

Militancy in Pakistan through Constructivist's Lens

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Abstract

Despite the ostensible relevance of the realist context to South Asia, nonetheless, a profound analysis by post-positivist critiques of mainstream international Relations (IR) highlight the epistemological, ontological, and methodological flaws innate in the rationalist theories (including realism) that have conventionally controlled the arena. The critiques of main IR theories vis-à-vis the nature of irregular warfare, apply nowhere more penetratingly than South Asian region such as Pakistan, Afghanistan and India where the non-state actors lay more focus on ideational forces to express their strength, instead of material forces of power and war. Constructivism underlines the prominence of identity, ideas, religion, history, culture, inter subjective connotations and it provides immense value to understand and analyze the violent extremism related to non-state actors. Moreover, Pakistan is suffering the worst kind of terrorism and insurgency especially since 9/11. This insurgency has undeniable linkages with trans frontier global militants' networks; thus making it exceedingly difficult to counter. On one side, Pakistan is upfront the terror groups like *Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan* (TTP) and on the other side US expects Pakistan to act more aggressively against the Afghan Taliban and Haqqany network. The phenomena require distinct social construct to tackle the issue of internal security vis-v-vis the international community's concerns. This paper will challenge dominant rationalist/realist frameworks and incorporate constructivist insights and explain the enduring conflict with reference to the 'intangible' forces that give the material face of the conflict meaning.

Introduction

"A gun in the hands of a friend is a different thing from one in the hands of an enemy, and enemy is social, not material, in relationship."
(Schonberg, 2009)

During the Cold War, the internal wars, insurrections and counterinsurgencies were mostly deliberated through the lens of political realism. Yet, in the post-Cold War period, other theories such as constructivism have challenged the realist perspectives on the nature of irregular warfare.

This article intends to explicate and outline the context and academic repertoire of constructivist approach in the broad spectrum of the violent extremism being unleashed by non-state violent actors. It will be contended that constructivism understanding of irregular warfare are wide apart from the mainstream IR theories. The paper goes in the sequence as: Firstly, it examines constructivism followed by emphasizing the value of constructivism by way of a comparative analysis with the leading rationalist/ materialist theories of IR—predominantly neo-liberalism and neo-realism. It will further make sense of constructivists application on the role of violent non-state actors, who spearhead the insurgencies and terrorism. Secondly, and utmost importantly, a definite case for the application of constructivism to the violent extremism is by moving beyond a general theoretical debate and establishing how a constructivist conceptualization can be applied to examination of the protracted conflict in Pakistan's western frontiers adjoining Afghanistan. It will be followed another piercing question as why is Pakistan being blamed to harboring and providing sanctuaries the Afghan insurgents in its territory? Do Pakistan's possess differential treatment understanding of the militants' networks targeting Pakistan vis-a-vis those who have waged insurgency in Afghanistan?

The Relevance of Constructivism

The anarchic structure of the global system (realist paradigm) cannot sufficiently explain the occurrence of insurgencies and terrorism; neither can rationalist illuminate the growth and decline of revolutionary insurgent movements, guerilla organizations, or the global terrorist networks. The Cold War was a structure of collective knowledge that directed the relations between the great powers for around forty years (Wendt, 1995, p. 73) but with the demise of the Cold War, the mainstream IR failing to comprehend the cause of such collapse, the constructivism found its place in the vacuum; and emerged as a powerful rival of rationalist 'neo'-realist/liberal approaches (Katzenstein, Keohane &Krasner, 1998; Checkel,2004, p.229). It will be argued that constructivism is a progressive research program with rich logical and practical significance. Constructivism is not a consistent or uniform theoretical approach. Some theorists hold a 'conventional' epistemology, while other constructivists adopt are 'critical' approach that use an interpretivist strategy. Besides, postmodern alternatives of constructivism also exist(Hopf, 1998, pp.182,184;Farrell,2002,

p.56).Notwithstanding these differences, the contending approaches share numerous fundamental ontological norms and assumptions. The association between the human actions and the material forces and in the manner these two interrelate hinge on epistemic and normative understandings of the material world (Adler,1997, p.322). Thus, ontologically constructivism is about the social construction of the social world(Guzzini,2000). This has important consequences for international relations.

