islamic countries, and fostering apparent unity through its regular meetings and declarations. However, in light of the points discussed above, a reassessment of the OIC’s positions in diplomacy suggests the need for a fundamental review of its approaches, priorities, and tools for cooperation among Islamic countries within their foreign policy frameworks.

Facing a complex global environment, it has become necessary to analyze the weaknesses and inefficiencies within the OIC’s current structures. Such a reassessment may first require moving away from reactive and passive diplomacy toward proactive policymaking that is based on shared interests and Islamic values.

This process could also promote the idea of embracing diversity within the Islamic Ummah, while preserving strategic unity and emphasizing the resolution of disputes through dialogue within the OIC itself, rather than relying on external Western or Eastern powers. If such changes occur, there is hope that issues like the



Palestinian cause, humanitarian crises, scientific and economic poverty, and other challenges could become central priorities of a shared foreign policy among Islamic countries.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is essential to establish a legally binding mechanism within the OIC to ensure that the organization's declarations are translated into policy frameworks that member states are obliged to implement.
2. A joint Islamic fund should be created, independent of politically motivated external aid, to strengthen the OIC's economic independence.
3. An independent monitoring commission should be established to oversee and ensure the implementation of OIC resolutions by member states.
4. The OIC should serve as the platform for resolving disputes between member states, and even internal conflicts within a member country, through dialogue, instead of relying on Western or Eastern powers.

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