

THE 55-YEAR FAILURE OF THE ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIC COOPERATION

(İslam İşbirliği Teşkilatı'nın 55 Yıllık Başarısızlığı)

Ali SARIHAN¹

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ABSTRACT

The security dilemma between Israel and the Muslim nations in the Middle East significantly influenced the outbreak of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, the 1956 Suez Canal Crisis, and the 1967 Six-Day War. Israel's decisive military victory over Muslim states in all of these wars led the Muslim nations to create a union, which is the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), to strengthen their union and, accordingly, their position against Israel. Despite its mission, after 55 years of existence, security dilemmas, trust and commitment problems, and ongoing conflicts still exist between Israel and Muslim states. The recent October 2023 attacks by Israel against Palestine demonstrate that the security dilemma and the intensity of tensions with Israel have not decreased since the OIC. This paper demonstrates that insofar as the parties do not change their strategies from competition to cooperation, they will continue to have serious security doubts about one another. Addressing this security dilemma via cooperation would benefit both sides of the conflict and will lead to a decrease in the resources spent on weapons, and an increase in the funds available to make new economic and social investments within their states.

Keywords: *Security Dilemma, OIC, Middle East, Muslim States, and Israel*

ÖZ

Ortadoğu'da yer alan Müslüman devletler ile İsrail arasında var olan güvenlik ikilemi, 1948 Arap-İsrail Savaşı, 1956 Süveyş Kanalı Krizi ve 1967 Altı Gün Savaşları'nın çıkmasında önemli bir rol oynamıştır. İsrail'in tüm bu savaşlarda Müslüman devletlere karşı elde ettiği askeri zaferler, taraflar arasındaki güvenlik ikilemini derinleştirirken, Müslüman ulusları birliklerini ve İsrail'e karşı konumlarını güçlendirmek için İslam İşbirliği Teşkilatı'nı (İİT) kurmaya sevk etmiştir. 55 yıldır sahip olduğu bu misyona rağmen, İsrail ile Müslüman devletler arasında güvenlik ikilemleri, güven ve taahhüt sorunları ile devam eden çatışmalar hâlâ mevcuttur. İsrail'in Filistin'e yönelik Ekim 2023'teki son saldırıları, güvenlik ikileminin ve İsrail ile olan gerginliğin yoğunluğunun İİT'nin kuruluşundan bu yana azalmadığını açık bir şekilde göstermektedir. Bu makale, tarafların stratejilerini rekabetten iş birliğine değiştirmedikleri sürece birbirleri hakkında ciddi güvenlik şüpheleri yaşamaya devam edeceklerini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu güvenlik ikileminin iş birliği yoluyla ele alınması, çatışmanın her iki tarafına da fayda sağlayacak ve silahlara harcanan kaynaklarda bir azalmaya, devletler içinde yeni ekonomik ve sosyal yatırımlar yapmak için kullanılabilecek fonlarda bir artışa yol açacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Güvenlik İkilemi, İİT, Orta Doğu, Müslüman Devletler, İsrail*

¹Dr, St. Mary's College of Maryland, Department of Political Science, asarihan@smcm.edu, Orcid: 0000-0002-4136-4404.

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Introduction

This study examines the position of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) from an international security perspective. It is argued that Muslim states established the organization after several hugely destructive clashes and fights between Israel and Muslim states. Muslim states developed the OIC to prevent these kinds of harmful clashes and promote security for Muslim nations by encouraging cooperation and collaboration among member states. The founders of the organization believed that not only would Islamic solidarity strengthen Muslim members' position against Israel, but also would build balance and prevent future aggression from Israel and any other country against the members of the OIC. Ideally, this balance of power would create a secure solidarity for the members.

While this approach proved sound in theory, this paper demonstrates that the OIC did not lead to a more secure relationship between its members and Israel. In fact, the situation has deteriorated, and new conflicts have developed between Israel and the member countries. Accordingly, the study hypothesizes that the establishment of the OIC failed to end and/or lessen the conflicts.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. This article begins with a brief definition of the theories about the security dilemma and a discussion of the arguments related to cooperation. The second part provides a historical and structural overview of the OIC. The queries about the vision and mission of OIC are discussed in the third section of the paper, with a comparison of conflicts before and after the OIC. Finally, this study concludes by examining the implications and conclusions.

