

PAKISTAN AND REGIONAL COOPERATION FOR DEVELOPMENT (RCD): A CRITICAL REVIEW

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Abstract

Islamic identity and safeguarding its economic interests were the main objectives of Pakistan's foreign policy overture towards the Muslim world. To achieve these goals Pakistan advanced the idea of the (Regional Cooperation for Development) RCD. Two other Muslim states, Iran and Turkey had a lukewarm attitude with the basic idea of a Regional organization. Iran and Turkey were not only reluctant to join this organization but the western powers also had apprehensions about the concept of RCD. Western powers had reservations that having already CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) another organization will also be redundant in its existence. Both Iran and Turkey wanted to build RCD without deserting the Western bloc, which they considered vital to safeguard their long terms interests associated with CENTO. To dispel the West's reaction towards RCD in already existing arrangements of CENTO, member countries propagated that this would be an economic and developmental organization among the co-religion states. But for Pakistan RCD was a multipurpose platform that retains its Islamic identity, makes a choice in foreign policy and gets rid of the impression of western tutelage. Similarly, Pakistan was shocked by the Western allies' overtures towards India, after its defeat to China in the 1962 border clashes. Pakistan was looking for new friends to counterbalance this situation.

Key Words: Identity, Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, CENTO, RCD, Middle East

Road to RCD*

Pakistan was carved out from the demise of colonial Raj in the Indo-Pak subcontinent. The end of the colonial era not only re-defined territories but also redistributed the power structures between the

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*RCD (Regional Cooperation for Development) was a security cum economic arrangement among three Muslim states, Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey in 1964. These countries were not satisfied with CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) a US-sponsored defense pact for Asian countries to counter the communist influence in the region.

retired empires and the new states. Newborn states in the pursuits of identity and interests restarted the old game of gain according to their political paradigms.

The same was the approach of Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey when they formed RCD. RCD meant to them a kind of pan-Islamism between non-Arab regional Muslim states. “The growth of regionalism in the developing world is a pragmatic and realistic response to the crisis of “demand input overload” (David, 1965, p.58). This was regional cooperation between co-religionist countries to rebuild their identity and interests according to the new needs. By initiating RCD, Pakistan also wants to cease its immediate colonial past and to safeguard its territorial integrity. Islam suits Pakistan in all aspects, it got independence on the slogan of separate Muslim land, therefore Pan-Islamism had a wider appeal for Indian Muslims and it dates back when they regarded Ottoman Caliphate as a symbol of religious unity and political Islam, thus Islam became the cornerstone of its domestic and foreign policies. In its formative years Pakistan tried to make an Islamic alliance with the Arab world, but on the other side found no keen response. But despite this Pakistan did not stop its quest to make an association with the Muslim countries.

Pakistan, Turkey, and Iran can be distinguished from the other Middle Eastern Muslim countries in many aspects. The following three countries are non-Arabs, their contiguity with the Soviet Union, and excluding Pakistan's other two have not been colonized. Turkey (the previously Ottoman empire disintegrated, before and after the First World War) and Iran (with a large territory that too bifurcated, see, (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Turkmenchay_1828) much influenced by the West expansionist design that ultimately tore them into pieces. Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey enjoy a close relationship with the Western world (Iran's path changed after the 1979 Islamic revolution) afterward they sought new national governments. “However, Among Asian countries, Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey can, in a way, be regarded as pioneers in the field of regional cooperation”. (Hashmi, 1973)

In the new international system that emerged after the 2nd world war, the Western countries hold the center of power. Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey experienced nationalist movements and modernization in their countries. Other than their religious ideological link, they had bilateral and joint defense pacts under Western power's auspices. Post-War developments forced these states to seek mutual defense as well as

nondefense agreements on regional as well as extra-regional levels that the cold war environment imposed on them.

Both Iran and Turkey had direct threats from Soviet expansion, to avert this danger they signed the Saadaabad Pact of July 1937, while Pakistan joined them after independence via Baghdad pact in 1955. "The idea of regionalism had historic roots among the northern countries of the Middle East. As early as 1937 the states of the Turco-Iranian plateau had recognized a certain identity of interests, in the Saadabad pact, concluded by, Iran, Iraq, Turkey (Gale archives, 2020), and Afghanistan to make new alliances and friends which could help them in grappling with their problems.

