Real Agenda of Kuala Lumpur Islamic Summit Plans Derailed by Saudi Arabia

There is more to the divide in the Muslim world than the schism between the Sunni and Shiite sects. This was recently proven by the apparent failure of an Islamic Summit, not due to good intentions but spoilers.

2019 ended with a Kuala Lumpur Summit organised by Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. Its stated purpose was to be an international platform for Muslim leaders, intellectuals and scholars from around the world to discuss issues facing the Muslim world as a whole. The four-day conference, December 18-21, would be an opportunity to bring Muslim heads of state together to discuss various problems facing the Islamic countries.

The summit was much-touted, and had good intentions; however, we all know where that proverbial road more often than not leads, at least in the Muslim world.

Let's just call it an "interesting geo-pol game." The main players, Pakistan, Malaysia and Turkey, planned the meeting, but Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan ultimately had to cancel his participation after "concerns" were raised Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi confirmed this news to the English Daily Dawn.

Golden Rule

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who was one of the driving forces behind the event, openly claimed that the Saudis 'put pressure' on Pakistan to withdraw from the summit, as the Turkish media reported. Interestingly,
Imran Khan discussed his unexpected absence from the conference with the Turkish leadership, ostensibly as it was not his own decision.

Khan told the Anadolu Agency, "declining to participate after its announcement will have a negative impact on Pakistan's relations with, not just Iran, but much more with Malaysia and Turkey."

This makes clear that Pakistan's last-minute decision to pull out of the Kuala Lumpur Summit was driven by "cash-strapped" Islamabad being financially dependent on oil-rich Gulf States. As always, money does the talking, at least when it comes to serious decision-making. It is simply the Golden Rule in play: He Who Holds the Gold Makes the Rules.

It is not only foreign direct investment and aid at stake here but remittances, which are used as a bargaining tool. Nearly three million (2.7 million) Pakistanis work in Saudi Arabia, and are a major source of foreign currency.

We must remember that Pakistan is purported to be a close Saudi ally, at least at first impression. However, in reality Saudi Arabia owns the financial soul of the Islamic Republic, due to the 6 billion US dollar lifeline Riyadh provided following the 2018 general elections to help tide it over economic crisis.

So it came as no surprise that Imran Khan was pressured into not showing up, even after being invited by Iranian President Rouhani himself. Obviously, Saudi Arabia had something to do with the guest list, despite not organising the summit itself, but had much more to do with the real agenda and who would actually come.

Iran attended, including Rouhani personally. This is especially noteworthy as Malaysia is a Sunni majority country, infamous for not treating Shia Muslims well. Iran on the other hand is predominately Shia, and these two countries have not had the best of relations.

But why is Pakistan in disfavour with Saudi Arabia? Firstly, Saudi Arabia obviously did not want Pakistan to attend a summit that in theory seemed to challenge the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation), headquartered in Jeddah.

Another possibility, perhaps more for public consumption, is that Imran Khan cancelled his scheduled attendance at the Kuala Lumpur summit following his recent visit to Saudi Arabia, so a Saudi connection is definitely possible. This has been officially denied, but we all know that not all that is made public knowledge is the real truth.

Yet another option may be found in the recent events concerning Iran and the United States, and the claims by Khan that Trump has asked him to be a go-between with Iran. Saudi Arabia does not want the US to act as peacemaker, and so blocked Imran's participation at a public forum where he could do so openly.

"You should try and go between Iran and the United States," Khan quoted Trump as saying, in an interview with CNN.

Could it be that Trump understands the true colours of Saudi Arabia, and its leadership, and is really looking for some sort of negotiated settlement with Iran over its nuclear programme, and therefore turned to Pakistan, a nuclear power, to act as something of an honest broker?

**Death by Ignorance**

The timing of the killing of Iranian general Soleimani may be part of a larger ploy in the region for Trump to make good on his 2014 campaign promises. Backdoor diplomacy is without doubt an option. And Trump really intends to remove troops but must find an indirect way to achieve the promise made to so many voters, in face of pressure from the Deep State and Saudi Arabia to indefinitely keep American troops in the region.

But one thing is clear in the larger scheme of things: the ideological model of the Iranian revolution is somehow being kept alive in Lebanon, Iraq and Bahrain, but is its lowest point ever in Iran itself—or at least was until recently, and the unexpected actions of Trump.

General Qasem Soleimani wasn't the classical regime person, deployed wherever needed: he was the regime itself. You will find plenty of literature about who he was, and how he operated without any need to hide. What is happening now, a game of chicken, between the US and Iran is because killing Soleimani is a direct hit at the very heart and soul of the Iranian nation.

It is true that Trump, at least until recently, has surrounded himself with more than a fair share of warmongers, such as John Bolton, his former National Security Advisor, and Mike Pompeo, a Goebbels-style Secretary of State who has
been beating the same war drum ever since he learned to talk. Nevertheless, times do change, and even from something bad good can sometimes result.

Mike Pompeo is still looking for love, and that may be long time in coming, according to Linda Ronstadt, who has been an outspoken critic of the Trump administration. She stood up during a dinner party and looked straight at Pompeo's table and said, "I'd like to say to Mr Pompeo, who wonders when he'll be loved, it's when he stops enabling Donald Trump."

No Love Lost

The Iranian leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, styled Leader of the Islamic Revolution, had said even prior to the murder of Qasem Soleimani by a US drone that there would be no negotiations between Iran and the United States at any level or in any place. But Imran Khan flying to both Saudi Arabia and Iran seems like some sort of Kissinger-era shuttle diplomacy.

Iran is too weak to respond properly to the killing on a larger scale, because it lacks, at least for now, regional consensus, and the sustained means to make a surgical enough response to send a message home. Regardless, any response it does muster may also be overreacted to—at least in terms of American rhetoric.

Iran would be best served by avoiding direct conflict with the US and letting events take their expected course. Even if revenge is sought, it should be served up cold. However, considering the history we know only too well of the last forty years, the standoff between the two will be one of strike, counterstrike and more recriminations.

Soleimani, in retrospect, made a fatal mistake in attacking the Kirkuk base; even worse, provoking the violent rally around the American Embassy in Baghdad (apparently made easier by the US's own provocation of bombing local militias). This prompted the Americans to intervene severely, as they understood what the reaction might be, even though it might have been an overreaction. But the US is prone to such overreactions when it thinks its own interests can be served, however short sighted its definition of its interests has consistently been.

No Pain, No Gain

I agree with Trump that some sort of climax was impending. It is as if they thought: no more tooth, no more pain. But it would have been better to have let it appear that there was a consensus of the military and political establishment in the US, rather than Trump making himself the scapegoat or the hero—as now it appears that this was his sole decision—as the result will be the final judge.

The question remains, however: why intervene at this particular time? What is the intended consequence, either for domestic or international consumption, or a combination of both? Is there a BIGGER game of negotiation going on in the region? Are we all being swamped with red herrings, as it is not a zero-sum game?

Soleimani might simply have been murdered in order to open up channels for further negotiation. The timing of these events is paramount—as perhaps the US realised that Soleimani and Saudi Arabia were both barriers to an Iranian nuclear deal, and even to bringing peace to the greater region.

Such a peace scenario would be Saudi Arabia's scariest nightmare. That is why all efforts were made to keep Imran Khan away from the regional power players at the summit, and prevent him from being a catalyst that could bring about a negotiated settlement between Iran and the United States.

Imran Khan needs to be aware that his efforts to act as a "go-between" on behalf of Donald Trump and the United States can bring about his own demise. Imran is far from stupid, but this cannot be said for the world he is obliged to operate in.

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