

**HISTORY OF REGIONAL INTEGRATIONS 2024/2025**

**THE ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIC COOPERATION (OIC)**

**The Collective Voice of The Muslim World:**

**A cultural and economic cooperation**

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Abstract

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) cannot be minimized to be considered as a weak entity in the international arena. In fact, the OIC has achieved notable success in resolving disputes among Muslims and continues to pursue four primary objectives: increasing solidarity among its members, combating Islamophobia, defending human rights, and safeguarding the self-determination of member states. The OIC's influence is further underscored by the cultural cohesion embodied by the Muslim Ummah, which encompasses a population of over 1.8 billion individuals. The OIC's institutions play a pivotal role in maintaining global governance stability for Muslims at all levels, a responsibility that, in the absence of the UN, would fall to the OIC as the second largest international organization. However, an in-depth study of the case is necessary to understand whether it is a case of regional integration or simply a case of strong regional co-operation that appears promising and in a development phase. In my essay, I will attempt to demonstrate and analyse the reasons why the influence of the OIC in global politics cannot be disregarded. To reach this aim, I will first provide the historical context, and then I will explain the economic and political conditions that led both failures and successes to the integration process.

### 1.2 Historical background

To understand the birth of the organization, a historical framing of the development of the notion of Islamic joint action is necessary.

The sense of belonging to an Ummah, i.e., the Muslim community, fostered bonding among Muslims and helped them live united under Islamic caliphates for more than thirteen centuries. The last Ottoman caliphate ruled for four centuries, until upon its collapse in 1924, new dynamics arose: after the upheavals of World War I, a debate arose about how to establish a modern caliphate, a different form of superordinate authority “that represented notably modern articulations of deeply rooted religious sentiments.”<sup>1</sup>

After the abolition of the caliphate, the deposed Caliph Abdulmejid II announced a proposal to convene an international conference of Muslim leaders to discuss the state of the Muslim Ummah. His suggestion to convene an international conference became a model approach followed by several Muslim leaders around the world to realize Islamic solidarity. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, the former Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, stated in his book *The Islamic World in the New Century* that “Islamic solidarity was viewed not only as a workable way to restore the Caliphate, but also as the most appropriate response to the political challenges facing the Ummah as a result of colonialism and fragmentation”.<sup>2</sup>

Inspired by the abolition of the Caliphate, several Muslim congresses were held during the interwar period, notably in Mecca in 1926, Jerusalem in 1931, and in Geneva in 1935. The latter took place with the participation of Muslim activists from Europe, the Soviet Union, the Middle East, and North

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<sup>1</sup> M. Hasan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate: A Transregional History* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2016), p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> E. Ihsanoglu, *The Islamic World in the New Century* (London, Hurst & Company 2010), p.14.

Africa, united “to establish a social, economic and religious bond between the Muslims living in the West and the Muslim World”.<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, the post-war period, marked by the Cold War and a bipolar world system, as well as a process of decolonization during which numerous Muslim countries gained independence, substantiated various endeavours by Muslim countries to consolidate under a governing body, thereby fortifying collaboration with pertinent nations.

However, Muslim countries realized that their political independence would not be complete without economic independence, which would be strengthened by further economic cooperation with Muslim nations. In addition, the effort to create an umbrella organization for Muslim-majority states was directly triggered by the plight of the Palestinian people under Israeli occupation and the attack on the Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem.

## 2. Case study

### 2.1 The creation of the OIC

The attempts to unite Muslims were sporadic and inconsistent, but they led to the creation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which later became the "Organization of Islamic Cooperation." The OIC was established in response to the arson of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem at the historic summit held in Rabat, Morocco on September 25, 1969.

The arson caused distressing reactions throughout the Muslim world. In response, on that same day, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem contacted Muslim heads of state, demanding an emergency Islamic summit to address the issue. As a result of diplomatic efforts by Saudi Arabia and Morocco, the first Islamic summit met in Rabat, and despite resistance from some countries, representatives from twenty-four states responded positively and participated. It was the first summit, which cleared the way for the creation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. Subsequently, the first meeting of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) was held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where it was decided to establish a permanent secretariat, headed by the general secretary of the organization<sup>4</sup>.