1. Literature Review

The security dilemma has been one of international relations literature's most discussed theoretical approaches. The concept, theorized by John Herz, Herbert Butterfield, and Robert Jervis, touches on many critical questions in international relations in general and security studies. Reminiscent of the 'Thucydides Trap'¹, Herz deals with the security dilemma through anarchy, fear, power competition, and a vicious circle approach (Allison, 2017). According to Herz, individuals/groups and states that never feel safe in the world of rival units of anarchic nature that prepare themselves for the worst, so they constantly try to gain power (Herz, 1950: 157-158). This process creates a vicious circle in the competition for force. Anxiety emerges as the main component of such an environment. For Herz, the source of the anxiety is

¹ The concept was used by Graham Allison (2017) to describe the struggle between Sparta and Athens, the two actors of the Peloponnesian War. According to Allison, the main reason for this struggle was the fear of states against each other. Thucydides defines this fear in his book: "It was the rise of Athens that made the war inevitable and the fear it created in Sparta..." Inspired by these statements of Thucydides, Allison defines this mutual fear in the states as the Thucydides Trap.

uncertainty, not human nature. Accordingly, uncertainty about each other's intentions creates a security dilemma about whether humans are naturally peaceful, eventually driving them into a conflict (Herz, 1950: 159-163).

Butterfield also made another significant contribution to the security dilemma literature. He emphasized "Hobbesian fear"; he associates the security dilemma with discussing "humanity's fundamental sin". This theory explains the universal sin of humanity as the source of the security dilemma and stresses the uncertainty of mutual intentions between states. It indicates that this uncertainty unintentionally creates a security dilemma, even if the nations do not intend to (Butterfield, 1951: 18-24; Tang, 2009: 589-592).

Defining the security dilemma as the undesirable result of defensive actions, Jervis emphasizes the zero-sum nature of anarchic society, and focuses on the process of "the tools that one state concentrates on to increase its security turn into an element that reduces the security of another state" (Jervis, 1982: 357-378; 2001: 36-56). Based on these assumptions, the study focuses on an important question: What is the impact of international organizations on security dilemmas? Mearsheimer's work on this question is noteworthy. Mearsheimer examined the theory of international institutions to determine whether institutions can preclude war as the theory claims. This institutional perspective contends, "Institutions can discourage states from calculations self-interest on the basis of how every move affects their relative power positions. Institutions are independent variables, and they have the capability to move states away from war" (Mearsheimer, 1994: 7). Since, according to institutionalists, "international politics rests on the belief that institutions are a key means of promoting world peace" (Mearsheimer, 1994: 5). Even though such institutions do not create a worldwide state, they build decentralized collaboration among the states to force them to obey the rules without having superior authority over them.

Mearsheimer analyzed institutional theories under three sub-categories: liberal institutionalism, collective security, and critical theory. Liberal institutionalists, rather than directly discussing how to prevent a war, emphasize the high likelihood of international cooperation by seeking economic and environmental collaboration (Mearsheimer, 1995: 14). Moreover, they posit that the main obstacle to global collaboration is cheating. Thus, international institutions' solving cheating problems between states will facilitate collaboration (Mearsheimer, 1994: 14). That is why they stress the importance of international institutions in promoting peace.

'Collective security' directly discusses preventing a war and presents its models. Accordingly, "institutions are the key to managing power successfully" (Mearsheimer, 1994:

27). Due to that, institutions will create joint action and reaction to the aggressors. Moreover, such unification will merge the strong and weak states' power to fight against the aggressors. While weak states would have a secure shield under the umbrella of institutions, the strong states will act in a more balanced environment.

'Critical theory', unlike 'liberal institutionalism', but like 'collective security', focuses on ways to prevent war. According to this theory, "ideas and discourse—how we think and talk about international politics—are the driving forces behind state behavior" (Mearsheimer, 1994: 15). In other words, "ideas shape the material world in important ways" (Mearsheimer, 1994: 15). As a result, international institutions can assist states in shaping international politics and transforming a greed-based material world through their ideas. Nations should pursue peace through these ideas, and institutions must play a key role in facilitating this peaceful transformation (Mearsheimer, 1994).

Mearsheimer claimed that even though many policymakers and academics believe that institutions can promote international peace, "these theories do not accurately describe the word" (Mearsheimer, 1994: 49). He noted that an intergovernmental institution like the League of Nations (LON) could not prevent World War II (Mearsheimer, 1994). Moreover, the United Nations (UN) was not able to stop the Bosnian-Serbian war and the Srebrenica Massacre. However, the European Union (EU) helped end the inter-European state competition and wars, like the 30-year war, and strengthened the integration of European countries' interests. Therefore, instead of saying that all institutions help peace or prevent a war, the institutions should be analyzed based on their idiosyncratic conditions and the environment in which they exist.

2. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation

The OIC, formerly the Organization of Islamic Conference, is an intergovernmental organization. The OIC is the second largest organization after the UN, with its membership of 57 states, 49 of which have Muslim majorities, spread over four continents (Bishku, 2012).² However, it is essential to note that OIC is not a military union and has no specific military mission. Yet, the OIC has the mission of strengthening the economic, diplomatic, and social collaboration of 57 members. Moreover, providing security and peace is another significant vision of the OIC. Therefore, the OIC has an indirect military mission aims to protect its members' security, territorial integrity, and sovereignty. In other words, the OIC is not a union like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). However, it is more of a Muslim version

² The OIC suspended Syria's membership in 2012 (Bishku, 2012).

of the UN. According to the OIC, the organization is “the collective voice of the Muslim world” (OICa, 2022).

