



PacificMUN 2017

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

Backgrounder Guide

Topic B: Overcoming the Sunni-Shia Split



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Dare to Speak | February 24–26 2017

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Dear Delegates,

My name is Ali Mohaidly and it's my utmost pleasure to serve as director of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation along with my chair Carol Wang. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, formally known as the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, will be known as the OIC for the purpose of the backgrounder. The OIC is new to PacificMUN and we're expecting a great outcome for all delegates. The OIC was established in a historical summit which took place in Rabat, Morocco, 12th Rajab 1389 Hijra > Islamic date (25 September 1969) as a result of criminal arson to the Aqsa Mosque (Dome of the Rock) in Occupied Palestine. This is the second largest intergovernmental organization after the United Nations. The OIC overlooks and encompasses the 1.5 billion Muslims spread across the universe. Representing the Muslim world, its sole purpose is to keep maintaining the unification of the Muslim world (i.e. the Ummah it follows that through building international peace and safeguarding the interests of Muslims).

Sincerely,
Ali Mohaidly
Director of OIC | PacificMUN 2017



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Committee Overview

The OIC consists of 57 member states with each respective state acting to represent their country in the OIC. In 2008, the present charter was adopted by the eleventh Islamic session, which laid down the principles and objectives of the organization. As a result, this charter unifies the OIC under one umbrella of “Strengthening Solidarity”. Each member state must abide by the OIC. The OIC consists of many different organs, each with the purpose of strengthening relations between its member states. The “Standing Committee,” which is one of the organs, consists of the following; The Al Quds Committee, The Standing Committee of Information and Cultural Affairs (COMIAC), The Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation (COMCEC), and lastly The Standing Committee for Scientific and Technological cooperation (COMSTECH).

Delegates should be aware of “The Standing Committee,” which is significant for the OIC as it strengthens the links between its member states, and in-order to advance issues of critical importance to the organization. The OIC’s 57 members are spread throughout four continents. In order to protect the interests of Muslims and to re-solve any rivalry between member states, the OIC’s relation with the United Nations and other bodies/organizations is consultative and cooperative. To stress more on the prime purpose of the OIC, it has adopted principles for which its members must abide by which are as follows:

- All member States shall commit themselves to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter
- Member states are sovereign, independent, and equal in rights and obligations
- All Member States settle their disputes through peaceful means and refrain from the use or threat of use of force in their relations
- All member states should undertake to respect national sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of other member states and shall refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of other
- Member states shall uphold and promote, at the national and international levels, good governance, democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law

Quick brief points from the Charter of the OIC which are significant include:

- To enhance and consolidate the bonds of fraternity and solidarity among the member states
- Ensure active participation of the member states in the global political, economic, and social decision-making processes to secure their common interests
- Protect and defend the true image of Islam, to combat defamation of Islam, and encourage dialogue among various civilizations and religious

The goal for the OIC is to keep a strong bond among its fellow member states despite the Sunni and Shia split. It should opt to combat any sectarian tension between Muslims, Islamic Defamation, and most importantly to ensure the safeguard of the 1.5 billion Muslim which are faced with discrimination and various threats. I’m expecting delegates to keep in mind the charter and principles of the OIC, but moreover, delegates shouldn’t isolate themselves from the outside world and should keep on maintaining relations and encouraging dialogue¹.

“There is no compulsion in religion” (Baqarah: 256)

¹ <http://www.oic-oci.org/oicv3/>



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Topic Introduction

After the death of prophet Muhammad, (SAW) Sunnis and Shias have faced bitter tensions even to this day! It should be the duty of the OIC to help overcome this division, especially in a time of terror and sectarian turmoil happening all over the Muslim world; instead, all Muslims should be united to combat the terrorism and sectarian violence from spreading. But before coming up with solutions to combat the Sunni and Shia division, it's important that delegates understand what a Shiite is and what is a Sunni, as with this information there will be a better understanding of how the division took place.