In 1972, during the third session of the ICFM, the first OIC charter was adopted. It outlines the principles and objectives of the organization to strengthen solidarity and cooperation among its members, which over time has grown larger and larger to 57 states.

Years later, on June 28, 2011, the organization would change its name and emblem and thereafter became the Organization for Islamic Cooperation<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> M. el-Sayed Selim (Ed.), *The OIC in A Changing World*, (Cairo University, 1994), p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> S. Awawdeh, *An Introduction to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation*, University of Exeter, 2020

<sup>5</sup> V. L. Gutiérrez Castillo, *the organization of islamic cooperation in contemporary international society la organizacion de cooperación islámica en la sociedad internacional contemporánea*, University of Jaen, 2014, Revista Electrónica de Estudios Internacionales

## 2.2 Adhesion to the OIC Charter

The members of the OIC are spread across the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, and Far East Asia. The Persian sphere of influence (Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan, and parts of central Asia), the Arab cultural zone of the Middle East and North Africa, the African sub-Saharan culture, the East-Asian Pacific region of Malay and Indonesian culture, and the Pax-Ottomana (Turkey, a portion of the Middle East, and the Balkans) are examples of cultural diversity. The western cultural zone was recently included in this list as well.

Initially to be admitted into the organization, the OIC charter stated that any Muslim state was entitled to join the Islamic conference by filing an application expressing a desire to adopt this charter. Whereupon the application is filed with the General Secretariat and submitted to the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, and be approved by a majority of the members of the conference. The membership rules adopted in 1972 and remaining in effect until 2008 contributed to the fragility of the organization, creating a 57-member entity without a clear and disciplining selection process.<sup>6</sup> In fact, one of the criteria stipulates that any country wishing to join the OIC must be a member of the United Nations, have a Muslim majority population, respect the Charter and submit an application for membership. The approval of the application comes only through the consensus of the Council of foreign ministers, which being composed of 57 countries is not always united in decisions.

According to the Charter, moreover, decisions on granting observer status to a state, which must be a member of the United Nations, will be made by the Council of Foreign Ministers only by consensus and based on criteria agreed upon by them.

Table 1: Full list of OIC countries and their membership years

Countries	Member since	Countries	Member since	Countries	Member since	Countries	Member since
AFGHANISTAN	1969	EGYPT	1969	Libya	1969	SENEGAL	1969
ALBANIA	1992	GABON	1974	MALAYSIA	1969	SIERRA LEONE	1972
ALGERIA	1969	GAMBIA	1974	MALDIVES	1976	SOMALIA	1969
AZERBAIJAN	1992	GUINEA	1969	MALI	1969	SUDAN	1969
BAHRAIN	1972	GUINEA-BISSAU	1974	MAURITANIA	1969	SURINAME	1996
BANGLADESH	1974	GUYANA	1998	MOROCCO	1969	SYRIAN	1972
BENIN	1983	INDONESIA	1969	MOZAMBIQUE	1994	TAJIKISTAN	1992
BRUNEI-DARUSSALAM	1984	IRAN	1969	NIGER	1969	TOGO	1997
BURKINA-FASO	1974	IRAQ	1975	NIGERIA	1986	TUNISIA	1969
CAMEROON	1974	JORDAN	1969	OMAN	1972	TURKEY	1969
CHAD	1969	KAZAKHSTAN	1995	PAKISTAN	1969	Turkmenistan	1992
COMOROS	1976	KUWAIT	1969	PALESTINE	1969	UGANDA	1974
COTE D'IVOIRE	2001	KYRGYZ	1992	QATAR	1972	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	1972
DJIBOUTI	1978	LEBANON	1969	SAUDI ARABIA	1969	UZBEKISTAN	1996
						YEMEN	1969

Source: OIC

<sup>6</sup> G. Bacik (2011) *The Genesis, History, and Functioning of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC): A Formal-Institutional Analysis*, Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, 2011

### 3. Institutions

#### 3.1 OIC Organs

The OIC was originally established as a political response to political developments, but its scope of interest has expanded to include a wide range of areas reflecting the interests of its Member States in the economic, social, cultural and humanitarian fields. As a result, the organizational structure of the OIC must reflect to a large extent the areas of interest, priorities and concerns of its member countries through a long series of organs and institutions useful in carrying out its work.