Whereas Iran and Turkey had issues with the Soviet Union, Pakistan needed help to contain the Indian's pressure through this agreement. Over time, all three countries and especially Pakistan started believing in the Baghdad pact (latter CENTO, when Iraq left it after a bloody coup) as a weapon that they cannot use against their adversaries. These defense pacts with the West further restricted the ability of the three Muslim countries to defend themselves against any aggression. "Modern, Turkish, Iranian, and Pakistani relationship was a series of 'marriages of convenience' CENTO and then it's economic off-shot Regional Cooperation for Development, RCD." (Bishku, 1999, p. 13-28).

In this situation, Pakistan was desperately looking for an organization with the Muslim countries to satisfy its identity needs and foreign policy shortcomings. To materialize this dream, the President of Pakistan visited Turkey, Tehran, and Kabul to muster favor of these countries to form a new regional organization of the like-minded Muslim States. In their joint statement, the heads of these three states declared "that regional cooperation is an essential factor in accelerating the pace of national development" (Pakistan Document Series, 1964).

The idea of RCD was floated in tripartite meetings held among Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey's foreign ministers to discuss the proposed organization's salient features. On July 3rd, President of Pakistan Ayub Khan suggested that the "conclusion of a formal pact between the three regional members of CENTO: Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran (DO, 1964). The foremost goal of the new organization was to stimulate, economic, cultural, and technical cooperation amid the three states, besides the framework of CENTO. The name of this organization was

recommended, Regional Cooperation Organization for Development (RCD).

With the formation of RCD Pakistan's relationship with the Muslim world, especially with regional Muslim countries was further strengthened. Islam was very much in the consciousness of Indian Subcontinent Muslims; therefore Pan-Islamism had a wider appeal for Indian Muslims and it dates back to when they regarded Ottoman Caliphate as a symbol of religious unity and political Islam. After independence, Pakistan's Islamic character and cordial relationship with Middle Eastern Muslim states became an important and constant factor in the country's foreign policy. But, on the contrary, the often reiterated metaphor of Pan-Islamism failed to impress Pakistan's other counterparts in the Muslim world.

It was a long-sought desire of Pakistan to complete its identity destination. Islamic episteme is the *raison d'état* of the State of Pakistan. Islam transformed the Politico-Religious desire of the Indian Muslim under the British Colonial Raj into State building endeavor. This was quite a different political struggle for national emancipation than other freedom movements, where ethnicity or language was the main driving force. On the contrary, in the Pakistan movement, religious orientation (two-nation theory) was the *sine qua non*.

Pakistan stood out in the community of nation-states as being a state formed solely based on religious identity-with neither ethnic nor territorial integrity (Ed. Svante, 2009, p, 291). This identity search landed safely with the formation of RCD "Pakistan's relations with the non-Arab countries of the Middle East were further cemented by the establishment in 1964 of the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) between Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran (FCO, 1967). Since all three countries have some reservations with the CENTO performance. "Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan had enough experience with CENTO to have arrived at some fundamental conclusions regarding the ability of the alliance to satisfy certain of their basic interests (Gale archives, 2020). Those Interests are, Pakistan had concerns regarding the West increasing tilt towards its arch-rival India, and their silence on the Kashmir cause. While Turkey was disturbed over the Cyprus issue and Iran was anxious over the bloody coup in Iraq.

This was also admitted by the USA State Department in their official correspondence, in one secret cable it was observed that "Pakistan was deeply disappointed at the USA and UK to support for

India the 1962 confrontation with China. Turkey felt let down by this same CENTO (and NATO) allies in the 1963 Cyprus crisis. Iran was frequently disappointed by British and American Arab policies (Gale archives, 2020). But all three were indisposed to lead any new political adventure that could cause resentment of the West against them. However, Pakistan's unrelenting demand leads them towards building a private alliance, RCD. Nonetheless, they did it with a cognizant approach, not to disenchant their friendship with the Western countries.

Identity and Interests

For Pakistan, RCD was much more than just an organization. "Pakistan was particular, wished to improve relations with the Soviet Union, and its other neighbor. However, the tie with CENTO made moves in this direction more difficult (DO, 1964). Pakistan since its establishment was in search of Identity formation. One such attempt to appease the Arab world was gone sour, due to the notion on the part of the Arab states that Pakistan was interested in acquiring a leadership role. In 1958, Pakistan's, a civilian government was replaced by the army in a coup. The new army regime under General Ayub Khan tried to overhaul the domestic and foreign policies of the state according to his political design. Being a self-proclaimed modernist who has a firm belief in the development of the country, he started a reformed program in state institutions. On one occasion, the President of Pakistan, General Ayub appealed to the county's powerful clergy and encouraged them to "interpret Islam in ways that would help the country's development agenda" (Behcet, 2009, p. 642).