In terms of its structure, the OIC comprises the following central bodies. First, the ‘Islamic Summit’ comprises the heads of the member states (such as the Kings, Presidents, etc.). The second body is the ‘Council of Foreign Ministers’, which is composed of the member states’ foreign ministers. Lastly, the ‘General Secretariat’ is the executive organ of the organization (OICb, 2022).

Muslim states established the OIC in September 1969, shortly after the Six-Day War between Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Israel. The peak event was the burning of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem by Israeli forces in 1969. After this act, the former Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husseini called all Muslim states to establish an organization to create Islamic solidarity. This effort resulted in the Organization of Islamic Conference in Rabat, Morocco, in September 1969. According to the OIC charter, mainly, the Organization aims to carry out the following goals: “Preserving Islamic social and economic values; promote solidarity amongst member states; increase cooperation in social, economic, cultural, scientific, and political areas; uphold international peace and security; and advance education, particularly in the fields of science and technology” (OICb, 2022). Thus, the OIC did not state Israel’s name particularly, but Israel’s combatants, Palestine, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq, were members of the OIC. That meant that the OIC aimed to protect the sovereignty and independence of the countries, particularly Palestine. That was not the only mission of the OIC, but it also constituted the security part of the organization.

Israel’s attack on the Arab states during the Six-Day War and its victory during the conflict worried Muslim states. Before the Six-Day War, the nations experienced two more Arab-Israeli Wars, which also concluded in an Israeli victory. The Six-Day War marked the third Israeli victory against Muslim states.

The tension between Israel and neighboring Muslim states began with Israel’s establishment in 1949. Muslim states were reluctant to coexist with a Jewish neighbor and feared Israel. From the Arab states’ perspective, Israel was the result of Western imperialism in the Middle East, and Arab states were striving to gain independence from Western domination (such as French and Italian hegemony in Libya or British dominancy in Saudi Arabia after World War II) (Smith, 2010: 222). The establishment of Israel in the Middle East created a pro-Western power situated in a crucial location within the Muslim world. At that time, a pan-Islamist view began to fill the gap in the region where the Ottoman Empire had existed before

(Ozkan, 2014). This movement promoted Muslim states as the dominant power of the Middle East region, but Israel appeared as the biggest obstacle to the pan-Islamic goal.

In addition to the general Muslim opposition, Israel also had to face targeted conflict with Palestinians in the region. All Muslim states defended Palestine in the struggle against Israel, because Palestinians were Muslims, and the Muslim situation was becoming hugely ambiguous after Israel's occupation of that region. In response, Israel took a similarly rigid stand about their right to the land. Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion spearheaded the argument, later termed 'Ben-Gurionism', which contended that Israel had to show its force against opposing ideas until they accept Israel's existence in the region (Smith, 2010: 229-230). Today, these two extreme arguments, 'Ben-Gurionism' and 'Pan-Islamism', continue to cause tension among warring factions in the Middle East.

Security dilemmas contributed to these conflicts in the region between Muslim states and Israel. Muslim states perceived Israel's increased military power as a threat to their security. Israel, conversely, saw any expansion of the Muslim state's armament as a threat to its security. Lack of trust and inadequate information were the main factors causing conflict between states. As a result of the intensified security dilemma, the OIC emerged in 1969 to strengthen Muslim states' position against Israel and to transform the security dilemma into a balance of power through strong Islamic solidarity.

3. The Security Dilemma Before OIC

In this section, the paper first discusses the specific events that resulted from the security dilemma between the Muslim states and Israel. The independence of Israel and the subsequent wars in 1948, 1956, and 1967 illustrate the outcomes of the security dilemma. In other words, the wars occurred because of the intensive security dilemma between Israel and the Muslim states. However, the paper argues that the wars intensified security dilemmas more than ever. That is why each war resulted in another one.

Second, the paper demonstrates that the OIC failed to end the security tensions between its members and Israel. To prove that argument, this paper explores the conflicts that occurred after the formation of the OIC. This study does not hold the OIC solely accountable for the ongoing conflicts; however, it argues that the OIC has not alleviated the security issues.

3.1. The Establishment of Israel and the 1948 War

In May of 1948, when the British decided to lift its mandate regime from the Palestine area, Israel declared the establishment of the independent state in Tel-Aviv; and thereafter the armies of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq marched into Israel along with the Sudanese, Yemenites, Moroccans, Saudis, Lebanese, and other Muslim groups (Margolick, 2008). From these

Muslim states' point of view, Islam was fighting the diffusion of Judaic ideas in the region (Morris, 2008: 183). As Ahmed Shukeiry stated, "The attack aimed at the elimination of the Jewish state from the Middle East" (Morris, 2008: 187).

