



RCAS Commentary

Arab-Islamic Summit: A Call for Unity against Aggression

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About RCAS

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RCAS aims to become a leading research institute and think tank on Asian affairs in the Indo-Pacific region. To date, RCAS has conducted research programs on maritime disputes in the South China Sea (SCS), China's relations with the Indo-Pacific states, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), terrorism/counterterrorism in the Afg-Pak region, and so on. It is committed to promoting maritime cooperation, regional integration, and regional peace in the Indo-Pacific region at large.

RCAS has published nearly ten books in Chinese and English and more than 20 papers in SSCI/SCOPUS/CSSCI-indexed journals. Recent English publications include *Populism, Nationalism and South China Sea Dispute: Chinese and Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2022); *Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Contemporary Developments and Dynamics* (London: Routledge, 2022); *Crossing the Himalayas: Buddhist Ties, Regional Integration and Great-Power Rivalry* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *The Reshaping of China-Southeast Asia Relations in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *Territorial Disputes, The Role of Leaders and The Impact of Quad: A Triangular Explanation of China-India Border Escalations* (2023); *Managing the South China Sea Dispute: Multilateral and Bilateral Approaches* (2022); *China-Pakistan Cooperation on Afghanistan: Assessing Key Interests and Implementing Strategies* (2022); *Hedging Against the Dragon: Myanmar's Tangled Relations with China since 1988* (2021); and *China-Pakistan Conventional Arms Trade: An Appraisal of Supplier's and Recipient's Motives* (2020).

RCAS has also published hundreds of articles, and its researchers have been interviewed in various local and international media outlets, such as *The Diplomat* in the United States, *East Asian Forum (EAF)* in Australia, *Bangkok Post* in Thailand, *Jakarta Post* in Indonesia, *Lian He Zao Bao*, *Think China* in Singapore, *South China Morning Post (SCMP)*, *China-US Focus* in Hong Kong, *CGTN*, *Global Times*, *World Affairs* in China. RCAS researchers have actively participated in international conferences or study visits in the United States, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, Cambodia, and other places.

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Recently, Doha saw the meeting of an Arab and Islamic Presidential conference, called to talk about the rising and impudent aggression of the Israeli regime. The expectations of this meeting were enormous against a backdrop from a highly complex crisis in the region. However, towards the end, when the last communiques were given, there was a kind of anticlimax in the air. The summit, though a symbolic and diplomatic achievement, ended up in what can best be termed as lukewarm condemnations and a show of solidarity. It was the moment when the long-standing and vexing disconnect between the strong rhetoric and the political determination to act decisively in a particular way was highlighted. Unless properly addressed, the Arab and Islamic world will remain in a constant state of vulnerability.



▲ (Times of Bangladesh).

What prompted this important meeting was an open display of aggression; the aerial attack of the Israeli regime on Qatar, the same nation that facilitated the shaky ceasefire between the regime and the Hamas resistance movement. It was not an assault on an unknown enemy in a far-off land; it was a point-blank assault on a state which was frantically working to de-escalate a war and save lives. The daring nature

of the operation was thunderous, particularly to the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, who termed it cowardly and treacherous. How could he receive delegations of the Israeli regime, and at the same time receive their aerial attacks on his country, resounded his torturous question: how could it be otherwise said-how could he not feel betrayal and exasperation at the whole position?

The declarations of the key actors in the lead were solid and unambiguous, by any measure. The Secretary General of the Arab League, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, issued a moral statement which was not diplomatic at all, and he said that doing nothing in response to a crime is a crime in itself. His statement was a straightforward, face-to-face challenge to the lack of action that has plagued regional responses to aggression. The President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has been a vocal critic of the Israeli government without a second thought, took it a notch even higher as he labelled it as one that had a terrorist mentality. It was not just political posturing, but a clear and powerful statement of state policy that has repeatedly demonstrated disregard for international law and now even basic decency as a human being.

Despite the presence of such a powerful and cohesive rhetoric, the summit was unable to turn its denunciations into a concrete and practical approach. The most conspicuous and discernible exclusion from the discussion was the arms race between the mass economic strength of Islamic countries. It stems from deep frustrations and is a hallmark of extraordinary strategic incompetence. The economic strength of the Islamic nations, and especially the Gulf nations, can dominate Israel and its allies. It can exert a strong influence on financial markets, consume a tremendous amount of energy, or control major trading routes, and it can exert some degree of control that should not be overlooked. The potent deterrence would consist of the economic reaction, the oil embargo, some sanctions or the reconsideration of trade relations. It is the leverage that has not been made, even when it comes to such violent action against a member country that does not exactly ring a bell.

The existing situation of doing nothing presents a stark contrast to one of the most significant events of recent times, the oil embargo of 1973. After having reacted to the aggressiveness of Israel in the Yom Kippur war, the Arab countries were willing to transform their economic resources into military resources, halting the export of oil to the United States and to other nations that aid Israel. The world experienced the effects of this move in the global economy, and they achieved this as a reflection of their immense strategic abilities. It was an effective appeal: supporting aggression against Arab nations would be a real and cost-effective price. The political audacity which exists today has been replaced by a bashful indecision, by a fear of offending old friendships and commercial clubs, even where these commercial clubs are with nations which facilitate aggression on their part.

The Gulf, Arab, and Islamic summits are not only a diplomatic move but also a breakthrough in regional action. The causes of the difficulties in the 21st century, including external aggression, territorial issues, economic instability, and climate change, are too complex and too vast to be addressed by any given state. The summits reiterate a fundamental truth: nothing can prevent aggressive policies and protect the sovereignty of countries except the genuine unity of nations. Their predecessors represent a more long-term strategic approach, characterised by the perspective that Arab and Islamic security are closely interconnected, without reference to national boundaries or individual issues. With such a vision, a collective security system that is effective and proactive is required to replace traditional transactional politics.

The start of the improved defence cooperation pact between the United States and Qatar was made at the periphery of the summit as one of the most noticeable tendencies. Marco Rubio, the US Secretary of State, who had left Tel Aviv for Doha, insisted that the two countries were on the verge of closing the deal, which is aimed at persuading Doha following the Israeli attacks. The vagueness and contradictions of regional unions are also represented by this move, which is a move towards more security. It sets a premonition on the level of knowledge that the US possessed of the Israeli strike and what kind of relationships can be characterised as impudent attacks on such an important ally. Such a deal would be a bitter yet necessary trade-off to Qatar, which has always taken pride in its strategic independence and its situation as a mediator of the region. It is an unconscious recognition that even a country with enormous economic potential and the ability to find partners in the global arena still needs the support of a world superpower to be sure that nobody will attack it.

Finally, the Doha summit was a powerful manifestation of the overall exasperation and moral indignation in the Arab and Islamic world. It gave strong, required criticism and declared a vision of togetherness. This cohesiveness, however, is not evaluated by what is said within the walls of conference halls, but rather what is done after. The moderate denunciation era has long gone. The power is in the economic and strategic ability of the Arab and Islamic countries to hold the aggressors accountable, as they have definitely done in history. It is to cede power, to be at the mercy of fear and economic profit in the here and now, in order to decide the policy of action. It is to invite further aggression and to lose the harmony and independence, which the summit was intended to confirm. The only way is clear: no compromise, no half measures.

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