

## How can OIC improve the security situation in South Asia?

By **Samina Akhter**

After World War I, the Ottoman Empire and the Caliphate fell apart, leaving a void. Consequently, the glory of once mighty Golden Age of Islam started to fade away- the Golden Era when Muslim Ummah or the entire Muslim community was at the pinnacle of intellectual and leadership supremacy. After a few decades the vacuum which was created after the demise of Caliphate was fulfilled by formation of the biggest organization for upholding and maintaining the dignity, independence and rights of the entire Muslim community. This institution formalized the unity of the then Muslim world under the banner of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, or OIC.

This 57-member organization appeared as a unified platform to safeguard Muslims and protect the interests of the Muslim world and promote peace and security. Since its birth, the OIC's role as a guardian for the Muslim community has been commendable. On the other hand, the centre for global geopolitics has been shifted to South Asia in 21st century. That is why the OIC should put extra focus on the security condition of Muslim countries in South Asia, especially Afghanistan and Bangladesh. However, the nature of the crisis of these two countries are opposite in nature: Afghanistan witnessing dire humanitarian and economic downfall and Bangladesh hosting the world's biggest refugee camp. In these conditions, OIC is expected to play a strong role to overcome the plight.

The looming catastrophe in Afghanistan has been exacerbated to an unprecedented degree, with 55 of the population facing hunger, and lack of shelter and other social services. More than 23 million are facing acute hunger, 9 million children are malnourished, and 3.5 million are forcibly displaced. This country was already reeling through drought as a result of never-ending conflicts and its crisis seems to escalate in the severe cold of the winter season. With freezing temperatures expected to drop by minus 25°C, millions of people might be exposed to threats of starvation, famine, winter diseases and most unfortunate deaths. Even experts say that hunger and poverty following the Taliban takeover seems to kill more Afghans this winter alone than all the violence did during the past two decades.

In the very first place, the OIC, also "the collective voice of the Muslim world" should immediately collect aid from Muslim countries and distribute it among the Afghans. At the 17th extraordinary meeting of the OIC, the member states agreed to launch humanitarian assistance for this worst crisis-hit country. Pakistan is to be thanked for

hosting this vital session. Now, the OIC should coordinate relief from other countries and distribute it among Afghans. Also, the OIC should make contact with the Taliban on a regular basis to administer the equal and proper distribution of relief materials.

The most essential responsibility of the OIC is now to use its influence over the Taliban regime to make them agree on building an inclusive government, that has "the full, equal and meaningful participation of women" and upholds human rights. The Taliban should acknowledge the necessity of educating its women and involvement of women in decision making for the welfare of the nation. By respecting the basic human rights, the Taliban could prevent the refugee exodus from Afghanistan.

But Myanmar should face continued pressure till the successful repatriation of millions of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar. Apparently, OIC has contributed a lot but there is still a long way to go. In recent times the Rohingya refugee crisis and repatriation are not getting much attention as the focus shifted to other issues, such as- Afghanistan security issues and the global environment crisis. The OIC should make sure that the Rohingya crisis never loses attention on international agencies

The OIC should also play a key role in making the Taliban cooperate with the international bodies and aid agencies to ensure proper distribution of the relief goods among the people. Additionally, it should cooperate with other agencies, like the United Nations, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank to help diplomats and envoys restart working in Afghanistan.

Another area OIC can contribute in reforming Afghanistan is to make the Taliban realize the worth of education for everyone. OIC should pressurize the Taliban to make a curriculum for assuring education for everyone and develop the standard for it.

What the Taliban need right now is to find an immediate political solution to combat the crisis and reform the economy. Last but not the least, the OIC should push the Taliban to ensure that terrorism and drug trafficking should not spill over to neighbouring countries.

Most Importantly, if Taliban want to be recognized, at first they should exhibit some qualities and worthiness of being recognized. The OIC should use its leverage on them to qualify themselves for engaging with the rest of the world.