From the Israeli perspective, the war was one of the steps on the way to independence, while Arabs considered the newly established state an *al-Nakba* (the catastrophe) (Falah, 1996). The Muslim states sought to preclude a strong Israeli occupation in Palestine and the Middle East as a whole. Failure to upset the Israeli presence in their region would weaken the authority of the Muslim states. Even though the Arabs had superior numbers, Israel's more organized war strategies defeated the Arab's inexperienced and poorly organized forces. Because of the Israeli victory, Israeli occupation in Palestine increased from 56 to 78 percent, and 700,000 Palestinians had to leave their homelands for Arab states or refugee camps (Tal, 2004). Contrary to the expectations of Muslim states, the 1948 War ultimately bolstered the Israeli state while diminishing the authority of the Muslim states in the Middle East.

3.2. Nasser and the 1956 War

When Gamal Abdel Nasser became president of Egypt in 1956, he wanted to carry out economic, social, and military improvements to build Egypt as a superpower in the Middle East. As the first step of his agenda, he decided to nationalize the Suez Canal to increase Egypt's economic position. This decision was unacceptable for Britain and France since they used this canal for gas transportation from the Gulf states to Europe. Britain, France, and Israel agreed in Paris to oppose Nasser's efforts, called the 'Amilcar' (Shlaim, 1997). This accord established that Israel would attack Egypt, and British and French forces would invade the Suez Canal to make peace between Israel and Egypt. They implemented their plan but overlooked the American factor.

The United States (US) was in a Cold War against the Soviet Union, and the Middle East was a critical region for both sides of the Cold War. The triple occupation in Egypt led to antipathy against Western states and increased Muslim states' sympathy toward the Soviet Union. Because of that, the US strongly opposed the British and French occupation of Egypt, and the two nations left Egypt without gaining any benefit from the occupation. Conversely, Nassir strengthened his position in the Arab world with their withdrawal (Podeh, 1993).

3.3. Six-Day War in 1967

After a high-tension period between Israel and its neighbors, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, the Six-Day War started on June 5, 1967, when Israeli forces launched surprise air strikes against Arab forces. As with prior conflicts between the nations, the dispute stemmed from the presence of Israel in the Middle East. The high tension led to an increase in armament by both sides. Nasser

began amassing his troops in the Sinai Peninsula on Israel's border, which increased security concerns in Israel. In response, Israel provided pilot and ground crew training in rapid preparation for a possible attack. In this war, like previous wars, Arab states sought the destruction of Israel. As President Nasser stated, "The conflict will be a general conflict. Our basic aim will be to destroy Israel" (Dawn, 1968: 222). The expansion in the level of security led Israel to attack neighboring Arab states on June 5 in a preemptive strike.

Historically, Israel and Muslim states in the Middle East have had several security dilemmas, and as a result, they have warred on several occasions. Any military action on the part of either nation directly impacts the security level of the other in a negative manner (Sprecher and DeRouen, 2002). However, increasing the dilemma does not help reduce the conflict or increase peace.

4. A Muslim Prospect to Lower The Security Dilemma

The security dilemma and its result in three big wars helped the establishment of the OIC, which sought to strengthen solidarity among its member nations and establish a strong, firm, and disciplined Islamic movement against Israel. The OIC sought to consolidate power under the umbrella of one organization because, until that date, Israel had tremendous military superiority over Muslim states in the region.

In 1999, the OIC decided to combat terrorism. They expressed the desire "to promote cooperation among them for combating terrorists' crimes that threaten the security and stability of the Islamic States and endanger their vital interests" (OICa, 2022). In 2002, at the Ninth Extraordinary Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, the OIC strongly condemned the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the US and stated that the US should act against Israeli state terrorism to prevent the killing of Palestinian people and stabilize the region (Takeyh, 2002). The OIC used the opportunity to express its lingering feelings that Israel is a threat to the region's security and stability.

The OIC established a permanent observer mission of the OIC to the UN in New York on October 10, 1975, with resolution 3369 (Castillo, 2014). The mission of the OIC is to strengthen and enhance relations with the members of the UN, particularly with the US. In addition, Former American President George W. Bush announced the establishment of the Office of the U.S. Special Envoy to the OIC on June 27, 2007. When President Obama began his term, the OIC secretary general sent a letter to welcome him to the office and encourage the continuance of the partnership established with former President Bush (Cutler, 2017).

The above developments indicate a desire on the part of the OIC to have strong and deep relations with the US to create a balance against Israel in the Middle East. The OIC recognizes

that the US's support strengthens Israel in the region. Accordingly, if the OIC had similar relations with the US, Israel's influence could be weakened, shifting the balance of power in favor of Muslim states.