1. *Islamic Summit*: is the highest-level decision-making body of the Organisation, consists of the Presidents and Prime Ministers of the Member States. It meets once every three years in one of the Member States, holds consultations to achieve the goals specified in the OIC Charter and adopts resolutions on the policies to be followed to this end. In cases where the interests of the Islamic world necessitate, Extraordinary Summit meetings may also be held in order to review the critical issues for the Islamic world and to determine the policies the Organisation will pursue.
2. *Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM)*: is the secondary decision-making organ following the Summit. It is held once a year in one of the Member States, with the role of making decisions on issues about fulfilling purposes, implementing general policies of the Organisation, reviews the progress from the previous Islamic Summits and CFM Meetings, evaluates and approves the budgets of the Secretariat and subsidiary organs and elects the Secretary General. As is the case with the Summit Meetings, Extraordinary Sessions of the CFM may convene, when necessary, for the critical issues concerning the Islamic world.
3. *Standing Committees*: it needs to further address the critical issues for the Organisation and the Member States.
4. *Executive Committee*: it consists of 8 members, including Saudi Arabia as the host of the Secretariat as well as the Secretary General of the OIC and meets when necessary.
5. *International Islamic Court of Justice*: It shall be the Organisation's principal judicial organ following the entry into force of its status
6. *Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission*: consists of 18 members, six members each from the Asian, African and Arab groups.
7. *The Secretary General*: the chief administrative official of the Organisation, responsible for bringing to the attention of the competent organs of the Organisation matters which concern the Organisation; following-up the implementation of decisions, resolutions and recommendations of the Islamic Summits and CFM; coordinating the work of the relevant Organs of the Organisation; preparing the programme and the budget of the General Secretariat and submitting annual reports to the CFM on the work of the Organisation.
8. *The Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (COMCEC)*: has formed to promote economic and trade cooperation among the Islamic member states. It covers all sectors including trade investment, transport, and agriculture.

### 9. *Two subsidiary organs:*

- Statistical, Economic and Social Research Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC),
- Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA)

### 10. *Specialized Organs:* Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Office of Türkiye.

### 11. *Four affiliate institutions:*

- Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum (ICYF)
- Organization of Islamic Cooperation Broadcasting Regulating Authorities Forum (IBRAF)
- Federation of Consultants from Islamic Countries (FCIC)
- Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC)<sup>7</sup>

## 3.2 Observers

In addition to the 57 member states, there are individual countries or regions with observer status, which does not include voting rights. These include Bosnia and Herzegovina, Russia, Thailand, the Central African Republic, and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Various international organizations also act as observers. For instance, the United Nations, the Arab League, and the African Union. The Filipino-Muslim "Moro National Liberation Front" is also considered an observer, despite the rejection of the majority Catholic Philippines' application<sup>8</sup>.

## 4. Pillars of OIC

### 4.1 Purposes and Goals

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has shifted its focus from Islam to the national interests of its member states. This strategic realignment has resulted in the incorporation of non-Muslim and developing countries within the organization's membership. Its objectives protect the socio-economic values of Muslim culture, the promotion of solidarity among member states, the facilitation of cultural, scientific, political, and economic cooperation, and the support of international peace and security. The OIC collaborates with the United Nations and other organizations to address conflicts, safeguard the rights of Muslims, and repress discrimination. One significant initiative of the OIC is the OIC-2025 Plan, an update of the 10-Year Action Program, which covers 18 priority areas, including peace and security, counter-terrorism, poverty, education, human rights, and climate change. The OIC has also adopted several declarations and conventions, such as the 1990 Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam and the 1999 Convention against Terrorism.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/OIC.en.mfa>

<sup>8</sup> Members of the OIC - Organization of Islamic Cooperation, <https://www.worlddata.info/alliances/oic-islamic-cooperation.php>