The new Pakistani regime has another task to accomplish, to ascertain the identity of the state. "The state did not, however, adopted a clear policy regarding Islam until 1958 when the military under the command of General Muhammad Ayub Khan took over and proceeded to resolve many of the anomalies that had confounded state formation" (DO, 1964) For Pakistan RCD was a panacea for most its predicaments. It could end its wandering for identity search, mitigate its economic difficulties, and provide its defense umbrella against regional adversaries. "The factors which contributed to the success of RCD can also be counted for its establishment. Identity of faith, geographical contiguity, harmony in political outlook, powerful cultural affinity, and a common historical background are some of the numerous factors which unite these states" (Behcet, 2009, p. 640). Besides Pakistan, no other member state of RCD was passionate to devise another

organization when they had other options as well; but they had to surrender before Pakistan's wish due to many factors.

Achievements of RCD

In spite, is not being a formal military organization, its leadership, promised to help each other in times of crisis, and they reiterated this commitment on various occasions. For example, the Shah of Iran told to Pakistan that they have a shared destiny and they have "to stand by you in good and bad days" (Morning News, 1967). These were not hollow statements but in reality, when Pakistan had bad days with India over the war of 1965 and 1971, Iran helped Pakistan. Similar pledges were showed by the Turkish authorities, Turkey President Cevdet Sunay said that "Turko-Pakistan relations had reached a level of far above of those alliances" (Dawn, 1967) Turkey also supported Pakistan, morally, militarily, and financially during both wars. By and large, RCD remains a developmental organization, and by the end of 1970, it completed 13 different, industrial projects. "RCD is fundamentally a "micro-regional economic organization and its main objective is to accelerate the process of economic development" (Nye, 1971, p. 21-54). RCD was an attractive organization; many sectors could be exploited for the betterment of the following countries masses "the economic achievements of RCD were modest" (Gale archives, 2020). But it was unsuccessful to achieve any substantial growth in trade and development among the member states. It can be used for internal stability and development within the territories of its members that could be a role model for other regions. It might be a future like the EU, but it failed to attain its goals. "The RCD Planning Council, "studies the development plans and production potentials of the countries of the region. It makes proposals regarding the harmonization of the national development plans in the wider interest of accelerated regional collaboration" (Government of Pakistan, p. 3). Most principles of the RCD were acceptable to everyone because there was no formal agreement on security and political engagements. Perhaps the most tangible and practical forum that so far Pakistan gained in its relationship with the Muslim world was the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD). Because in the past "Pakistani overtures to the Arabs had not been reciprocated" (Gale archives, 2020). This might be the outcome of the non-Arab Muslim countries distancing themselves from the Arab world to create their group. They were also frustrated with the CENTO, which failed to fulfill their rudimentary requirements of security and economic development. A consequential result of the earlier failed pacts was a developmental and Economic organization

was the need of the time. The main idea behind RCD was to speed up domestic growth, as well as development through the dynamic and continued regional partnership among the member states. In this regard, RCD's communiqué affirmed that "the new organization would operate without damaging its members, activities within other regional organizational" (Behcet, 2009, p. 644).

The international environment at that time was furthermore viable for regional alliances. It was also because America and Russia were edging towards normalization, which reduces the importance of military pacts. Although, RCD was not a military pact, apparently to appease big powers for any objection in the formation and to attract alienated Muslim countries to make them a part of this pact. RCD countries aim to engage other regional Muslim states in the organization. Among those states, Afghanistan was on the priority list to include in the organization.

RCD makes it clear that it will welcome "the members would be open the consideration of the participation of other regional countries" (FCO, 1967). For this purpose, Afghanistan was a natural choice, its proximity, being a Muslim country, and being in the vicinity of Russia that all fulfilled the basic criteria that it should be a part of RCD. "The first suggestion that Afghanistan should join the new grouping was made by President Ayub Khan, when he paid a formal visit to Kabul, en route to Tehran and Ankara, early in July 1964" (FCO, 1967) but they decline to be a part of RCD because they thought "Pakistan had strongly hoped that Afghanistan would accede, but RCD seemed to close in appearance to CENTO" (Gale archives, 2020).

But Afghanistan was much conscious about RCD formation. It still has to apprehend the real motive of RCD. Again, it did not want to dispel any impression, both to Russia and America about its commitment to any regional or global arrangements. In this regard, the British ambassador to Kabul, assessment report was quite appropriate, he reported that "Afghanistan did not want closer practicable ties with Iran and Pakistan on RCD" (FCO, 1967) There were many reasons for what Afghanistan stay away from formally joining RCD. It doesn't want to lose its neutrality gestures in diplomacy; again its internal affairs were not suitable for new regional alignments. It also doesn't want to instigate its powerful neighbor Soviet Union's wrath against it and last but not the least "The Pashtunistan problem is still at least formally an issue with Pakistan" (DO, 1964) and has much reservation to be a partner of Pakistan in any regional alliance. However, in such an

odd situation, still, there was a hope that Afghanistan might sometimes join the group. It all depends on RCD's performance and direction "If RCD manages to build up a reputation both for success and independence of the West" (FCO, 1967) other nations might join it.