Ultimately, the OIC came into being in response to the constant security dilemma between Muslim states and Israel, to increase the level of security in the Muslim nations through more cooperation and solidarity among the OIC members. More importantly, the OIC sought to amass enough power to serve as a deterrent against future attacks from Israel.

5. The Change of Nothing After OIC

Despite the OIC's attempts to enhance security, the modern Middle East faces several critical security issues between Israel and neighboring Muslim states. For example, in a 2003 speech in Malaysia at the OIC's meeting, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad argued that the Jews control the world:

1.3 billion Muslims cannot be defeated by a few million Jews. There must be a way. And we can only find a way if we stop to think, to assess our weaknesses and our strength, to plan, to strategize, and then to counterattack. We are actually very strong. 1.3 billion people cannot be simply wiped out. The Europeans killed 6 million Jews out of 12 million. But today the Jews rule this world by proxy. They get others to fight and die for them (Tharoor, 2016).

Notwithstanding the founding goals of the OIC, the Middle Eastern region has seen a slight improvement in the security dilemma since the organization's inception. The conflict between Palestine and Israel continues, the likelihood of Iran emerging as a nuclear-armed threat to Israel increases, and Israel's repression on the US to attack Iran still stands as a threat to the entire region's stability. Hezbollah attacks in Israel also continue, and recently, Lebanon fought with Israel over border disputes in 2006. Egypt also withdrew its ambassador from Israel because Israel killed five Egyptian police officers in August of 2011 (Batty, 2011).

To summarize, the most important examples of conflicts between Israel and the Muslim countries can be classified as follows. 1973's Yom Kippur War, 1978's Operation Litani, First and Second Lebanon Wars (1982-1985; 2006), First and Second Intifadas (1987-1993; 2000-2005), 2014 and 2023 Gaza Wars, and the Flotilla Incident.³ The unrest in the Middle East continues in full force. The proofs demonstrate how the OIC has not created a more secure environment, as evidenced by the conflicts following the OIC's foundation (see Table 1).

³ Please see more: Shafir, Gershon (2017), *A Half Century of Occupation: Israel, Palestine, and the World's Most Intractable Conflict* (California: University of California Press).

Table 1. The Incidents Between Israel and Muslim States Before and After the OIC

Before OIC	After OIC
1948 War	1973 Yom Kippur War
1956 War	1978 Operation Litani
1967 Six-Day War	First and Second Lebanon Wars
	First and Second Intifadas
	2014 Gaza War
	Flotilla Incident
	2023 Gaza War

To elaborate further, Türkiye, one of Israel's allies, downgraded its relations with Israel and expelled the Israeli embassy due to a flotilla crisis in 2010. During this incident, the Turkish Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (İHH) was carrying humanitarian aid and construction materials to the Israeli blockade in the Gaza Strip via ships. Still, they were attacked by Israeli helicopters and speedboats in the summer of 2010. Israel defended the attack, claiming it was necessary to protect its territory from potential threats.

Nine Turkish volunteers died in the Israeli attack, and Türkiye demanded an apology and compensation from the Israeli government. When Israel rejected Türkiye's request for an apology or compensation, Turkish leaders cut diplomatic, economic, and military ties with Israel (Greenberg, 2011). This tension also aggravated relations between the OIC and Israel because then the general secretary of the OIC, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, was from Türkiye and had very close relationships with the Turkish government. These crises and developments show that the region continues to experience intense conflict among warring factions.

In conclusion, the OIC has not yet achieved its mission of increasing security in the Middle East. In theory, the OIC would increase economic, political, and military solidarity among Muslim states to strengthen their position against Israel. The escalation in power would create a balance and serve as a deterrent power against Israel. This vision has not yet become a reality, as Israel and Muslim states still have many serious problems. This situation raises questions about why the OIC, the world's second-largest organization, has been unable to assist its Muslim member states with their security issues concerning Israel.

The following section examines why both sides prioritize deterrent powers over cooperation to address their security dilemma. It begins by analyzing the economic and security

interests of the OIC members, followed by an exploration of the international frustrations regarding the cooperation between Israel and Muslim states.

6. Economic and Security Interests of OIC Members

The key members of the OIC, particularly Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Türkiye, do not intend to endanger their economic interests and earnings by worsening their relations with Israel. While the US and the United Kingdom (UK) guard Israel as a strategic and geographic ally, these two big economic powers also have significant controlling effects over the above-stated members' economies. In other words, the member states' economies heavily rely on Western capitalism. All these mean that the OIC's significant members prefer the protection of their economic interests to their ideologies, and turn a blind eye to what is happening with Israel.