## 4.2 The OIC Charter

The OIC's Charter was approved at the Third Islamic Foreign Ministers Meeting in Jeddah in 1972: the objectives of the Charter underscore the imperative to safeguard and advocate for the elevated Islamic principles of peace, compassion, tolerance, justice, and human dignity. In this manner, the Charter aspires to reinvigorate the pioneering role of Islam in the global context and to ensure prosperity and solidarity among the peoples of the Members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.<sup>9</sup>

According to Chapter I of the Charter, the following goals:

- To enhance and consolidate the bonds of fraternity and solidarity among the Member States.
- To safeguard the common interests and support the legitimate causes of the member states, and to support the restoration of complete sovereignty and territorial integrity of any member state under occupation, as a result of aggression, on the basis of international law and cooperation with the relevant international and regional organisations.
- To support the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination and establish their sovereign State with East Jerusalem as its capital, while safeguarding its historic and Islamic character as well as the Holy places therein.
- To strengthen intra-Islamic economic and trade cooperation in order to achieve economic integration leading to the establishment of an Islamic Common Market.
- To exert efforts to achieve sustainable and comprehensive human development and economic well-being in member states.
- To protect and defend the true image of Islam, to combat defamation of Islam and encourage dialogue among civilisations and religions.
- To promote and to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms including the rights of women, children, youth, elderly and people with special needs as well as the preservation of Islamic family values.
- To promote and defend unified position on issues of common interest in the international fora.
- To cooperate in combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, organised crime, illicit drug trafficking, corruption, money laundering and human trafficking.<sup>10</sup>

The new Charter, adopted at the 11th OIC Summit held in Dakar in 2008, marks a pivotal moment in the Organization's reform process. The new Charter establishes the legal basis and the organs necessary for the cooperation and activities among Islamic countries in accordance with the contemporary requirements of the new environment, which have emerged as a result of radical changes in the international fora since 1972.

## 4.3 The OIC Ten-Year Program of Action

The OIC-2025 Programme of Action is grounded on the vision and principles of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Charter. It builds upon directives outlined in various OIC declarations, agreements, conventions, and resolutions, forming the framework for its development paradigm. This

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<sup>9</sup> THE OIC – 2025 PROGRAMME OF ACTION pag 3

<sup>10</sup> S. Awawdeh, *An Introduction to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation*, University of Exeter, 2020

document represents the second phase of the OIC Ten-Year Programme of Action (TYPOA), first launched in 2005<sup>11</sup>.

Rooted in the Charter's core principles, the Programme of Action seeks to strengthen unity and solidarity among OIC Member States, advancing their collective interests on the global stage. A key priority remains the Palestinian crisis, with the OIC committed to ending the occupation and achieving a comprehensive resolution in line with UN resolutions and international initiatives<sup>12</sup>.

Endorsed at the 3rd OIC Extraordinary Summit in Mecca (2005), the TYPOA was developed through insights from scholars and intellectuals. This action plan reflects the OIC's commitment to fostering cooperation, promoting stability, and addressing the evolving needs of the Muslim world<sup>13</sup>.

The Programme serves as a comprehensive roadmap encompassing:

- Political cooperation, Islamic solidarity, and joint action
- Moderation and tolerance, Islamic Law, and the Islamic Fiqh Academy
- Counterterrorism efforts and the fight against Islamophobia
- Human rights, good governance, and conflict resolution
- Support for Palestine and occupied Arab territories
- Economic collaboration and development, including backing the Islamic Development Bank
- Social solidarity, disaster relief, and poverty reduction in Africa
- Advancement in higher education, science, and technology
- Rights of women, youth, and children, alongside family welfare
- Cultural exchange among OIC member states

## 5. A broad picture of the OIC Member

The OIC world is characterized by its diversity and complexity, with a wide range of cultural, economic, political, and sociological differences. The Muslim world has always been a significant player in global politics and economics since its emergence in the early seventh century, making it a major epicentre of world politics, economics, and history. However, the current increase in tension and political instability in the region has several underlying causes, including political and religious factors.

Energy is undoubtedly a central issue, given its role as the ultimate source of power in the current era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This work focuses on energy-rich countries, whether in oil or gas, that dominate the regions of focus. Notably, most of these powerful yet relatively weak economies are Muslim countries: its primary natural resource, the physical energy, is the ultimate source of power in the modern era. The 20th century witnessed a significant escalation in the centrality of energy in inter-country relations, with the field becoming a pivotal aspect of economic and political relations among regional and global powers. The Middle East is not merely a centre of physical energy, but also considered the spiritual heart of humanity. Consequently, it is logical to infer that this unique region would not be left undisturbed.