Meanwhile, ever since Bangladesh welcomed the 1.2 million Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, she has been paying the price of her generosity. Despite many diplomatic efforts, the repatriation of Rohingya people has been lingering for quite long. The exodus of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar to Bangladesh created numerous strategic, economic and environmental issues as Bangladesh is already an over-populated nation. Nevertheless, Bangladesh continues to generously host the world's largest and growing refugee settlement despite the huge burden on economy, food management, its limited resources and other circumstances. Even Bangladesh planned to relocate some of the

Rohingyas to Bhashanchar to ensure better living standard for them through the Ashrayan 3 Project through its own financing.

With the backing of OIC, Gambia, an OIC member, volunteered to file a case against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for the alleged genocide of the Rohingya in November, 2019. On January 23, 2020, the ICJ unanimously passed a resolution on protection of Rohingya refugees, preventing acts on genocide and killings. On the other hand, OIC countries commenced its fund-raising campaign in December 2020 and could donate \$1.2 million to Bangladesh. All in all, OIC's support in resolving the crisis has been commendable.

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Bangladesh has always been an obedient member of the OIC, and promptly responded to the resolution of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan at the OIC's 17th extraordinary meeting with an announcement of providing aid through food and medical support. As pledged, the OIC should show solidarity with Bangladesh apart from playing a pivotal role in the Afghanistan crisis to improve the security situation in South Asia.

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## Changing ME and Pakistan: opportunities on the horizon

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By: **Shazia Anwer Cheema**

We are at the beginning of the year 2022 and it seems like that ice is breaking in the Middle East and after decade-long tense relations, Middle Eastern economic powers are joining hands again and mitigating their differences.

In the last year, Middle Eastern theatre has changed drastically. In January 2022 we got the news that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will visit Saudi Arabia in February 2022. Just a year ago, on January 5, 2021, we witnessed the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, visiting Saudi Arabia for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit followed by the signing of an agreement to restore diplomatic relations between Qatar and the Saudi-led bloc comprising the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt. This change was the end of the five-year long diplomatic deadlock of Qatar.

On November 24, 2021, President Erdogan hosted Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan in Ankara in what was the latter's first visit to Turkey after 2012. Diplomatic relations between Turkey and the UAE went through a turbulent patch due to major differences and their contradictory positions over Arab Spring, Muslim Brotherhood, Libyan civil war, Syrian war, and Qatar embargo. Turkey was the only country in the region that stood with Qatar when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, the Maldives, Mauritania, Senegal, Djibouti, Comoros, Jordan and Libya severed diplomatic relations with Qatar and blocked its airspace and sea routes in June 2017.

Now Qatar and Saudi Arabia are working again to establish a rail link that would connect the two countries. Last week, Qatari Minister of Transport Jassim Al-Sulaiti and his Saudi counterpart Saleh bin Nasser Al-Jasser held discussions regarding aspects of cooperation in the fields of transportation, civil aviation, ports and railways. Aljazeera reported that the proposed rail link project was expected to be launched back in 2016 before it was abandoned due to the diplomatic crisis between the two states.

I believe that Middle Eastern economic giants now understand that the age of imposing regional hegemonies are a bygone idea because Qatar boosted its economy and diplomatic position when it was physically isolated from neighbouring countries. Turkey despite the horrific Syrian war at its borders has become the hub of information technology and high technological productions while Iran despite sanctions and embargoes not only survived but has become an integral part of Chinese vision in the region. There is no doubt that Middle Eastern wars ruined Syria, Iraq and Libya but

someone else out of the Middle East was the beneficiary of these wars while the Middle East got nothing but terrorism, large-scale migrations and asylum-seeking youth.

Pakistan's foreign policy has always been proactive in the Middle East because situated at the crossroads, Pakistan links South Asia with Central Asia and the Middle East via Iran. Turbulence in the Middle East has never been favorable to Pakistan, therefore it had been trying to bridge Middle Eastern countries by mitigating differences between and among brotherly countries.

