

A GROUP OF THEOCRACIES: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON WHY INDIA SHOULD REBUFF OIC ON KASHMIR

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: OIC

The improvement in India's ties with the Gulf countries is often cited as a major success of the present government. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's focus on relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which he has visited more than once in his tenure, and his personal ties with their most powerful royals, has yielded accolades and promises of investment. In March 2019, it resulted in then External Affairs Minister [Sushma Swaraj addressing](#) the 57-member Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Abu Dhabi, a breakthrough for India. The government's outreach to the grouping was seen as a way of strengthening ties with the "Muslim world" including West Asian countries where more than six million Indians live and work. It was therefore disappointing for the government to note that in June, the [OIC appointed a "special envoy"](#) on Jammu and Kashmir, and subsequently issued several [strongly worded statements on the government's decision to amend Article 370](#) of the Constitution, the Supreme Court verdict on the Ayodhya dispute and the [Citizenship \(Amendment\) Act, 2019, or the CAA](#). And last week, according to Pakistani officials, the OIC decided to [convene a special meeting in Islamabad](#) in 2020 to discuss the Kashmir issue and the repercussions of the CAA, after discussions the Saudi Foreign Minister had in Islamabad. It should be clear to the government that the engagement with the grouping this year was a miscalculation. In any case, the basis of the OIC is a unity between theocratic Muslim states, an idea that India, as a secular country with a large Muslim population has never been aligned with. At all costs, attempts by the OIC to make statements and arrogate to itself the well-being of India's Muslims must be rebuffed as gross interference.

However, New Delhi must note that the OIC's recent statements also stem from a broader tussle within the grouping that has become a concern for traditional leaders, the KSA and the UAE. The challenge comes chiefly from Malaysia, where Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has revived his plans for a "reformed" OIC, and has enlisted other challengers to the Riyadh-Abu Dhabi domination of the pan-Islamic movement including Iran, Turkey and Qatar. In that sense, the OIC's criticism of India is a clear attempt at reaffirming its leadership of the movement. New Delhi must strengthen ties with its strategic partners in the region on both sides of the divide without taking sides or becoming collateral damage in the internecine warfare between them. But it must also be wary of groupings with nothing in common other than a religious world view.

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