Generally, two core assumptions are identified (Checkel, 1998, pp.326-327, Ruggie,1998; Jackson & Sorenson, 2003, pp.255-257). First, the building blocks of international reality are based on ideational or social as well as material and constructivists analyze the actions of states or non-state actors in these settings of international realm. Undoubtedly, meanings are attached to the material structures by the social setting through which they are understood. The distribution of power may influence states' intentions, but will also be subject to the inter-subjective identifications and expectations, on the "distribution of knowledge," that establish their formations of identity of self and other (Wendt, 1992, pp. 396-397). If the public forgets what a military is, the powers and practices of soldiers and officers terminate; if Pakistan and India ignore the existence of Kashmir dispute, the thaw in the relations will melt. It is collective meanings that constitute the structures which organize our actions. Likewise, USA perceives Britain's nuclear arsenal markedly differently than the North Korean nuclear weapons as the former is allay and the later as a threat. These social structures are built on the shared knowledge, beliefs, ideas, norms, and ethics and these structures produce social practices such as diplomacy and war—that cast have the most dominant influence on international relations. Social structures are also supposed to construct the identities and in turn the interests of actors (Finnemore and Sikkink (2001), 392-393; Lapid (1996), 7-8; Wendt (1992), 398). According to Wend (1995), social structures involves the actors in a situation and the nature of their relationships, whether cooperative or conflictual. Every so often actors fail to define their interests without first getting to know 'who they are.' Their socially constructed self-identity and even their formation of the 'Other(s)' thus notifies their interests and leads their actions and strategies (Cederman and Daase,2006, p.129). A security dilemma, for example, is a social structure derived of inter subjective understandings in which states are so mistrustful that they make worst-case assumptions about each other's'

intentions (Deutsch, et al., 1957). Social structures exist, not in actors' heads nor in material capabilities, but in practices.

The second core constructivist assumption concerns the relationship between agents and structures. Human agents (or states) and social structures as mutually founded in the logic that though human agents do not exist autonomously from their social setting and shared systems of meaning (structure); and social structures themselves are shaped and altered through the informed practices of agents (human and states) (Risse,2000, p.5; Checkel, 1998, pp.326-327; Wendt,1987; Farrell,2002, p.50; Reus-Smit,2009, p.221). For example, the social practice of American military intervention persuades other states to build a structure based on the inter subjective meanings branding and classifying US character and identity as an 'imperialist power'. In another example, Pakistan's neighbouring countries- both china and India share a comparable balance of military power; but Pakistan regard India as an adversary and China as an all-weather friend; clearly the structure (enmity) are built through the informed practice (border Dispute-Kashmir) by the agents(states).The two aforementioned core constructivist assumptions—the socially constructed nature of international reality and the mutually constitutive relationship between structures and agents —dispute the materialism and methodological individualism of mainstream IR, particularly neo-liberalism and neo-realism (Checkel,1998, pp.326-327).

Realism, constructivism and Irregular warfare

Realism, with its focus on the power struggle amongst the states guided by the need to either survive or acquire more power in an anarchic world offered little elucidation for the non-state violent actors emerging in post 9/1 era. Liberalism, that put great value on the international institutions, peace, trade and democracy within the international system provided no rationalization for the rise of groups motivated by religion (Rosendorff & Todd Sandler, 2005). All non-state violent actors are not state: however, they are actors just like state is an actor in the international realm.

Mearsheimer (1994) argues that handling states "like billiard balls of varying size" is not adequate to explain this reality. Distribution of military power and anarchy do not predetermine states' distinctiveness and relations among them. If a state has strong military power, mean threatening power or protecting power

for other states. Nuclear weapon in the hand of United States has different meaning for Israel from nuclear weapon in the hand of Pakistan. Though military competences and distribution of power continually turn into dominant features, these cannot effectively comprehend state to state relations as well as amongst states and non-states actors.

