

A NEW CONVERSATION

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: OIC

© 2019 The Indian Express Ltd.
All Rights Reserved

Back in 1969, India had to endure the diplomatic humiliation of being “disinvited” from the founding session of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, thanks to intense Pakistani lobbying. Fifty years later, India had the privilege of addressing the opening session of the OIC foreign ministers’ gathering in the UAE; and it was Pakistan’s turn to sulk. The foreign minister of Pakistan, Shah Mohammed Qureshi, who objected to the UAE invitation to India, chose to stay out of the room when the external affairs minister, Sushma Swaraj, was speaking. The inability of Pakistan to prevent India from joining the meeting underlines the big change in India’s standing in the Muslim world. It also points to the relative decline of Pakistan’s influence in the Middle East. While religion remains the organising principle of the OIC, all member states pursue their own national interests with little regard to faith. The growing importance of economic partnership with India and the shared interests in combating the destabilising forces of religious extremism have generated new warmth for Delhi. Pakistan is no longer in a position to veto India’s possibilities in the Islamic world.

Swaraj chose not to directly criticise Pakistan by name, but underlined the need to press Islamabad to dismantle the infrastructure of terrorism on its soil. She acknowledged that the challenge of terrorism can’t be fought through military means alone and “must be won through the strengths of our values, and the real message of religions” in favour of peace and harmony. She reminded the OIC of India’s traditional good relations with most member states. She specially referred to the dramatic transformation in India’s relations with the Gulf region during the last few years. “It is an indispensable strategic and security partnership, and a natural economic partnership, of immense value, to our nations, and for our shared region.” She specially thanked the United Arab Emirates, the host of the ministerial, for inviting India to address the gathering and Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh for lending support.

India’s first ever participation in an OIC gathering does not mean the Islamic countries have decided to discard Pakistan in favour of India. As in other international forums, it’s not a zero-sum-game between India and Pakistan. A furious Pakistan appears to have got the OIC to endorse its criticism of India’s Kashmir policies. Delhi should not be detained by these routine resolutions that different member states bring to the OIC. What really matters is the political decision by the UAE and Saudi Arabia to press Pakistan to release the Indian Air Force pilot, Abhinandan Varthaman, who was downed in the aerial combat with the Pakistani Air Force last week. Even more important is the fact that the diplomatic opening in Abu Dhabi has cleared the ground for a more intensive and sustained political engagement with the global Islamic collective. The next step for India is to begin a quiet campaign for observer status at the OIC.

Download the Indian Express apps for iPhone, iPad or Android

© 2019 The Indian Express Ltd. All Rights Reserved

END

Downloaded from crackIAS.com

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com