

**Book Review**

**The organization of Islamic Conference: Continuity and Change and India**

By Zafar Imam  
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***Riyaz Punjabi***

The Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), as a pressure group claiming to represent the Islamic countries, has seen varying fortunes since it was formed about forty years ago. The emergence of OIC owes much to the competing claims of prominence among Muslim countries, especially between Saudi and Egyptian leadership in the Sixties. The Egypt's defeat in 1967 in Middle East War and demise of Gammal Abdul Nasser facilitated the rise of the Saudi leadership among Islamic – particularly the Arab- countries. The formation of OIC at the initiative of Saudi Arabia in 1969 was the manifestation of this very assertion of Saudi leadership.

It is interesting to note that the Islamic countries, which constitute the OIC, have remained a part of power block politics in international relations. The OIC member countries have equally been bound by pacts and alliances among themselves and with forces outside the region as well. Thus, in the presence of these pacts, the OIC has not been seen to be playing any major role on behalf of the Islamic countries except that the Organization has been passing resolutions on issues ostensibly affecting Islamic countries or Muslims anywhere in the World. In this vein, many a young scholars have been describing OIC as no more than a 'Post Office'. However, the fact remains that the existence of OIC as a specific pressure group has a specific relevance. Moreover, its role and performance needs to be keenly watched during the post cold war period.

The literature on the constitution, programs, policies and performance of OIC is scanty. In this regard Zafar Imam's latest book, *OIC: Continuity and Change and India*, is timely. The first two Chapters of the book provide the background, the beginning and growth of the OIC; the organizational structure and its activities. The next two chapters, which deal with the programs, policies, trends for change and the policy for India are highly relevant in the present changing times of global politics.

The author has brought forth a significant fact that in eighties a political shift in the political direction of OIC became quite discernible. The involvement of OIC in Asian affairs became prominent in the event of Russian intervention in Afghanistan. According to the author, the western powers also encouraged the OIC to play a more active role in the Afghan civil war. He also underlines the role of OIC in Camp David accord between Egypt and Israel in 1979. However, the author should have also mentioned the fact that the directional shift on the part of OIC was also a consequence of alignments of Arab countries with the western world and the latter were more concerned with their own strategic and economic interests in these regions of the world.

The author rightly analyses two important developments, which have laid a significant impact on OIC in its relations with the West during the last one decade. These developments have posed a major challenge for the OIC in as much as it has to respond to this challenge or face isolation. First, the gradual removal of protective umbrella of the West over OIC in the post cold war era. Second, the growing perception, which was sometimes supported by empirical evidence that some members of OIC were encouraging what, is described as 'Islamic fundamentalism'.

The author further highlights the new challenges, which OIC had to face as a result of breaking up of Yugoslavia. The author rightly maintains that although OIC began to move out of its purely Arab orientation due to the exigencies of post-cold war, it unsuccessfully ventured in promoting solidarity in Asia by taking sides on Indo-Pakistan disputes. This development has, in fact, accentuated the conflict in South Asia. The author points out that by forming a special contact group on Kashmir in 1994 OIC began supporting Pakistani stand on Kashmir issue and, thus, contributed to the hardening of India's attitude and made bilateral India-Pakistan negotiated settlement of the issue a more difficult and complex one.

Be that as it is, the stance of OIC members on Kashmir has been at variance with OIC as a group. Moreover, the role of Iran in offsetting the Pakistan's initiative of bringing a resolution against India in UN Commission of Human Rights in Geneva in 1994 is quite significant. Due to that Pakistan was forced to withdraw the resolution at the eleventh hour it demonstrated the fact that on crucial issues of bilateral relations OIC members would not allow the forum to be used by any member to achieve its strategic objectives.

The author concludes that OIC is now poised for finding a well-defined personality for itself in tune with the spirit of the new millennium. He is of the opinion that OIC might loose its specific political content and concentrate more on crisis management, and particularly, on economic activities. The developments in the member countries of OIC, particularly from the Arab world, substantiate the hypothesis of the author about the future role of OIC.

The author has argued that although India qualifies for a full membership of OIC, however, due to many historical and pragmatic facts India should initiate steps to become an associate member of the Organization. He bases his argument on the fact that legitimacy of India's claim rested on having second largest Muslim population in the world. According to the author, OIC, as an organization, had not been working against India's interest. The Indian official position is not in favour of joining OIC formally as a member after the Rabat Conference in 1969 in which Pakistan delegation took an exception to India's presence in OIC. India's position has been that it has been dealing with the OIC members bilaterally. Hence, there was no urgency in seeking a formal membership in OIC. However, the absence of India in OIC has given a free hand to some rival countries to use this forum to their advantage. As a country, home to the second largest Muslim population of the world, India should have a presence in OIC. The suggestion of the author, in this regard, needs to be considered seriously.

Zafar Imam's scholarship and his command on the writing skills makes the book quite readable. It is informative, analytical and incisive. The merit of this study lies in its brevity (107 pages). This

book is an authentic guide and can equally serve as a good source for the young scholars to carry on further researches on OIC.

*[Dr. Riyaz Punjabi is President, International Centre for Peace Studies, New Delhi]*