<sup>11</sup> OIC/SUM-13/2016/POA-Final *THE OIC - 2025 PROGRAMME OF ACTION: Implementation plan 2016- 2025*

<sup>12</sup> *THE OIC - 2025 PROGRAMME OF ACTION*, p 3.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/OIC.en.mfa>

## 5.1 Economic relationships between the OIC members

The OIC is the second biggest international organization after the UN. The 57 member countries (and 5 observers) of the OIC produce 9% of the world's economic output<sup>14</sup>. Combining all existing Muslim economies, the OIC represents a population of more than 1.7 billion people, implying an economic, sociological and political reach of enormous significance. This demographic scenario, characterized by a predominantly young population (54% of the population is below 24 years old), presents both challenges and opportunities. While cultural and religious diversity may pose threats to stability, younger generations and low dependency rates contribute to economic dynamism and prosperity, with growth rates expected to continue until at least 2030.

In a global context of increasing regional economic cooperation, the creation of a unified alliance among OIC countries seems a logical and beneficial shift that can promote overall prosperity. Such cooperation is also crucial for strengthening economic ties with non-Muslim regional powers, such as Israel, especially in the energy sphere, where collaboration on imports and infrastructure, such as gas pipelines, becomes imperative. In this context, the importance of energy security is highlighted, with Turkey's trade deficit largely attributable to energy imports.

Although the OIC already constitutes a powerful economic entity, it has even greater potential: OIC member states possess 60% of the oil reserves, 61% of the gas reserves and 30% of the lands on Earth. Indeed, it counts for 11.7 % of exports and 10.8 % of foreign direct investment (FDI) globally, cause the top 10 member economies claim 70 % of the total production. However, a clear division emerges between natural resource-rich countries, with as many as 21, among the world's 48 least developed countries, OIC members characterized by severe crises and corruption.

To better understand the internal economic dynamics, the members can be divided into three main groups. The first group includes the OIC's Least Developed Countries (LDCs), such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh and other countries classified as LDCs by the United Nations. The second group consists of middle-income countries (MDCs), including Albania, Egypt, Indonesia, and Turkey. The third group includes oil-exporting countries (OECs) such as Saudi Arabia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates.<sup>15</sup> The OIC has not yet succeeded in creating a common market among its members, but there have been attempts by some regional groups to establish regional economic cooperation. Although plans for a common market appear promising, they are still in the development stage. For example:

- The Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) aims to create a "Maghreb Economic Area" with free movement of goods, people, and services among member countries.
- The Council of Arab Economic Union (CAEU) aims to create an Arab common market by eliminating trade restrictions.

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<sup>14</sup> B. Bağış, & Ç. Yurtseven, *The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. In Turkey and the OIC: Greater Economic Cooperation, Opportunities and Challenges*, Center for Strategic Research (SAM). 2017 (pp. 10–31).

<sup>15</sup> M. Kabir Hassan, *Economic Performance of the OIC Countries and the Prospect of an Islamic Common Market* Working Paper 461 January 2009

- The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is working toward a common market that promotes the free movement of goods and services, as well as other forms of economic and political cooperation<sup>16</sup>.

However, efforts to reduce trade barriers and promote economic cooperation among member countries are ongoing, chasing the aspiration to further strengthen economic cooperation within the organization and achieve integration.

The OIC has clearly defined objectives, and one of its main goals has been to promote economic cooperation among member countries. In 1977, the OIC established the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) to finance economic and infrastructure development projects in Muslim countries. The bank has become one of the most important instruments for economic integration, providing loans and financial assistance<sup>17</sup>.

## 5.2 The balance of power: political cooperation

Today, several conflicts and areas of tension exist within the OIC, and this reality needs the development of the organization's involvement in promoting peace and security, member countries and Muslim communities<sup>18</sup>. Indeed, the politics and relations among OIC members have a fundamental impact on the role of each state, influencing its capacity for leadership and participation. The following are examples of the protracted conflicts on the OIC's agenda.