Constructivism better explains and help the complex irregular warfare and conflictual dynamics is because other mega theories fail to relate to the conceptual domain of insurgencies and terrorism. Such conflicts in the post 9/11 world posed greater challenges and demanded better explanation to the distinct nature of prevailing warfare. The 9/11 attacks prompted the importance of understand culture, religion, identity, and ideas so as to understand the motives behind the emerging global insurgency. Shaha (2011) cited John Mearsheimer that "My theory and virtually all realist theories don't have much to say about transnational actors." In particular, realism being a dominant theory to understand conflict or power dynamics, has failed to analyze and predict such asymmetrical conflicts as it had dealt primarily with relations among states. It is the constructivist terrain that explains the ideationally-motivated actions of the non-state actors, that ultimately affect the relations of the states. For example, TTP and other militant groups in Pakistan are able to coax states to take measures that they would never do under normal circumstances. Therefore, without having the conventional state craft paradigm, the non-state violent actors established shadow government and achieved state like powers. State without any of the traditional physical or institutional assets of statehood. For example, the Mumbai blast in 2008 by the terrorists brought the two nuclear power, India and Pakistan on the brink of war. India accused the Pakistan of supporting the perpetrators of the blasts, which Pakistan totally brushed aside. In this case, though the militants didn't have any institutional strength to affect the relations of various states however, it had the power of idea as well as material (physical explosion) to influence the behavior of states.

Narrative and perception are being constructed by individuals or states, as the mostly cited cliché that 'One person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter' retells that the characterization of terrorism is a social construct. The connotation of insurgency and terrorism' varies according to the situation, culture, ideology and relations with other states (Stump, 2009). Terrorism and

insurgency does not exist outside our subjective identifications. Constructivism just reminds us that terrorism is a social fact, 'which requires human institutions for its existence' (Searle, 1995). So as the Counterinsurgency has its own distinct manifestation and meaning, the Sri Lankan heavily kinetic approach of Counterinsurgency would neither be pragmatic nor is workable in Pakistan due to the insurgency so called spiritual nature and its porous border, transnational connections and sanctuaries.

In divergence to rationalists, whether liberals or realists, who uncover power within material capabilities of states, power in insurgencies is measured in terms of battling ideas, narratives and psychological edge over the people (Lynch, 2006, p.9). It's about socially constructing the battle field where the fight is conducted based on massive asymmetric pattern, which clearly goes in the favour of insurgents. Because if the insurgents blow up a school, the terror waves swim across tens of millions of people and public outcry is massive for protecting every school. The variable of power in irregular warfare is not about killing enemy soldiers or occupying territories but winning hearts and minds and de-radicalizing the insurgents.

People act toward object, including other actors, on the basis of the meanings that are being carried by those objects. Similarly Wend (1992) believes that anarchy is socially constructed by individual states, based on their 'identities' and how they create their own security dilemmas. States' actions and perception towards enemies are different from the same towards friends because of the social connection of threat and friendship. For example, notwithstanding their structural position, Cuba carries different image for US military than Canada. Similarly, just as British nuclear arsenal has a different importance for the United States than do Soviet nuclear threat. In the same vein, responses of the state can vary in the context of the meaning that attaches to various militant groups. *Ikhwan-ul-Muslamin* and *Jundum Salam* carry different value to Indian than *Lashkar-e-Taiba* (LeT). Likewise, it has different approach and understanding of (BLF) and even TTP or Pakistani Taliban. For Pakistan, Indian's insurgencies of Naxalites, Mizoram and Kashmir has different connotation than Moro Islamic Liberation Front in Philippines or Red Brigades in Italy. CI operations also display distinct manifestations vis-à-vis the pattern of insurgencies and looming threat spectrum. Pakistan CI operations in various theaters of insurgencies

would vary in size, scale and approach according to the meaning and interpretation it offers.

Pakistan Internal Security dynamics and Constructivist Terrain

US support of irregular warfare and rebel forces in Afghanistan had sown the seeds of militancy in the whole region. Pakistan formed this new identity (Non-NATO Ally), through international social structure and domestic pressure of keeping Pakistan safe from external aggression. Moreover, Militant groups like Pakistani Taliban, the Afghan Taliban operate and maneuver in a conspicuously constructivist territory, where social construction, identity, persuasion, and discourse take precedence over material power, economic rationality, or efficacy of recognized international institutions. Afghan Taliban considers American in Afghanistan as an occupant force, therefore considers it a spiritual and national cause to fight the NATO forces. Indeed, their social construct of relationship with Pakistan would be significantly different for the reason that the meanings they attached to their relationship with Pakistan are much different from the one they attach with the US and NATO forces.

