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Naveed Sheikh, *The New Politics of Islam: Pan-Islamic foreign policy in a world of states*, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002, xii+206 pp

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Since the events of September 11, 2001 we are frequently informed in the press and the media about the threat of militant Islam. At the same time, we are also hearing the Islamic nations express their frustrations with the West over their experiences of discrimination and prejudice. Fueling the hostility towards Islam are new writings which present it as a unified, monolithic threat to Western democracies. Samuel Huntington's writings are representative of this trend. He has portrayed the conflict with Islam in terms of a "Clash of Civilizations" and argued that in the period after the Cold War, the next major conflict would occur between a unified bloc of Muslim-majority states and the Western democracies. He has also suggested that Islamic fundamentalism is being encouraged by the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), and is a serious threat to Western security.

In response to this oversimplified and hyperbolic picture of Islamic threat, we need a more nuanced understanding of the politics of Islamic states. Naveed Sheikh's book is an attempt to do this. It offers a powerful critique of the essentialist and orientalist portrayal of Islamic internationalism through a study of the activities of the OIC and its leading members, and demonstrates the erroneousness of Huntington's understanding. Combining his twin interests in classical Islamic writings and International Relations theory, Sheikh seeks to attain three goals in this book: first, to refute the notion of a globalized, unified threat of militant Islam; second, to prove his argument by examining the role played by three leading members of the OIC and show that these Islamic states pursue policies guided by national interests rather than some shared vision of pan-Islamism; ; and third, to critique the actions of these Islamic states for inhibiting the growth of a strong, unified, and progressive Islamic consciousness that would enable the OIC to be a considerable force in international relations.

While Sheikh's goals seem reasonable, the method he uses is less than satisfactory. His text is both a polemical response to Huntington and others, and an involuted treatise examining the activities of three leading members of the OIC, using current theories in International Relations. The result is a highly opaque, incomprehensible text.

Pan-Islamism is understood as the unity of Muslim people, regardless of the differences of language, ethnicity or nationality. Such transnational pan-Islamic sentiments are embodied in the OIC which, in spite of the diversity of its 57 member governments, claims the prerogative to speak for the global Muslim community and promote pan-Islamic unity. Sheikh pursues his investigation first by digging into the conceptual foundations of the OIC. From where, does the OIC derive its claim to speak for the '*umma*', unified community of Islamic believers? Sheikh explains that Islam subscribes to the "divine origin of government," because the political and religious realms are unified. Qur'an provides the principles for defining the relationship with God, and also the code of conduct for individuals and communities. Some scholars are uncomfortable with the notion of '*umma*' because it defines the identity and bonds for the Muslim individual in terms that supercede their nationality, which diminishes the legitimacy of the nation-state. However, Sheikh points out that while theoretically the functioning of the '*umma*' may require a single "pious" polity, the past historical record of the forms of Islamic polities

demonstrates pluralism rather than ideologically based exclusivism. His survey of the historical writings of Muslim theologians reinforce this assertion that '*umma*' is best understood at present as a "certain collective consciousness without a corresponding polity" and functions as a form of "intercommunal norm-sharing" without diminishing the role of other factors in the construction of identities of modern Muslims. (33)

If the OIC's ideological origins signal a compromise with classical Islamic theology, then its emergence as an organization highlights the explicit influence of the realist calculus practiced by some Islamic states in the anarchic post-Westphalian world of nation-states. According to Sheikh, its establishment was precipitated by the Saudi monarchy's encirclement by hostile forces including the popular radicalism advocated by President Nasser of Egypt, anti-monarchism favored by secular republicanism of Baathist parties of Iraq and Syria, and the civil war in Northern Yemen following an anti-Royalist coup. The Arab League had also shifted its ideological stance to advocate the pan-Arab and secular-nationalist sentiments. Two significant events acted as a catalyst: the humiliating defeat of the Arab states in the Six Day War with Israel in 1967, and the arson attack on the famed al-Aqsa mosque in 1969, resulting in the convening of the First Islamic Summit Conference in Rabat in September 1969.

Already, the Saudi monarchy had initiated the process of transforming "Islam from a fraternity of faith to a strategically informed anti-radical coalition" by sponsoring "the Muslim brotherhood" in Egypt (35). Though it assumed the guise of a trans-national Islamic coalition, from the outset the OIC was destined to serve its progenitors' national agendas: a Saudi plan to contain Nasserite radicalism, a Pakistani desire for increased security and finance, and a Moroccan-Iranian public relations campaign in the face of increased domestic criticism and challenges from Islamic groups (36).

Sheikh analyses the Charter of the OIC and identifies its essentially innocuous character found in its reaffirmation of the UN Charter and fundamental Human Rights (along with the principles from Qur'an), and rejection of any supra-statist advocacy. The organization's secretariat is based in Jeddah; the Saudi Kingdom bankrolls it, ensuring its control (56). In theory, its members must espouse Islam as a collective identity, but its membership rules lack coherency. It accepted memberships of states with a small minority Muslim population and of constitutionally secular states, but rejected membership of India, with the second largest Muslim population in the world (39, 88).