There are many scopes for further collaboration among these three countries that CENTO missed to achieve, because of the misunderstanding and divergence of interests among the members. The main objectives of RCD that were propagated were "to collaborate on national projects in the fields of communications, agriculture, industry, mineral resources, education, health, regional development and to strengthen this collaboration by technical cooperation" (DO, 1964) failed to realize. Because RCD countries tried to convince the non-Arab Muslim countries and particularly Afghanistan that was a natural part of this regional design. But they failed to win the Afghan government's trust. The Arab states saw this agreement, an extension of imperialists disguise to overthrow the rising forces of Arab unity" (Burke, 1991, p.306)

Problems between the Partners

There were some cleavages among the RCD partners that were not so visible but create hindrances in the performance of the organization. Shah of Iran was young and an ambitious monarch but at the same time a frightened member of the organization. He was vigilantly looking at all the movements of the regional players that might be a threat to his political future. "Nevertheless, it has created a regional sub-system within which the member states make decisions by way of "splitting the differences" (Ernst, 1966, p.100).

In this regard, he was fearful of Arab Ba'ath party antimonarchy rhetoric. He was still in the trauma of regime change in Iraq. This ousted the government in a bloody coup. In RCD he saw a hope to alienate member states from the radical Arab countries and leaders whom he saw a looming danger for his power. Therefore, any gesture of goodwill between Shah's friends and suspected enemies takes up the Iranian government very seriously. This can be assessed when normalcy returned to Pak-Egypt's relationship. "The disquiet began as the Shah saw Khan increasing looking to radical Arab revolutionary regimes such as that in Nasser's pro-Soviet Egypt an anathema to the Shah as inspirational movements worthy of Pakistan's admiration and perhaps, even, as collaborators"(Alex,2015,p56) He did not stop here and send a strong message to Pakistan's president, "It

instructed the Iranian ambassador, General Hassan Pakravan, to go and see Ayub Kahn and asked him, ‘why is it that Pakistan always turns to Iran when it has material needs but holds instead 1 00,000 man rallies for Nasser of Egypt?’(Alex, 2015, p56)

India and the Persian Gulf are important for Pakistan and Iran respectively in their foreign policy objectives. Both Pakistan and Iran frequently used these sensitivities to balance their relationship with each other. If Iran has some objection with Pakistan, it let jump to soothe its relationship with India, to give a message to Pakistan. Similarly, if Pakistan gets annoyed with Iran, it starts to close its relationship with the Gulf States. “The Arab question continued to generate friction between Islamabad and Tehran, soon after the 1967 war, the Pakistani media began to refer to the Persian Gulf as the Arabian Gulf” (Alex, 2015, p56). Such incidences paralyze the RCD to accomplish the basic goals for that it was formed. Turkey officially acknowledged these shortcomings during the Regional Planning council meeting in 1967 and shared their thought “Although we have achieved closer cooperation and a better understanding, we are yet to see the concrete results of our joint efforts” (FCO, 1967). Many other factors contributed to the slow pace of the organization, lack of funds for ambitious projects, administrative difficulties to efficiently run the affairs were some obstacles.

After contemplating these deterrents, the British Foreign Office assumed that “it would be very difficult indeed for RCD to make much concrete progress in the economic field at the time” (FCO, 1967) RCD went through many phases since its formation in 1964 and ultimately landed as ECO in 1991. In its first 12 years, its performance was not much satisfactory, just advancing some industrial projects and treaties, it gained nothing. The main objective of the organization to liberalize the trade in the intra-region remained unsuccessful. In 1976 another futile attempt was made to reactivate the organization by making amendments and declarations in the basic documents. These efforts were instituted in the Izmir treaty and adopted as a new framework to invigorate RCD. “Since the first 12 years of applications were unsatisfactory, the three heads of state (Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan) held a summit in Izmir on 22 April 1976 made amendments to the declaration of 22 July 1964” (Behcet, 2009, p.657). But these exertions once again failed to get desired goals. It was unable to provide any workable format to increase trade and let even any agreeable mechanism for the utilization of resources within the region.

