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It is time to give the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation a decent burial.

Monday 16 July 2018, by [HOODBHOY Pervez](#) (Date first published: 22 July 2017).

The ummah is at war with itself. What other way is there to describe the brutal bloodletting by Muslims of Muslims in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Afghanistan, Turkey, and, of course, Pakistan.

To be fair, the ummah has not mattered for a long time to the governments or peoples of Muslim lands. State-to-state relations among Muslim countries have been astonishingly [independent of religious identity](#). They have depended instead upon perceived self-interest, domestic politics and the whims of rulers. Just look at the evidence.

Pakistan was created on a religious premise. But, in the days of the Suez Crisis of 1956, Pakistan's position was ambiguous. It refused to side with Gamal Abdel Nasser after he nationalised the Suez Canal and threw out the British. On the other hand, India was active in the Non-Aligned Movement, fully pro-Arab, and loud in support of liberating Palestine. To show gratitude, King Saud bin Abdul Aziz paid a state visit to India and declared that Indian Muslims were being treated well. There was outrage across Pakistan. Newspapers exploded in anger when Jawaharlal Nehru, on his return visit to Riyadh, was greeted by the king and with street banners in Riyadh bearing the slogan *rasul-ul-salam* (messenger of peace).

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Dawn's editorial of Dec 1, 1956, bitterly criticised the Arabs and "Nasser's hatred of Pakistan, and love of Bharat and its Nehru". It went on to suggest that such sensate bias and blind prejudice "may well be examined by psychiatrists". In other words, the Arab world's greatest hero of the moment was denounced as crazy.

Today, Pakistan has disputes with both its Muslim neighbours, Afghanistan and Iran. Iran occasionally lobs artillery shells over to Pakistan, as does Afghanistan. Pakistan has reciprocated with its artillery, while PAF jets brought down an Iranian drone last month. Ironically, Pakistan has excellent relations with one of its neighbours — China, a communist state that has banned the beard and burqa in its only Muslim-dominated province. India has good relations with both Iran and Afghanistan. And, India's trade with China far exceeds Pakistan's trade with China.

It is not just Pakistan. The Muslim monarchies of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, both Wahabi, are practically at war with each other now. Teeny tiny Qatar, say the Saudis, is acting too big for its boots and cannot conduct its own foreign policy. Qatar has dismissed the Saudi-UAE demand to close down Al Jazeera, the Arab world's only independent news source. In response, all Qataris and their families, as well as 15,000 dancing Qatari camels, have been expelled from Saudi Arabia.

Last year, Saudi Arabia's highest civilian award was conferred upon Hindu fundamentalist Narendra

Modi by King Salman. The Saudi king left Kashmir and pellet guns unmentioned.

Saudi Arabia's war on Yemen shows the emptiness of the ummah notion. Directed against one of the world's poorest Muslim countries, it has so far has killed 7,600 and wounded 42,000 Muslims. Most casualties have resulted from air strikes of the Saudi-led multinational coalition. Pakistan has shown little concern. I have yet to see a single TV news report or evening talk show discussing the Yemen war.

Ending Israeli occupation of Palestine was once the ummah's grandest cause that cut through the Shia-Sunni divide. But now, Saudi Arabia is fast nearing rapprochement with Israel. Both countries see Iran as the greater enemy. After the failed Arab Spring, Sisi's Egypt and the Gulf's monarchies fear Iran as an insurrectionary power and prefer to work with Israel. Palestine is unmentioned.

Where does this leave the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), whose job is to bring together and represent the ummah? Based in Saudi Arabia, it has 57 member states and calls itself "the collective voice of the Muslim world." The OIC has had nothing to say about wars that have consumed Syria, Iraq, Libya, or Yemen. Nor is it relevant to any other conflict between Muslim states or that within them. It has yet to give a single cent to desperate refugees who, instead, must rely on the West.

Pakistan bought into the OIC fantasy early on. But the euphoria of the 1974 Lahore meeting organised by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto has gone with the wind. What is left is the magnificent flag-adorned building on Constitution Avenue in Islamabad that serves as the headquarters of Comstech, the highest scientific body of the OIC, for which Pakistan pays the lion's share of its operating expenses.

Examine: [Science & the ummah](#)

Comstech is charged with promoting science within the ummah. This is a futile and misplaced effort because science does not have a religion. Add to this the abysmal quality of science in Muslim countries (with Turkey and Iran only partly excluded). Prime minister Suhrawardy once famously remarked, "zero plus zero plus zero is after all still zero". While he said this of the Arab bloc during the Suez crisis, it's still truer about scientific cooperation.

It is time to give the OIC a decent burial and end the fantasy that Comstech can serve as the centre of Muslim science. Among the benefits, Comstech's staff could be put to good use promoting science in Pakistan with the building turned into a public science library or science exploratorium where Pakistani children could be introduced to the wonders of science.

If Muslim states have paid no attention to the ummah, non-state actors have paid even less. They have slaughtered tens of thousands of co-religionists. The Afghan Taliban and the Pakistani Taliban are like two wings of the same bird. One kills Afghan Muslims, the other kills Pakistani Muslims. One finds shelter in Pakistan, the other in Afghanistan. The militant Islamic State group seems to be everywhere and kills with even less concern. There is no sign any of them will fade away soon.

There is a way for Muslim states and peoples to move forward. This will require creating strong democratic institutions based on equal rights for all citizens, encouraging the participation of women in public life, and respecting equally all Muslim sects as well as other religions, providing space and freedom to individuals and education for all based on science and reason.

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P.S.

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