As far as Pakistan relations with Afghan Taliban before 9/11 are concerned, it was also framed in a constructivist paradigm. The perfect example of cooperative social security system in 1980 was observed with Pakistan supporting the seven groups of Mujahidin groups and later on in 1990s and established same cooperative social structure with Taliban. At the same time Pakistan had conflictual social contract with Afghan communist backed government in 1980s and early 90s. It is equally important now to establish cooperative social structure with all the neighboring states for the success of CI.

Pakistan had cooperative social structure with Afghan Taliban based on shared knowledge, material resources and practices. However, the same social structure became conflictual and Musharraf regime decided to see itself and others to analyze Pakistan's own practices and reassessment of cooperation Taliban keeping in view the changing international dynamics. The example of ex-president Musharraf of Pakistan is useful in this respect, since the Cold War was a highly conflictual social structure. Yet someone else in his place might have found a more aggressive solution to a decline in power. What is so important about the Musharraf regime is that it had the shrewdness to see how the Pakistan's own practices sustained the afghan war, and to undertake a

reassessment of American intentions. This is exactly what a constructivist would do, but not a neorealist, who would eschew attention to such social factors as naive and as mere superstructure.

In Pakistan's case, material world offered new meanings, some meanings were abducted from the changes in the material world, related with other meanings and finally new meanings were constructed. Resultantly, Pakistan had to reinvent its identity and inevitably transform its international role; subsequently had to follow the dictates of change in international order. The 9/11 explosion was an occurrence of material world and it had its meaning for the rest of the world (Lumsdaine, 1997). For Pakistan it signified the end of fraternity with Taliban. Pakistan was forced to take side internationally through the threat of material aggression and became part of global fight against terrorism as Non NATO ally. Since constructivism incorporates the space for non-state actors, therefore, both conflicting parties state or non-state actors formed new identities as we witnessed that Afghan Taliban fought Afghanistan against American and Afghan forces and whereas TTP and other militant groups were created to fight Pakistan.

Pakistan National Internal Security Policy (NISP) has identified 60 banned militant groups in Pakistan (Butt, 2014). These Pakistan's militant groups mostly don't fight each other and enjoy a relative peaceful co-existence between each other as Kin culture don't fight each other. It can be termed cooperative social structure. In the same line, Pakistan Counterinsurgency doctrine 'Nation Action Plan' (NAP) lays its foundations on the constructivist terrain because it recognizes that insurgency and terrorism is a social construction. NAP forbids the glorifications of terrorists is method of degrading the cause of insurgents and terrorists. By even calling the insurgents with the name of 'terrorists' undermine the basic cause of their movement which is either spiritual or revolutionary; thus socially constructing a theme and a narrative. Therefore, it can be argued that constructivism offers multiple explanations for various response to the insurgency and terrorism.

They are relentlessly using media as a weapon; orchestrate social constructions of terrorism and insurgency in FATA and rest of Pakistan. It is the TTP social construction paradigm that portrays Pakistan Army as infidels and hypocrites

who carry out atrocities against the innocent tribesmen. The main argument and theme that militants always project and advantage of is that Pakistan has sided with the American their war on Muslim world and therefore, it becomes the holy duty of every practicing Muslim to fight the US forces as well as their allies such as Pakistan. Social constructivism explains the phenomena of interactions between various non-state actors fighting on both sides of the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Similarly, the Pakistan Taliban's trans-frontiers links in Afghanistan and its marriage of convenience with the militants across the border in Afghanistan brings unimaginable pressure on Pakistan from the USA and other regional countries. It is sometime being seen as providing safe havens for some of the militants of Afghanistan. Though, it sounds outrageous in the back ground of the assessment by the US military that Afghan Taliban controlled or influenced 40 percent of Afghan territory in the wake of US draw down of 2014 (Gul, 2017). Not only the Afghan Taliban but Mullah Fazlullah, the head of TTP is being sheltered in Kunar province of Afghanistan by state and non-state actors at times. The Pakistan's military chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa, underscored that Pakistan will not get Afghan war into Pakistan's territory (Gul, 2017). Therefore, a natural question arises that why would they need hideouts in Pakistan if they have sufficient space and territory to hide and seek?