As mentioned, the Sunni and Shia divide happened after the death of Prophet Muhammad, (SAW) who didn't assign a successor. The dispute began when the Sunnis believed that Abu-Bakr, who was a close companion to the Prophet, should succeed him. This is contrary to what the Shia's believed, which was that Imam Ali, who was the son-in-law and cousin of the prophet, should succeed him. Later they became known as Shiat Ali or the partisans of Ali. In short, both Sunnis and Shias cannot go back in history and change anything, as this lays in the hands of Allah (SWT) -("Glory to him"). In the long run both sides should accept their differences, and look for ways to ease the tensions to make a better path for the future. The Quran states about sectarian violence:

"Indeed, those who have divided their religion and become sects-you, (O Muhammad), are not associated with them in anything. Their affair is only [left] to Allah; then he will inform them about what they used to do." (6:159)

However, the OIC's main objective is to boost its relations with the various Islamic sects, which goes according to the Ten Year Program plan. The Sunni and Shia split influences the international community to an extent that this is an internal issue. As is well known, the Middle East is home to most of the Muslims in the world, but two major powers that play a big role in the split are Iran with a Shiite dominant population and Saudi Arabia which is Sunni dominated. These two powers are at odds as they face ideological differences.

For example, there is a conflict between each other in Iraq where Iran supports and backs the Shiite dominated government and other Shiite rebels whereas Saudi Arabia backs Sunni militias. As a result of sectarian violence in Iraq between Sunni and Shia groups, bloodshed for both sides in the conflict has been said to be between 130 000 to 165 000 dead. If these two powers start a war, it could lead to a World War Three scenario as Saudi Arabia's major ally is the US and Iran's major ally is Russia. But it is important to understand that Sunnis and Shiites still come from the same faith, worship the same god, follow the same five pillars of Islam, and agree that Prophet Muhammad was the messenger of God. What distinguishes Shiites and



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Sunnis are only a small number of theological and legal differences such as Shiites have Imams where Sunnis don't.

Another example is Islamic schools of thought for Sunni and Shiites. While at the core they are the same, a few differences cause major unrest in the Middle East, and must be solved to better the Islamic world.

"Death with dignity is better than a life of humiliation". – Imam Hussein (A.S)

The Pillars of Islam which every Muslim must abide by if possible are:

1. Shahada: Testifying to God's Oneness: The declaration "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His prophet.
2. Salat: Prayer
3. Zakat: Giving Charity
4. Sawm: Fasting
5. Hajj: Pilgrimage



A Historical Map of Islamic Territory



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Timeline

570	Prophet Muhammad is born in Mecca, modern day Saudi Arabia.
598	Imam Ali ibn' abi Talia, the first Shiite Imam, is born in Mecca.
632	Prophet Muhammad dies in Medina, modern day Saudi Arabia, and Abu-Bakr becomes Caliph after bitter dispute where a minority favoured Ali to succeed the prophet since he was the son in-law and the cousin of the prophet. Tension rose and later those who supported Ali to become Caliph broke off to become known as Shiat Ali.
656	'Uthman, the third Caliph, was assassinated in Medina.
656	The Battle of Camel- the second Islamic civil war. It was fought between forces allied to Ali and the forces allied to Aisha. Aisha was Prophet Muhammad's wife. She had a long standing hatred for Ali, she especially opposed Ali as Caliph. Upon 'Uthman's death, Ali launched an investigation into the death of Uthman, but later Aisha claimed that Ali's investigation into the death of 'Uthman was unsuccessful, and as a result she called revenge for 'Uthman. She then waged war against Ali in Basra, modern day Iraq. Aisha was defeated.
661	Violence and turmoil erupt as Ali, the fourth Caliph, was assassinated in the grand mosque of Kufa in Iraq as he was praying.
680	Imam Husain, as the protector and guardian of the religion established by his noble grandfather, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) refused to swear allegiance to the ruthless and immoral Caliph of Yazid, and as result Imam Hussein, the third Imam and the grandson of Prophet Muhammad, was killed and beheaded along with his companions.
873	Imam Hassan al-Askari, the 11 th Shiite Imam, was assassinated.
1979	Saddam Hussein takes power in Iraq and the Islamic revolution in Iran succeeds with Ayatollah Khomeini taking power.
May 15, 1948	Elections in Iraq lead to Shiite political powers backed by Iran taking power in Baghdad, Iraq's capital. As a result, Sunni and Shiite sectarian violence intensifies, leading to many Shiite mosques and shrines being bombed, as well as some Sunni mosques.