Again there was a divergence of interests among the member states that creates a hurdle to utilize it in full capacity. Nevertheless, RCD remained on paper until 1978, and then regional political upheavals make it inactive. “However, it remained in operation up to the end of 1978, but then lapsed into dormancy from 1979 to 1984” (Behcet, 2009, p.657). This time Iran was the reason for the deactivation as well as the motivator to revive it again for its reasons. The political disorder in Iran, the ouster of Shah, and the arrival of the Religious regime under Khomeini reshape the RCD. In new regional alignment, Pakistan got closer towards Sunni Saudi Arabia, a regional and political rival of Iran. This leads to the over-sensitive and conscious clergy administration in Iran away from RCD.

However, Iran's internal engagements and war with neighboring Iraq proved the immediate cause for the demise of RCD. “Undoubtedly, the political and economic instability in Iran following the 1979 revolution and the ensuing war with Iraq were major factors in the demise of the regional organization” (Bhatti, 1995) Iran's isolation in the international political arena due to its regime radical and anti-West policies ultimately compelled it to come back in the fold of regional arrangements. The death of Khamenei, the demise of the USSR, and the emergence of Central Asian Republics regenerated the RCD into ECO. “Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey restored the organization, renamed the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) (Behcet, 2009, p.657). To accommodate the new countries in the fold and to revitalize the organization, new changes were introduced to make it more acceptable and viable in the new regional and global perspectives. “Following the amendments in the Treaty of Izmir, ECO was fully launched in early 1991” (Hussain, 1992, p.4) However, after its establishment, RCD remained in the phase of issuing communiqué, organizing conferences, and printing shallow leaflets. There were several reasons overdue the successes of RCD performance, deficiency of proper resources to implement the over-ambitious projects, then there were also difficulties in reconciling the various contradictory interests and claims of the member states. Both on political and economic grounds the idea of RCD was weak. On political grounds, except Pakistan only at the start, the other two found no relevance presently with it. But gradually Pakistan felt too that RCD, in reality, failed to benefit it.

Pakistan's unfinished agenda

The RCD proved futile to deliver Pakistan, intended political and military backing against India. Most of the problems that must be solved, however, remained on paper. From 1958 to 1962 more than 98% of the overseas trade of RCD countries was with other countries of the world rather than among themselves. In terms of economic sectors, all RCD states have parallel economic conditions as well as common problems. All were underdeveloped countries and overwhelmingly dependent on the outdated agriculture sector. But even though they, initiated big goals "The first phase of industrialization, based on the production of consumer goods has entered the next phase of industrialization to produce intermediate and capital goods" (Sartaj, 1965, p.7). For example, till 1967, Pakistan's agriculture sector share in total GDP was 45%. Only Iran has some exceptions, thanks to its oil industry that contributed to its economy. They all were dependent on foreign aid and credit to meet their balance of payment difficulties and industrialization. Pakistan like any other developing country was coping with the same condition. Since its foundation, RCD's countries quickly stress that organizational activities are only restricted to cultural and economic fields. RCD was an important symbol for regional collaboration among members outside the old cold war alliances network. Since its foundation, RCD's countries quickly stress that organizational activities are only restricted to cultural and economic fields. RCD was an important symbol for regional collaboration among members outside the old cold war alliances network. But RCD failed to answer the foreign policy needs of Pakistan and other member states due to many factors that limit its usefulness. In general RCD's states never really break their relationship with CENTO. Turkey and Iran's military and economic strength create the impression in the Middle East countries that RCD is an extension of CENTO's unfulfilled dreams of the Western hegemony in the region.

Arab countries suspect the RCD countries' move and never accepted them as a political entity. The theory that Pakistan can use the Turkish and Iranian support to address its imbalance with rival India also failed the test during the 1965 and 1971 Wars. A joint meeting of Iran and Turkey was arranged in Ankara after 9 days starting in the September 1965 war. The joint statement was interesting, it reads, 'declaring their readiness to participate in a peace force if decided by the UNO. This means any independent intervention on part of RCD partners was categorically rejected. Even the military and material support from these countries was limited to small arms and ammunition

in little quantity and did not play any significant role to culminate the war. The Turkish declared that they are keeping the army only for the Cyprus issue. However, it was a rare occasion when any RCD member country gets assistance during the conflict, and Pakistan has the most military and political gain from the regional cooperation. It has been noticed that the political importance of RCD was compromised due to each member state's unwillingness to support each other. It was partly because every country found powerful friends outside the Middle East, who promised to support them in their cause. The relationship was further complicated by the disputes that erupted time and again, between Pakistan and Iran, and between Turkey and Iran.

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