Since 2016, Pakistan had been facing critical situations and trying to keep a balance among Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and other GCC countries after Qatar was virtually cut off and isolated by Saudi Arabia. Syrian, Iraqi and Libyan wars turned the situation complex further when Saudi Arabia and Turkey stood against each other, putting Pakistan into a difficult situation as it has good relation with both. Pakistan tried to play its role to neutralise the situation between Iran and Saudi Arabia and between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Now things are becoming favourable for Pakistan when after a tug of war-like situation, Middle Eastern countries are normalising their relations.

This situation is an excellent opportunity for Pakistan to place itself at the diplomatic centre stage of the Middle East. Pakistan, Iran and Turkey have already initiated a cargo railway project and the first cargo train from Islamabad left the station for Istanbul in December 2021. Shall we not go for developing a workable economic vision pooling human resources offered by Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar for a better future of our generations to come? I think we can do it now.

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## A pragmatic approach toward Afghanistan

By: Talat Masood

The Taliban for the second time assuming power in Afghanistan has been generally welcomed by Pakistan leadership. It is understandable as the former government of President Ghani was extremely hostile toward Pakistan and its close links with India created a two-front situation placing additional burden on our armed forces. Moreover, as the previous Afghan government was heavily dependent on the US and maintained close ties with it, this led to Pakistan being viewed mostly through the Afghan lens. And President Biden and his predecessors found Pakistan a convenient scapegoat for their policy failures in Afghanistan.

The snub to PM Imran Khan by President Biden by not engaging with him is apparently a reaction to it. How long this grievance would last is not clear but certainly is pushing Islamabad more toward China and finding new avenues of building ties with Russia. This is despite the fact that Imran Khan has repeatedly expressed the desire to promote close relations with Washington and emphasising that its relations with China do not prevent it from firming up ties with Washington. Considering that the US policy is to weaken China so as to stem its rise as a credible challenger to its global supremacy, Pakistan's strategic relationship with Beijing goes against its vital interests.

There are other aspects that Pakistan will have to watch despite the friendly regime being in place in Kabul. First and foremost is the Taliban ideology itself. The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan has acquired a new life under the Taliban rule. They feel if Taliban can acquire power in Afghanistan, we can at least spread our influence and writ in North Waziristan, parts of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and in Balochistan. The Taliban leadership claims that they will not allow anyone to use their territory against others. It was heartening to learn that they lived up to their commitment and Omar Khalid Khorasani, the leader of TTP who under his watch was responsible for the murder of hundreds of innocent people including that of 140 children of Army Public School, was killed in Afghanistan.

. Being comrade in arms of Afghan Taliban against the previous regime, their leadership were initially hesitant to restrain the activities of TTP against Pakistan and take action against them. Taking advantage of the lax policy of Taliban, the TTP had intensified their terrorist activities against Pakistan and hardly a day passes when there are no reports of casualties of our troops and those of the TTP. Earlier efforts by the government to engage with TTP and negotiate a peace deal failed to make any headway due to the latter's refusal which indicates their confidence in maintaining pressure on the government.

The Taliban government must have realised that if they did not change their policy of maintaining close relations with TTP and different terrorist groups and deny them space in Afghanistan, they can lose the support of the international community, including Pakistan. Moreover, Pakistan or the international community would not recognise the Taliban government if they continue to support such groups. In fact, the worst sufferer would be Pakistan if they did not take stern measures against these groups. Their past practice of giving protection to militant outfits including Osama bin Laden had invited the wrath of the US and the Western world. Hopefully, the Taliban leadership would not repeat such mistakes that have cost their people and the country incalculable damage.

The death of Khalid Khorasani no doubt has been a serious blow to TTP but it may be premature to assume that the terrorist group will demobilise. Any weakness in governance of K-P government could be exploited by TTP and other militant organisations. Already the growing influence of JUI-F and other religious parties is giving a boost to religious extremist groups including the Islamic State Khorasan (ISK) group. Although it is expected that due to the existing extreme rivalry between the Taliban and ISK that dates back to intense clashes since 2015, they would in their own interest try to eliminate them.