In analytical framework, Constructivist's interpretations are diverse. It is constructed through discursive power. While observing Pakistan response to insurgency, it was its discursive power, that it displayed different interpretations for the groups fighting on either side of Pak-Afghan border in post 9/11 era. Through its discursive power, Pakistan interpreted TTP and Haqqany group differently. The former is threatening and the latter is unthreatening; TTP is enemy and a terrorist organization whereas Haqqany group are not. These social identifications are not implied by material power or by the distribution of material power. Pakistan followed the strategic principles of Hartmann (1982) of 'conservation of enemies,' signifying that it is fair deal to minimize the enemies and engage those which are not source of direct threat; Pakistan Taliban are directly challenging the writ of government however, Afghan Taliban or Haqqany group are not. Due to the persistent cooperative social contract between TTP and Haqqany. Afghan Taliban and AQ, Pakistan Army had been unwittingly forced to

target all militants as well as denying them sanctuaries. From 2013 onwards General Raheel Sharif's claim of targeting militants without discrimination of good or bad Taliban shows that domestic pressure and critical self-reflection play dominant role in generating identities. The tremendous losses also persuaded Pakistan to have re-invent its identity(Hashim, 2017).

Similarly, a state may have numerous identities as hegemon or impartial power or colonized (Wendt, 1992, p.398). Identities are the foundation of interests. States pronounce their interests in the course of describing situation and circumstances(Hindess, 1989).It was contrasting to the neoliberals and neorealist school of thought who assume a distinct and relatively stagnant identity, whereas, Constructivists contend that states have several and vibrant identities. For example, the Trump administration's labeling Pakistan as deceitful country that houses "agents of chaos" and "the very terrorists" the U.S. military has been battling in Afghanistan is another form of giving identity to Pakistan (Gul, 2017). On the other side, Pakistan too brands US as an untrustworthy ally also leave Pakistan in the lurch in the time of crises. Now this is an attempt to reframe the identities in the sense that those who had been perceived to perform certain set of actions, should be given new identities. Untrustworthy ally is identity that both Pakistan and US had seemed to awarded each other owing to complex web of south Asian politics and China's factor.

According to Pakistani Senator Mushahid Hussain, instead of acknowledging Pakistan's "unprecedented" sacrifices in fighting terrorism, Washington's new Afghan strategy is nothing but the same old tactics of bullying and browbeating (Gul, 2017. This seems a step towards reinventing its identity and adding meaning to US doctrine towards Afghanistan and Pakistan and more importantly the growing Indian role in Afghanistan. Pakistan underscored that India cannot be a net security provider in the South Asia region when it has conflictual relationships with all its neighbours and is pursuing a policy of destabilizing Pakistan from the east and the west (Hashim, 2017).

Conclusion

Constructivists argue for the relative autonomy of ideas from material structures, and for the socially constructed nature of human institutions. Constructivists hold the view that the building blocks of international reality are ideational as well as material. Constructivists generally argue that ideas matter in a far richer sense than usually embraced by rationalist theories. This places a greater burden on the constructivist to understand the contours of spiritual insurgency and political discourse on its own terms.

In retrospection of last three decades in Pakistan and Afghanistan's political dynamics, it is evident that former USSR, USA and Pakistan had played its role in reconstruction of anarchy in the region as tool of its broad security policy. All the civil wars, proxy wars, insurgencies and CI were the product of conflictual social structure at the top, middle and lower levels. For example, USA deliberately allowed the privatization of war phenomena in Afghanistan and helped the Afghan Mujahidin in 1980s. The social construct of the narratives and identities were transformed with the passage of time especially after 9/11. Pakistan's counterinsurgency involves the battle of ideas, it's neither about conquering swathes of lands nor subjugating the masses but final success is measured through the perception of the population and not as some materialistic outcome. However, Pakistan remains on the horns of dilemma in terms of drawing balance between countering the insurgency in FATA region as well as keeping a check on the cross border movement through the vast border along Afghanistan. The US failures to counter the insurgency in Afghanistan eventually boil down to its excuse of not having the cooperative social structure with Pakistan. The unfriendly and precarious social structure between Afghanistan and Pakistan is prone to accelerate the intensity of insurgency in both countries if the right social construct is not built within the frame work of cooperative social structure which will ultimately pave the way of generating the appropriate identities.

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