The energy exports of Gulf states, Egypt's annual \$1.3 billion economic aid from the US, and Türkiye's regional dilemmas compel these countries to engage in economic cooperation with the UK and the US, whether willingly or reluctantly (Lutterbeck, 2013: 37). Increasing the voice of the OIC or embracing an adequate power to the OIC could lead to severe economic problems and even financial crisis within these countries. Accordingly, Muslim-majority countries' regional problems, including the Palestinian issue, are the victims of economic gains. In other words, for the sake of economic benefits, the OIC members do not take a strong position against the UK and the US's loyal ally, Israel. The opposite strategy could mean losing American and British economic aid and protection. That seems more catastrophic and unbearable than the failure of the OIC.

In terms of security tutelage, the UK and, particularly the US, protect Sunni Gulf states from Iran's Persian and Shia expansion. Put differently, rich but militarily small states need an American defense shield against Persian ideological expansion. Iran wants to control the Middle East and Gulf states by using its ethnic and religious identities. Bahrain hosts the US Fifth Fleet (Stevenson, 2020). Thus, such ideological schism between the OIC's Gulf members and Iran prevents the development of a unique strategy for the OIC. In 1981, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was established by the Gulf states to provide and strengthen the unity of the Gulf region (Helfont and Helfont, 2012).

7. The Things That Foster The Security Dilemma

As discussed before, this study does not contend that Israel and Muslim states clash because of the failure of the OIC. Lots of national and international variables have an impact on the clashes. However, this paper demonstrates that the security dilemma has long been playing a critical role in the prolonged conflicts between Israel and the Muslim states. Israel defends its

aggression against the neighboring Muslim countries as protection of its territorial integrity and national sovereignty. However, Muslim states also do the same explanation against Israel. Thus, this section examines the following variables as contributions to the unending dispute between the OIC members and Israel.

7.1. The Interdependence of Religious Identities: Islam versus Judaism

The intention of protecting the religious identities of Islam and Judaism creates a security dilemma in their groups. Since, according to them, “the only way for ‘us’ to be ourselves is to make it harder for ‘them’ to be themselves, and the offense/defense distinction is fully blurred” (Mitchell, 2019: 13). In other words, the religious groups strengthen their positions insofar as the opposing group exists. So, they keep showing the rivals threatening their religious existence to get a strong presence. As Mitchell explained, “solidarity with the collective and rejection of the out-group come to be regarded as the surest ways to preserve safety, while at the same time, identity is deliberately securitized by leaders who offer themselves as the best defenders of the group” (2019: 13).

Jerusalem is a holy place for both Islam and Judaism. For Muslims, the Prophet Mohammed prayed with all prophets in Jerusalem, at Al-Aqsa Mosque, and more importantly, he ascended from this mosque. Thus, for Muslims, Jerusalem is part of the Muslim world. For Jewish people, Jerusalem is the holiest city because King David of Israel first established it as the capital of Israel in c. 1000 BCE. That means Jerusalem is the eternal capital of the Jews.

This historical context provides clarity about the religious motivation that drives both the Muslims and the Jews to control this area. Religious values also prevent the states from cooperating strongly without solving the issue of who will control the holy space. Currently, Jerusalem serves as the capital city of Israel. Muslim states do not accept this occupation, and they strongly want Israel to leave this territory to Palestine.

This aforementioned religious disjuncture has built nationalistic political ideologies on both sides. *Zionism* is simply the self-determination of Jewish people in an independent national homeland (Gurock, 1998: 289). “The creation of a Jewish state in Palestine is the only viable and permanent solution to the problem of Jews” (Schulze, 2008: 4). In short, Zionism forces Jews to procure an independent state in Palestine.

In contrast, Islam orders Muslims to spread their religion across the World, a practice termed ‘jihad’, and Muslim states in the Middle East struggle against Jewish diffusion in the region. In the eyes of those Muslim nations, ousting the Jewish state from the region and declaring Palestinian independence is necessary for the protection of Islamic values. It is essential to the diffusion of Islam as the Islamic holy book, the Quran, orders.

The conflict between Zionism and pan-Islamism frustrates cooperation in the Middle Eastern region. For example, Iran had good relations with Israel during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi between the years 1941 and 1979. However, the Iranian people did not like the Shah's Western-based style of governance or his friendly relations with Israel. Exiled leader Ruhollah Khomeini ended the Shah's Reign in Iran with the advent of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The Iranian people strongly supported the Islamic revolution, and relations with Israel have subsequently deteriorated. In addition, one of the most prominent defenders of nuclear arms in Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, won the 2005 and 2009 presidential elections with majority support against more reasonable and pragmatic conservative leaders Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mir-Hossein Mousavi, respectively.⁴

The third Egyptian president, Muhammad Anwar al-Sadat, provides another example, as he made an accord with the US at Camp David in 1978. In 1981, a short time later, he was assassinated by Omar Abdel-Rahman, who opposed collaboration with Israel and was a member of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad. The fifth Prime Minister of Israel, Yitzhak Rabin, signed the Oslo Accords with Palestine in 1993 to solve the problems peacefully. He was also assassinated in 1995 by Yigal Amir, who was a radical right-wing Orthodox Jew who opposed the signing of the Oslo Accords. In 2006, Palestine's militant wing, Hamas, won the Palestinian elections against the more moderate Fatah party. Furthermore, Turkish Prime Minister, then Recep Tayyip Erdogan, became the hero of the Arab world because he scolded Israeli President Shimon Peres at Davos in 2009, also known as 'one minute,' because of Israel's siege over Palestinians.