It is not clear what specific measures the Pakistan government is taking to counter the growing influence of TTP and militancy as a whole. It has essentially left it to the army leadership that relies heavily on the kinetic approach. This has to be combined with political and economic measures and better border management and security of border areas. The army's remarkable effort at fencing the border despite objections of the Taliban government and extremely difficult working condition has clearly strengthened the Western border. An open border with disturbed conditions on the other side would have invited more problems for Pakistan. As it is troubled conditions in Afghanistan increase vulnerability of Balochistan and districts of K-P especially those that were part of the former tribal belt.

The inequality in development of border districts and regional disparity in Pakistan is a serious issue and should be given high priority by the government and be made an integral part of the National Security Policy. It is through implementation of these short- and long-term measures that our borders can be secured.

Another area of concern is that Taliban leadership are backtracking on the treatment of women and have not changed their policy regarding education of girls despite the assurances that they were initially giving. They have to conduct responsibly this time around if they want to be a part and not a pariah of the international community. Pakistan despite being one of its few well-wishers would be the worst affected if Taliban continue to pursue their old ways.

Our leadership needs to draw serious lessons from its long history of involvement in affairs of Afghanistan. We have to reconceptualise our relations with Afghanistan in the light of

the changed strategic and political situation. Humanitarian assistance and matters related to border management should be the main focus. Being a proud nation and having a history of interference by foreign powers Afghan leadership are skeptical when Pakistan despite its good intentions gets involved in their affairs.

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## Reinvigorating SAARC

By: Inamullah Marwat

One of the key challenges that states face across the globe is how to effectively deal with Collective Goods' Problems. It's a concept in International Relations. IR scholars can make a better sense of it; however, let me decode it for a better understanding of readers. The Collective Goods' Problem refers to that problem which states collectively face and in the resolution of which all states have stakes; however, not all states put their expected share in the resolution of that problem, as at a point in time, taking a step for the resolution of any collective problem may jeopardise a state's vested interest.

So, in simple words, the Collective Goods' Problem is a clash between collective interests of the states and their individual interests. Its examples across the globe in recent history can be seen in a hesitant collaboration among states in dealing with global issues like climate change, the refugee problem in Europe, nuclear proliferation, rising waves of populism and the growing sense of discontentment in the South in the wake of globalisation.

South Asia is not immune to Collective Goods' Problems. Faced with the issues of overpopulation, rising levels of economic marginalisation, climate change and bilateral rivalries between states especially the long-standing issue of Kashmir between Pakistan and India, the whole region is facing a lot of collective problems where member states need to play their role for their resolution as a delay in this regard is pushing the whole region to pay a heavy price for it, maybe not in the short term but definitely in the long run. Theoretically, International Relations suggests three principles through which Collective Goods' Problems can be resolved. These principles comprise Dominance, Reciprocity and Identity. "Dominance" says that powerful countries should decide the terms in dealing with collective problems. So in the case of South Asia, as per the Dominance principle, politically and economically strong countries should play their part proactively in the resolution of collective problems. "Reciprocity" says that states can solve collective problems through the principle of "Give and Take". In other words, in dealing with any collective problem, states can incentivise cooperation of member states and disincentivise states for lack of cooperation. "Identity" says that states can solve a collective problem if they focus on their bigger identity instead of focusing on their individual identity.

Currently, of the above mentioned principles for the solution of collective goods' problems, which principle can work effectively? That's a question worth exploration; however, in reality, it seems that all of South Asia has failed in finding a way to solve its collective problems. In 1985, the region established the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) for better integration in pursuit of peace and prosperity.

SAARC has not been able to bring all the members on the same page and has not been effectively used so far for the resolution of perennial issues of South Asia. A lot of push-and-pull has been observed among member states in SAARC since its birth and this tug of war is more vocal between the leading giants of South Asia, which includes India and Pakistan because of having no common understanding over long-standing issues including Kashmir.

The last summit of SAARC was held in 2014 in Kathmandu, Nepal. In 2016, Pakistan was supposed to host the SAARC summit; however, India refused to be a part of it in the wake of Uri terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir. India not only boycotted the SAARC summit in 2016 but also diplomatically persuaded other members of SAARC, including Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan, not to attend it. Since then, no SAARC summit has happened.