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Historical Analysis



The bombing of the Al-Askari Mosque in Samarra, Iraq

As mentioned, the Sunni and Shia split started after the death of Prophet Muhammad, (SAW) where tensions rose on who would succeed the prophet. Those who supported Imam Ali to succeed the Prophet were known as Shiat Ali. However, the tensions reached their climax when Imam Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet, was killed along with his companions in Karbala, Iraq, by the forces of Caliph Yazid. After this, the Islamic caliphate would soon break up as it clashed with European crusaders and the Mongols. There was a period of stability between the two, but the split would remain until the 20th century where it served as the main reason of conflict in the Middle East, especially when oil was discovered. This divide would also benefit political means, for example in Iraq when the sectarian violence took place, the government wasn't able to maintain control and the country slowly broke apart. As a result terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda and the Taliban would come in and take control of the oil fields, all the while stirring up sectarian violence, which was to their benefit. In 1979, the Islamic revolution in Iran succeeded, implementing a Shiite theocratic government, which would cause conflict when Saddam Hussein took power in Iraq, who was from a Sunni tribe who would later prosecute many Shiites. These ideological differences ignited a war between Iran and Iraq, with effects on both sides being devastating. It has been made clear that the Koran condemns sectarian violence and speaks against terrorism. Along with that, Prophet Muhammad also warned his followers that breaking into groups and fighting one another goes against Islam, being that the Koran states about sectarianism *"And fight them until there is no fitnah (Sectarian) and [until] the religion, all of it, is for Allah . And if they cease - then indeed, Allah is seeing of what they do". (8:39)*

Then how come it still happens? Who starts it? And who benefits? because there's a pattern for example in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria etc. These countries are rich in natural resources, especially oil, and geographically they're in a strategic position. This has attracted several external factors to start sectarian violence in order for them to take control of the resources. Another explanation could be that conflict exists, and powerful nations make matters worse by dividing the conflict upon religion groups like the Sunnis and Shias i.e. it's becomes a geopolitical conflict.



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Current Situation

Currently, there haven't been any major developments in resolving the split, but there's no reason why this split should continue, whether you're a Sunni or Shia. They are all still Muslims, and should stay united together under one religion, and it's the OIC's duty to render this. For example, currently in Iraq ISIS has taken parts of the country and announced their caliphate. The Iraqi retaliation to ISIS isn't as efficient as necessary because different religious affiliated militias have formed to fight ISIS alone, instead of having one resistance force which consists of all the Iraqi faiths and ethnic groups to combat ISIS. To make matters worse, some Sunni tribes have pledged their allegiance to ISIS. The international community has not taken sufficient action to resolve the split as it is a more internal issue, but some countries are taking precautions to avoid further sectarianism. For instance, Syria's government is secular and within its armed forces it consists of a mix of different backgrounds which unites the country to combat the terrorists. On the other hand, some countries have done the opposite and deepened the Sunni and Shia split. For instance, Saudi Arabia's Wahhabism based government has for a long time discriminated and oppressed its Shiite population, which lives in very harsh conditions. In December of 2015, Saudi officials executed the moderate Shiite cleric and activist Nemir al Mustafa due to his movement for the Shiite population. As a result this sparked conflict between Saudi Arabia and its rival Iran where the Saudi embassy in Iran was burned down and diplomatic relations were severed. It makes it hard to resolve this issue when governments stand in the way of peace. This is a fact to take into consideration.



The UN has not been engaged in this conflict to a great extent. When the Sheikh Nemir was executed by the Saudi regime, the UN did not get involved. As previously mentioned, this is more an internal Islamic issue. Muslims should attempt resolve this conflict on their own if possible, as with a Muslim conflict, it should be Muslims to solve it. We are in a time where ignorance and arrogance should not exist, and a solution must be found to lead us forward.