As the examples above demonstrate, hegemonic, radical, and fundamental nationalistic groups have stymied efforts at cooperation between Israel and Muslim states. They created an environment where "identities become locked in mutually reinforcing enmity" (Mitchell, 2019: 13). In our case, the identities are Muslim and Jewish. In sum, populist and extremist policies have overwhelmed both sides' realistic and more moderate policies.

7.2. The East versus the West Concept

In 1948, following the UN's decision to partition Palestine in 1947, Israel declared its independence with the support of the West, particularly Britain and the US. Due to British economic troubles in the Middle East after World War II, Britain could no longer maintain the

⁴ Mousavi supporters protested the 2009 presidential election's results, claiming vote theft, known as the Green Movement.

Palestinian area and decided to withdraw from the region at the least cost (Smith, 2010: 179; Morris, 2008: 38). Otherwise, the Jewish-Arab conflict would prove too costly for Britain. The US wanted to have a strong ally like Israel in the region to support the US in its struggle against the dangers of the diffusion of Soviet communism in the Middle East.

Muslim states strongly opposed the partitioning of Palestine because they perceived this act as a new Western imperialism in the Middle East (Giray, 2010). Many Muslim states obtained their independence through the mandate of Western states (e.g., Iraq received independence from the UK in 1932; Syria obtained independence from France in 1946; and Egypt gained independence from the UK in 1922). All these Western-based colonization experiences led the states to oppose the new Western-sponsored state of Israel in Palestine. By supporting Palestine in the Israeli-Arab conflict, Muslim states and Russia confront not only Israel but also the expansion of Western influence in the Middle East. This international polarization complicates the collaboration between Muslim states and Israel.

Western interests that support Israel dispute this characterization, asserting that they do not seek to control the Middle East but rather aim to protect the rights of Jewish people. Furthermore, Israel was a loyal and strong ally of the Western world during the Cold War against the Soviet threat. Today, the competition between Russia and the West, combined with the emerging threat of a nuclear Iran, has heightened the significance of the alliance between Israel and the Western world. This alliance with the Western world benefits Israel because of Western economic subsidies, especially from the US (Smith, 2010: 229). To keep Israel as a strong state, the US has provided nearly 3 billion dollars annually in grants to Israel since 1985, and Israel is becoming the largest annual recipient of American aid (Sharp, 2013). International foreign aid prevents trade cooperation between the Muslim and Israeli sides because their foreign support ensures that they meet their financial needs. In this sense, foreign aid undermines the likelihood of cooperation between Israel and Muslim states.

7.3. Nuclear Weapons and the Armament Race

Even though Israel does not officially accept its weapons, Israel has between 75 and 400 nuclear warheads, along with intercontinental ballistic missiles (Fetter, 1991). This underscores the necessity for balance and deterrent power among Muslim states in the region because these nuclear weapons make Israel a militarily dominant power over all non-nuclear states. To create balance in the region, Muslim states spend a lot of money on weapons. The logic of the armament is that building a balance of power against Israel will deter Israel from making future attacks and provide stability in the Middle East. This same scenario occurred during the Cold War era between the US and the Soviet Union.

Iran pursues a nuclear weapons program under the guise of protecting itself against a nuclear-armed Israel. Ostensibly, Israel's nuclear weapons compel Muslim states to have high levels of armament to create a balance of power against nuclear Israel. Unfortunately, this policy proved counterproductive because despite the high level of armament between both sides, severe security problems still exist between Israel and the Muslim states in the region. This dilemma indicates that more weapons actually undermine stability and safety. Such scenarios tend to escalate security dilemmas while precluding cooperation between Israel and Muslim states.

7.4. Lack of Common Threat and Uncertainty

When developing cooperation between opposing sides of a prolonged conflict, a common enemy can serve as the glue that binds the two factions together. For example, the EU has brought long-term enemies France and Germany under the umbrella of an organization that worked against communist Soviet expansion. Thus, the lack of a common threat towards both parties is the other factor contributing to the lack of cooperation between Israel and Muslim states. To elaborate, they do not feel that cooperation is necessary to struggle with an enemy to overcome it, such as a terrorist organization that attacks both sides.