- The situation in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003. There were attempts to end the Sunni-Shiite sectarian violence that spread across the country after the fall of the Baath regime, in fact in 2006 thirty of Iraq's most prominent Sunni and Shiite authorities signed the Mecca Declaration to achieve complete national reconciliation and preservation territorial integrity and sovereignty.
- The conflict on the OIC agenda is the Jammu and Kashmir dispute between Pakistan and India. For the OIC, the Jammu and Kashmir conflict, if left unresolved, could escalate into a military confrontation that could threaten peace and security in South Asia. Therefore, an OIC contact group was established on the two conflict regions to enforce Kashmiri aspirations.
- The OIC expressed concern about the presence of foreign forces in Somalia. Therefore, the OIC decided to undertake humanitarian and reconstruction actions.<sup>19</sup>
- Iran's role in the OIC has undergone significant changes due to difficult relations with Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia. After the 1979 Revolution, Iran was marginalized from the OIC because of its political and religious views, which threatened Saudi hegemony. Finally, despite the growing hostility, diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia improved, focusing on the "dialogue of civilizations," and Iran's relations with the OIC also culminated in the OIC chairmanship awarded to Iran in 1997<sup>20</sup>.
- The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has taken concrete steps to address the crisis in Palestine, focusing on key initiatives such as supporting the Egyptian plan for Gaza,

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem

<sup>17</sup> "The Islamic Development Bank: A Decade of Achievements", Islamic Development Bank. IsDB Board Approves Over US\$1.4 Billion to Advance Sustainable Development Goals in 8 Member Countries | News | IsDB

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1039946/%7B%7B>

<sup>19</sup> <sup>19</sup> S. Awawdeh, *An Introduction to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation*, University of Exeter, 2020

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.geopolitica.info/organisation-islamic-cooperation/>

promoting legal action to end the Israeli blockade, and condemning military operations in the Strip. The OIC strongly supports the two-state solution and urged intervention by the international community to protect Palestinian civilians. Strategies include boycotting Israeli products in order to press for an end to the occupation. In 2013, Secretary General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu proposed severing diplomatic relations with states that recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital. In response to the U.S. decision to relocate its embassy, the Istanbul Declaration on Freedom of Al-Quds was adopted in 2017. In addition, in 2019, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) condemned Netanyahu's plan to annex the West Bank and, in 2024, expressed support for South Africa's complaint to the International Court of Justice on genocide charges against Israel<sup>21</sup>.

These examples illustrate how political and ideological differences among OIC members, such as those between Saudi Arabia and Iran, have a direct impact on the functioning of the organization. While Saudi Arabia seeks to exercise selective leadership and prevent others from achieving hegemony, Iran has used the OIC as a tool to expand its diplomatic influence and seek leadership in the Muslim community. At the same time, new players such as Turkey and other moderate states, like Malaysia, Morocco and Indonesia are seeking to reform the organization to play a more inclusive and cooperative role. These dynamics undermine the OIC's ability to act as a unified force in the Muslim world, limiting its global influence and internal cohesion.<sup>22</sup>

## 6. Regional integration or regional cooperation?

The Organization officially changed its name from the "Organization of Islamic Conference" to the "Organization of Islamic Cooperation" and this change is not solely semantic, as it also reflects the OIC's intention to engage more seriously with a growing number of parties in an increasingly interdependent global community. Nonetheless, the Organization has not yet reached its full potential.

### 6.1 Absence of shared sovereignty

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) cannot be regarded as a model of regional integration; rather, it is an illustration of regional cooperation. To be considered a case of regional integration, it requires the partial transfer of sovereignty to shared institutions, the establishment of a unified market, or the formation of a political union among member states. By contrast, regional cooperation is based on a less binding interaction, where states collaborate on specific issues without renouncing their decision-making independence. This is the first obstacle of the OIC, which distinguishes it from organizations like European Union or ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations). The OIC functions as a loose intergovernmental organisation where decisions are made through consensus. Compliance with these decisions depends entirely on the political will of individual states. There is the lack of a supranational authority capable of binding member states to collective decisions: its role is primarily confined to diplomatic and mediation efforts in conflict situations, and the protection

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<sup>21</sup> "Genocide case against Israel: Where does the rest of the world stand on the momentous allegations?". Al-Ahram. 13 January 2024.