Sheikh's strongest argument against the assumption of a monolithic Islam can be found in his analysis of the foreign policies of three key players of the OIC: the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Sheikh critiques the Saudi regime for its phony espousal of Islamic internationalism, and because it has never sought to develop an "Islamic *Internationale*." Instead it has used its dominant position in the OIC to increase its own international security from challenges of populist Nasserism or the militant Shi'ism from Iran, or to diffuse internal instability from attacks by the homegrown Salafi radicals. Moreover, it has acted repeatedly in the OIC to depoliticize pan-Islamic solidarity with the Palestinian cause. It also uses its oil revenues to offer bilateral aid to stabilize friendly regimes against forces that would challenge the status quo in the Middle East (48, 55). What enables the Saudi monarchy to coat its actions with Islamic political correctness is its pragmatic alliance with the Wahhabi '*ulema*' who constitute the religious establishment and provide a source of legitimacy to the monarchy. The privileged '*ulema*' have frequently obliged the regime by issuing fatwa against any type of political criticism which questions the legitimacy of the ruling family (57).

If the Saudi goal with the OIC was to create a depoliticized network which would ensure its legitimacy, the post-Pahlavi Iranian Republic sought to use the OIC as a venue for expansion of its ideological influence. Bursting on the political scene with its revolutionary zeal in 1979, it proclaimed that "In Islam, there are no frontiers." Causing tremors in the Gulf monarchies, it proclaimed that "the Iranian people's revolution was the starting point for the great revolution of the Islamic world" (62). Khomeini's pronouncements sought explicitly to delegitimize the Saudi regime for its corruption and its close ties with the West and offered to take away their control of Islam's holy sites for pilgrimage. Sheikh astutely charts the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia over the control of the OIC, which became increasingly pro-Arab during the 1980s. However, once the Iranian revolution went through its convulsive phase, the post-Khomeini regime too adopted a pragmatism in pursuit of its national self-interest by moderating its stance on pan-Islamism. This ideological capitulation is very persuasively illustrated through numerous instances of Iranian foreign policy including, for example, its moderate positions during its presidency of the OIC from 1997-2000, promoting a strategic alliance with Russia, and favoring close ties with Christian Armenia over the Sh'i majority Azerbaijan (77).

If the swings in the Islamic Republic of Iran's postures in the OIC have conveyed an ascendancy of cautious pragmatism in the pursuit of national self-interest, then how should we understand the frequent vacillations in Pakistan's foreign policies in spite of its self-proclaimed Islamic credentials? Here, Sheikh's analysis appears less critical, in comparison with his sharp impartiality in dealing with the other two cases. For instance, he rationalizes the compromise in principles that the new government made in 1954 in accepting military aid, and joining the U.S.-sponsored anti-Communist security alliances, arguing that "Islam was not shelved, it only became less seductive" (91). When Pakistan has been unable to persuade the OIC to do its bidding, Sheikh contemptuously accuses the OIC of pursuing "impolicy," described as "de-engagement in matters that can adversely affect the interests of one of the pivotal member states," and of uttering words that are "deprived either of sense or direction" (94). Sheikh does acknowledge that it is the primary concern for geostrategic security which has determined Pakistan's foreign policy behavior in spite of its repeated public allegiance to Islamic principles.

Sheikh's partisanship in dealing with events concerning India is also obvious. For example, he ignores a Muslim mob's killing of 57 Hindu pilgrims which ignited the Gujarat riots, resulting in reprisal killing of thousands of Muslims in 2002 (88). He offers no evidence to back his opinion that the attack on the Indian Parliament in late 2001 by Muslim militants was "staged" (99).

Given the OIC's inability to obtain consensus, pursue a joint policy, or achieve a united front, Sheikh concludes that Islam cannot be viewed as "a single civilizational corpus." Does this mean that pan-Islamism will remain an innocuous force? This is where the limits of this research project becomes apparent. Saudi Arabia may not need to use the organizational network of the OIC to spread its brand of Wahabbist fundamentalism. It does this directly through funding madrasas, sponsoring itinerant preachers, and building mosques. The OIC will remain an organizational forum for discussing important issues confronting the Islamic world. Beyond that the idealized transnational *ummatic* integration that Sheikh seems to favor will remain a chimera, seductive in its appeal but without any real potential.

Sheikh's text offers many valuable insights and interesting observations. However, its arcane language and turgid prose will frustrate many readers. It would be accessible to those familiar with the specialized dialect of post-structuralism and with theories of International

Relations. In the post-9/11 world, scholars who espouse progressive left values can not afford to ignore the need to make their message accessible to a broader public.