Possible Solutions

Since this is a religious issue, there's only one main outcome. It is for both Sunnis and Shiites to unite themselves together and live under one umbrella of Islam, but both sides should respect their differences. Pluralism should be maintained, not to forget the Prophet (SAW) had a vision for the religion of Islam being a religion of peace and unity, he would not like to have seen this split take place. Another thing both is both sects can work together to promote more tolerant teachings of Islam, and such teaching that persecution by any side is justified shouldn't be tolerated at all; both sides should agree on the same Islamic institutions for teachings and guidance. Once all of these are met, both sides should work strongly together to fight ISIS and other terrorist groups, instead of having western collations fight them, all the while painting a picture that Muslims cannot solve the problem. Shiites and Sunnis must come together to prove the world otherwise. Lastly, previously discussed external forces purposely start sectarian violence on occasion as it benefits them. The solution for this is Muslims and religious groups should avoid being influenced by these external forces, as they often make matters worse. The pros of this solution is that it focuses bringing Muslims together by solving some differences and reaching some conclusions, also this could hopefully end the Saudi and Iranian rivalry. Not all the differences can be met, because there are still some practices that Shiites do which differs from Sunnis. For instance, Shiites perform prayers differently than Sunnis do, also Shiites commemorate the death of Imam Hussein (SAW) each year while Sunnis don't. These difference do keep the two sects different, however they should not cause conflict between Muslims.

"The greatest jihad is to battle your own soul, to fight the evil within yourself"

- Prophet Muhammad



Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's government is based on Wahhabism, a very radical form of Islam which was only formed in the 1800s by Muhammad ibn Abdul wahab. This idea advocated a return to the purity of the first generation of Islam, and claimed that mosques with domes or shrines should be destroyed. Shiites are disbelievers in Wahhabism, and it also rejected any reliance on the intercession of Prophet Muhammad. This idea spread throughout the Arabian Peninsula. The Saudi regime embraces this idea and uses it to fund Wahhabist propaganda around the world. The Saudi's affinity for Wahhabism has only made matters worse, especially at home where it has persecuted its Shiite population. An example of this is in Mecca, the holiest site in Islam, where the Saudi regime has laid bans on Shiite pilgrims in which they have been singled out and left vulnerable by authorities, only because of its determination to abide by its principles and traditions. Also, the leader of the of the Grand Mosques of Masjid al Haram Adel-Al kalbani decelerated in a horrific interview that all Shiites were apostate, unbelievers, and as such should be hunted down and killed, not to mention that Al-Kalbani was appointed to his position of the Saudi king himself. To conclude, this would make the process hard when coming to the negotiation table. To resolve this split on the Saudi side they should consider reforming their policies and especially revamping their ideology of Wahhabism. Saudi Arabia is often considered the flagship of Sunni Islam, and many Sunni majority nations ally themselves.

Iran

Iran is the opposite of Saudi Arabia in that its government is mostly a Shiite dominated government. It was formed in 1979 by the Islamic revolution following the overthrow of the last Shah Monarch of Iran. The government imposes tight religious restrictions on its population in-order to consolidate its power. Iran is a major player in the Middle East because of its power in the region, and it's ranked the third largest oil producer in the Middle East. Its relation with its rival Saudi Arabia has resulted in multiple proxy wars in the region such as in the Syrian civil war Iran where supports the Alawite government of Bashar Al Assad (which is another branch of Shiite Islam) and the Saudis have supported the majority Sunni Syrian rebels. In the Yemeni Civil War Iran has supported the al-Houthi rebels, which is the biggest Shiite tribe in Yemen, and the Saudis have supported the current government in power which is Sunni. There are still many more examples, but overall this leads to sectarian violence in the many examples of Sunni vs. Shia conflicts. It's possible that the OIC can assist in repairing the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Similar to Saudi Arabia, Iran sets the precedent for many Shia nations and groups, who find themselves allying with Iran.



Neutral Nations

While few nations are truly neutral, there are some members of the OIC that will choose to fight for a fair deal for both sides, instead of siding with their ideological flagship. These nations should act as mediators to the discussion, and try and help negotiations with large nations such as Iran and Saudi Arabia be more successful. Peace will be the goal for these nations, so they should take steps to ensure that they have a fair deal planned for both sides of Islam.



A Map of the Middle East



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Discussion Questions/Further Reading

1. What are the similarities and differences between Shiites and Sunnis?
2. How can the relations between Sunnis and Shiites be improved?
3. How does this religious split translate into politics?
4. How can Muslims as whole work together to avoid sectarianism from worsening in a time with terrorism and discrimination towards Muslims?
5. If prophet Muhammad (SAWT) assigned a successor would have this division happened?
6. Since the Koran denounces sectarianism and violence, then who starts it?
7. How much influence do outside powers have on starting and maintaining conflict?

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