<sup>22</sup> P. Hakala and A. Kettis, *Policy briefing: The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation: Defined – for better and worse – by its religious dimension*, Directorate-general for external policies policy department, European Parliament, 2013

of solidarity among its members, but without the capacity to enforce agreements through coercive means. For instance, in the Israeli-Palestinian context, while the OIC has issued condemnations and promoted diplomatic meetings, its impact on resolving the dispute has been limited. Its actions in Syria have demonstrated its limitations, as its response to the humanitarian crisis has been primarily supportive of UN resolutions and appeals to the Security Council, without being able to intervene directly to protect civilians or enforce ceasefire agreements.

Additionally, the OIC faces competition from other regional organisations that often take precedence in addressing political and economic challenges. Many member states are also part of other regional organizations, such as the Arab League, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), or the African Union, each of which has more clearly defined regional cooperation mandates. This double and triple membership creates potential conflicts of interest, as states may prioritize the initiatives of these other organizations over those of the OIC. For example, Morocco, a member of both the Arab League and the OIC, might be more inclined to support Arab League-led mediation efforts rather than those initiated by the OIC, diminishing the latter's effectiveness<sup>23</sup>.

An absence of an enforcement mechanism is a key obstacle to its effectiveness. This limit for the organization was also identified by the United Nations, which in 2006 encouraged increased collaboration with the OIC to bolster its global role. This collaboration highlights the OIC's complementary role to other global institutions, confirming that its work is more about cooperation than integration.

## 6.2 Deep political and economic divergences

Beyond structural limitations, deep political, economic, and social divergences among OIC member states further prevent meaningful regional integration. Geopolitically, major powers within the organisation—Saudi Arabia, Iran—have competing agendas, often using the OIC as a platform to advance their own national interests, while Turkey continues its efforts for the comprehensive reform of the OIC, which is the only political platform which unites the Islamic world under a single roof and stands out as the intergovernmental organization with the largest number of members after the UN, in order to ensure that it can realize its true potential. Türkiye is the drafter, presenter and follower of numerous political, legal and Muslim minority-related resolutions adopted at the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers meetings.

This has resulted in the OIC failing to adopt a unified stance on critical international issues, including the conflicts in Yemen, Syria, and Palestine. From an economic perspective, the OIC includes highly developed economies such as those of the Gulf states, middle-income nations like Malaysia and Turkey, and least developed countries (LDCs) such as Somalia and Chad. The wide economic disparities within the OIC make it challenging to implement a cohesive trade policy or common market, in contrast to the European Union, which has robust economic integration mechanisms. The OIC's composition, which includes a wide range of legal and cultural diversity, poses challenges. This diversity encompasses strict theocracies like Iran and Saudi Arabia, as well as secular republics such as Turkey and Albania. These ideological and legal differences have hindered the OIC's ability to

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<sup>23</sup>I. Shaqieh, *Can the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Resolve Conflicts?* Peace and Conflict Studies Volume 19 Number 2 Article 3 11-2012

evolve into a practical instrument of regional integration, and have limited its capacity to fulfil a more symbolic and diplomatic role. In contrast to the European Union (EU), where legal harmonisation and shared institutions facilitate collective decision-making, the OIC lacks a framework that can replace national legal systems and enforce common policies. Instead, the OIC's primary focus remains on mediation in political conflicts, coordination of humanitarian aid, and the fostering of cultural solidarity among its members. The OIC remains an entity driven by voluntary cooperation rather than a structured institution capable of enforcing economic, political, or legal integration among its members. This inherent limitation underscores why the OIC continues to function more as a platform for dialogue rather than a regional bloc with deep institutional integration <sup>24</sup>.