Pakistan intends to hold a SAARC summit during the first half of this year, with a key focus on the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. It's encouraging on the part of Pakistan to welcome India in the upcoming 19th SAARC summit as Pakistan Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi recently said in a press conference, "If India doesn't want to participate in person, then it can attend virtually also, but they should not stop others from coming." This SAARC summit is currently the need of the hour. There is a lot at stake in South Asia at the moment and SAARC can turn out to be the best platform not only for the resolution of various Collective Goods' Problems but also it can be effectively used for regional cooperation, regional economic activity and regional trade.

All the member states in general and India and Pakistan in particular, should think about a better future for South Asia. It all depends upon how flexible we are in accommodating one another.

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## Nordic model of education and Pakistan

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By: HR Ahmad/Kulsoom Ghias

Children are born and the world is already there for them to find the essence of life. Through the stages of development starting from early infancy and early childhood, every child carries the creative energy within to explore and seek the essence of life. An enabling environment of care, nutrition and stimulation of playfulness is required to unfold their creative genomic programs referred to as "nature". This in turn depends on how the cognitive neural circuitry is nurtured. The ideal soil for the children's growth is difficult to find but not impossible. Worth-citing here is the Nordic model that has high economic productivity. It is also associated with high social equality, trust and wellbeing. The model shows that children's performance is independent of parents' income. The nurturing of a civil society is driven by an opportunity afforded to all children of a country to enter elementary schools without discrimination of social class or standing. This can serve as seedlings of a nation-state with nourishment provided by a universal pedagogical curriculum (UPC).

David Brooks in his article in NYT in 2020 described how the Nordic nations in the 19th century were homogenous and poor. Interestingly, their economic growth took off after 1870. This is before establishment of the welfare state. How did they achieve it? The 19th century Nordic elites realised that if their countries were to prosper, they must shed the curse of illiteracy by creating a genuine 'public school system' for all children to learn and grow as a natural fabric of society. They laid the foundation of a holistic education known as Bildung in German. It means moral, emotional, intellectual and civic transformation of a person to unfold their talents and passion to be enlightened. Bildung enables a holistic broad-based education with the capacity of critical thinking. The training deals with acquiring expertise in a general and/or specialised field. The holistic education enables students to observe their world around them to understand the complex functional dynamics between self and society. How lucidly Rachel Andersen and Tomas Bjorkman describe the narratives in *The Nordic Secret*, "Bildung is the way that the individual matures and takes upon herself/himself ever bigger personal responsibility towards family, friends, fellow citizens, society, our globe, and the global heritage of our species, while enjoying ever bigger personal, moral and existential freedoms," Before 19th century, most Europeans identified themselves in local but not in national terms. However, the Nordic Curriculum instilled in students a learning mechanism to switch from local to national to universal terms of reference. This would enable students to take shared

responsibility for the whole stepping up from the family to a society to a nation. The Nordic educators enabled students to develop internal awareness dealing with emotions, cravings, wounds, and desires, and learn how to become resilient to deal with crisis.

The creative role of curriculum in a child's development starts from parental conforming to group norms. If the environment enables, the child may finally frame her/his own norms of value. With this background, growing children learn as a pacemaker in a network of selves to acquire mutuality and holistic thinking. Thus, the purpose of a holistic education is to nurture children exploring the new world by providing them a horizontal enabling environment to unfold the creative energies.

The challenges for such a model to be implemented in a developing country like Pakistan include a well-established territorial society, agricultural means of production, children's performance dependent on parent's income, the influence of race, gender, language, culture complex and a higher rate of brain and capital drains. What it will take for the elites of this country to come to a consensus to shed the curse of illiteracy by implementing a UPC on the lines of Nordic model is indeed a challenge. A UPC would enable all children to live and grow with dignity and integrity as proud citizens of Pakistan. It could then lead to an integrated higher education system of bachelor studies of philosophy being sandwiched by natural and social sciences. It means the best revolution could be through adopting new means of universal education and training for all children without any discrimination of class and gender as vital sources of human development leading to a country's progress and wellbeing.

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