Furthermore, no third party has the authority and capacity to enforce the opposite sides for a peace agreement. As Mitchell (2009) cites, "Without central authority, groups are unable to credibly commit that they will not exploit each other, and mutual fear drives them towards provocative preparations for war" (Lake and Rothchild, 1998; Fearon, 1998). The environmental uncertainty propels the opposing sides to behave self-centered and follow an offensive strategy. The rival sides believe that there is no authority to defend and protect their rights but themselves. That obviously creates a security dilemma since they have rival agendas. As Mitchell stated, "both real and imagined-for safety and their self-interested calculations that they must take their security into their own hands in the absence of a strong state" (2009: 12).

Western actors are not accepted as fair mediators by Muslim states; vice versa, Muslim actors by Israel. The US seems to be the most powerful actor that could convince the opposite sides of a peace deal. However, its energy cooperation with Gulf states and its unwavering support for Israel's existence make its negotiating role inappropriate and unconvincing.

7.5. Palestinian Issue: The Self-Perpetuation Dynamic

Though most of the Muslim and Jewish nations desire to reach a solution and take complete control of the Palestinian territory, some Muslim and Jewish factions defend deadlock, not a resolution. Since the factions perceive the Palestinian issue as a self-perpetuating dynamic. The end of the Palestinian issue would mean the end of their *raison d'être*. Thus, insofar as this

problem remains popular, such groups get more attention from national and international actors. They do not help the peace but create more problems.⁵

Muslim states perceive Israel as an invader in Palestine, and they contend that Israel should withdraw from Palestinian territory. In the eyes of the citizens of these Muslim states, Palestine is a nation aggrieved by Israeli territorial occupation. Muslim people give Palestinians military and economic support to fight against Israel, and, while all 57 OIC members recognize the statehood of Palestinians, 29 of them neither recognize nor maintain relations with Israel (Yahaya, 2020).

Türkiye proposed Palestinian statehood to UNESCO to enhance Palestine's international standing, which accepted the offer with 40 votes (Meskell, 2013). Israel claims that it received the territories from the Prophet Moses, which justifies their desire for a state in that area. This belief contributes to the ongoing deadlock that hampers cooperation between Muslim states and Israel. In October 2023, Israel's significant attacks on the Gaza region have further obstructed potential collaboration. It appears that these tensions will persist for the foreseeable future.

Conclusion

Key members of Muslim states in the Middle Eastern region established the OIC to address their security dilemmas with Israel. The 1948 Arab-Israel War, the 1956 Suez Canal Crisis, and the 1967 Six-Day War each resulted from the security dilemma between these opposing factions. Israel's decisive military victory over Muslim states in all of these wars led the Muslim nations to create a union to strengthen their position against Israel. The Muslim states planned to develop balanced and deterrent power against Israel through Islamic solidarity among the Muslim members of the OIC.

Despite its mission, after 55 years of existence, security dilemmas, trust and commitment problems, and ongoing conflicts still exist between Israel and Muslim states. This paper demonstrates that insofar as the parties do not change their strategies from competition to cooperation, they will continue to have serious security doubts about one another. Addressing this security dilemma via cooperation would benefit both sides of the conflict. It would decrease resources spent on weapons and increase funds available for new economic and social investments within their states. As contingent theory states, cooperation will bring mutual gain and benefit to both parties, while competition leads to relative gain (Glaser, 1994). Domestic

⁵ Israeli sources describe Hamas as a radical group that engages in terrorist activities. But the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) asserts that Israel is the real source of the problem (see more: Levitt, Matthew (2007), "Could Hamas Target the West?" Studies in Conflict & Terrorism (30) 11: 925-45).

and international frustrations must be resolved for peaceful cooperation to pave the way for collaboration.

Cooperative and constructive collaboration between states increases trust and respect for each other. This increase in trust can lead to improved information sharing and decreases in miscalculations of relative power. Besides, the deficiency of any member in the cooperation negatively affects the rest of the members, and the *domino effect appears here*. To avoid adverse effects, allied states tend to avoid war to protect their interests. For example, the current EU has strong trade cooperation among its 27 members, and the likelihood of a war breaking out among the members is less likely because such conflict would undermine all their national interests, regardless of who wins or loses the battle.

If Muslim neighbors, such as Lebanon, Iran, Türkiye, Syria, and Israel, could have strong cooperation, they could live in much more secure and stable conditions. Moreover, instead of spending significant resources to buy and develop new weapons, such as Iran's nuclear weapon project, they could make investments in promoting their nations' development and welfare standards. Most importantly, the states in the Middle East and their nations would have a more secure and developed region. However, as of 2025, Israel and several Muslim states, particularly Palestine, are engaged in a tense conflict, with Israel conducting significant attacks on the Gaza region. This is evidence of the OIC's failure and the ongoing security dilemma.

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