## 7. Conclusion

### 7.1 The Role of the OIC

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which began as a fringe entity in the global political landscape, has gradually acquired a central role in resolving its internal disputes. In his speech in the United States, OIC Secretary General, Hissein Brahim Taha, outlined the organization's priorities, including combating violent extremism and terrorism, promoting human rights and empowering women, the elderly, children and people with disabilities. The OIC sees itself as a supreme authority in the Muslim world, committed to offering guidance, mediation and suggestions through democratic and peaceful methods, encouraging dialogue as the primary means of resolving disputes (Hashmat, 2011).

Throughout its history, the OIC has played an active role as a mediator in numerous conflicts, cementing strong relationships with international organizations such as the United Nations, the European Union and major world powers, including the United States, Russia and China. It is also the only organization that has consistently tried to champion the cause of Palestine, providing aid and bringing international attention to Israel's violations of international law.

The OIC is also at the forefront of the fight against Islamophobia, a growing form of fear associated with Muslim militant organizations, whose actions have been heightened since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. In response, the OIC has taken peaceful measures to counter discrimination against Muslims in the Western world. A specialized unit, such as the Islamophobia Observatory, is charged with monitoring and disseminating an accurate picture of the reality of Islam, reporting its findings to the organization's members <sup>25</sup>.

### 7.2 The success and the failure

Summing up the successes and failures of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, we can conclude that: The OIC has so far held important conferences on the Palestinian issue and has shown great commitment to grasping the demands and needs of the 21st century, but nevertheless no fruitful results

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.humanitarianstudies.no/resource/the-organization-of-islamic-cooperation-and-the-islamic-development-bank/>

<sup>25</sup> T. Ali & H. Sultan. *Emerging role of the organization of Islamic cooperation in the global governance since 1969. Cogent Arts & Humanities*, (2023) 10(1).

have been achieved, resulting only in symbolic efforts<sup>26</sup> and in a limited cooperation based on cultural and mainly religious values that cannot upgrade to turn into integration.

The function of the OIC in the Islamic world is comparable to that of the United Nations in the rest of the world. The United Nations is responsible for global governance in 193 nations, while the Organization of Islamic Cooperation is responsible for global governance in 57 Muslim countries scattered over four really different continents<sup>27</sup>, which is not effective enough for Muslim leaders who want to carry out some recessive activities, hampered by regional rivalries, particularly between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which exacerbate these divisions and obscure collective efforts.

Unlike NATO, it is not up to OIC member states to consider an attack on a member as an attack on the entire organization, nor to respond collectively. The OIC, in fact, lacks the deterrent power, collective military capacity, or modern technology needed to address today's challenges, which increasingly limits its influence.

To compensate for this structural weakness, each of the OIC's agencies is committed to advancing its mission, working extensively with UN agencies and other international organizations<sup>28</sup>. However, to enhance its global relevance, it is essential for the OIC to develop concrete and actionable strategies, moving beyond symbolic gestures to include diplomatic, economic, and possibly legal measures. The use of economic instruments and the establishment of strategic partnerships with influential global actors, such as the United Nations and the European Union, can amplify its impact. In this context, the "OIC - 2025" Action Program represents a renewed commitment by the OIC Member States, all institutions of the OIC system, international partners and other stakeholders to work together for a better future. The goals identified for the decade 2016-2025 include those that are already underway and those that will emerge from global political and economic developments.

Meanwhile, the current international efforts to shape the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are also influencing the priorities of the OIC, which, however, remain focused on issues of particular interest to its Member States, without going beyond its own sphere of interest.<sup>29</sup> It is only through a pragmatic and cooperative approach that the OIC can demonstrate its value and consolidate its role in the international landscape; in this way, the OIC could help mitigate the crisis between the West and the Islamic world and play a more decisive role in conflict resolution and regional stability. It would also enhance its relevance by promoting constructive dialogue between Islam and other faiths, but without aspiring to greater political involvement in establishing a proper regional integration<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> <https://brighterkashmir.com/oic-a-failed-institution>

<sup>27</sup> T. Ali & H. Sultan. *Emerging role of the organization of Islamic cooperation in the global governance since 1969. Cogent Arts & Humanities*, (2023) 10(1).

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=16&refID=5>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.eurasiareview.com/13062024-failure-of-organization-of-islamic-cooperation-in-resolving-israeli-palestinian-conflict-oped/>

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