



Citation for published version:

Aslam, W 2020, 'Pakistan's hard misplacement and the politics of regional identity', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, vol. 33, no. 4, pp. 542-554. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2020.1723060>

DOI:

[10.1080/09557571.2020.1723060](https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2020.1723060)

Publication date:

2020

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication](#)

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Cambridge Review of International Affairs on 3/3/2020, available online: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09557571.2020.1723060>

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Pakistan's hard misplacement and the politics of regional identity

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Abstract:

Pakistan has been a misplaced state from its birth. Created as a separate homeland for the Muslims of the Subcontinent, it considers itself to be a misfit in a multi-faith, South Asian region dominated by India. This paper analyses Pakistan's misplaced identity utilising the layered model of identity change. The model helps us focus on various foreign-policy roles that Pakistan performs. The deepest layer (most resistant to change) denotes Pakistan's identity as a sovereign and independent state, which outlines the roles of an alliance partner and a nuclear power. The middle layer represents the identity of Pakistan as an insecure state with the roles of a 'chancer' state, a regional intermediary and the regional leader. The top (and least sedimented) layer points to Pakistan's identity as a Muslim state, giving birth to the hoped-for roles of the leader of the Muslim world, an Islamic crusader, and the defender of the faith. However, Pakistan has been unable to gain acknowledgement for these roles either in South Asia or elsewhere. The country's attempts to reimagine a cognitive home for itself in the Middle East have also not come to fruition. It continues to be a misplaced state, cognitively dissociated from its geographic home.

Keywords: Pakistan, role, Arabisation, identity, subcontinent

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1. Introduction

Pakistan is the most misplaced state in the South Asian region and one of the most misplaced states in the world. Though located in South Asia, Pakistan's trade connections with its neighbours (and the rest of the region) are minimal. Its exports to South Asia accounted for just under 13% of its total exports in 2016 (World Integrated Trade Solution, 2016). Pakistan's trade figures with India (a global economic giant) are also very small, with imports and exports accounting for 0.35% and 0.17%, respectively, of Pakistan's global trade figures (World Integrated Trade Solution, 2016). Similar to other cases of hard misplacement, the country's citizenry is almost completely cut off from its immediate neighbours as well as the wider South Asian region. That is complicated by the fact that it is near impossible for a Pakistani citizen to obtain an Indian or Afghanistan visa as both countries suspect Pakistan for its sponsorship of terrorism. The number of Pakistanis visiting Iran, consisting mostly of Shia pilgrims, is slightly higher. However, reciprocal visits by Iranians to Pakistan are few and far between.

A country almost completely cut off from South Asia, Pakistan has occasionally attempted to find a cognitive home in the Persian Gulf. A large number of Pakistanis visit Gulf destinations such as Dubai, Mecca, Medina and Istanbul every year. The closeness between Pakistan and the Persian Gulf can be explained through religious and socio-cultural linkages between the two sides. However, that closeness does not make the Gulf countries welcome Pakistan as one of their own.

Like any other country, Pakistan also performs several roles that are rooted in different layers of its identity. However, this paper argues that most of these roles have not received acknowledgement from Pakistan's neighbouring countries, the Muslim world or the wider

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international community. That has led to Pakistan emerging as a case of hard misplacement: appearing as a misfit within its geographical region but unable to find a permanent cognitive home elsewhere in the world.

The paper is structured in the following way: relying on the layered model of Hagstrom & Gustafsson (2015: 6), we study three layers of Pakistani identity, from the most deeply rooted (most sedimented) to the most superficial one (least sedimented). The second section studies Pakistan's most deeply rooted identity linked to its status as a sovereign and independent state. That identity gives birth to several roles (e.g. an alliance partner or a responsible nuclear power). The third section looks at Pakistan as an insecure state, which leads it to adopt the roles of a 'chancer' state, regional intermediary or a regional leader. Pakistan's Islamic identity is seen as the top-level layer and it is discussed in the fourth section. That section examines Pakistan's roles of Islamic crusader, defender of faith or the leader of the Muslim world. The conclusion asserts that Pakistan's failure to gain acknowledgement of any of its roles makes its leaders depict it as an exceptional, *sui generis*, case. We conclude that Pakistan's misplacement is set to continue, being sparked by, and resulting in, a lack of association between its regional and cognitive homes.

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2. The concept of misplaced statehood¹:

Before we study Pakistan's hard misplacement, it ~~would be~~ useful to make links with the conceptual paper of the Special Issue [to understand the phenomenon of misplaced statehood \(Aslam et al. 2020\)](#). ~~Every state in the world, generally states believe that they belongs to a specific location on the world map or to a region. This sense of belonging is~~

¹ This section is composed of the excerpts from the provides a brief overview of the theoretical framework concerning the phenomenon of misplaced statehood. For a comprehensive exposition of the phenomenon, see [theoretical paper of this Special Issue](#). For more, see Aslam et al. 2020 in this issue.

as relational as it is material or geographic (Aslam et al. 2020, 2). However, we also observe that certain states appear to be misfits in the regions where they are located. There can be several reasons for this. Perhaps these states feel that, cognitively speaking, they belong in a part of the world that is different from their geographical location. There can also be situations where their neighbouring states treat them as ‘aliens’ (Aslam et al. 2020, 2).

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When it comes to formally conceptualising this phenomenon, we consider a state to be misplaced when it faces a dissonance (at the cognitive level) between its physical geographic location and the cognitive location where it considers itself to be located. This dissonance commonly results in a mismatch between the way a state perceives its national aspirations and how other states in the region view it (Aslam et al. 2020, 7). This mismatch between the Self and Others’ perceptions is often manifested through the roles that Self and Others play or attempt to play. It is not just a state’s own national identity forces that lead it to being misplaced. The part played by the Others’ actions, which are linked to the external identity dimension, is also critical to learning about a state’s misplacedness in a region.

One of the key characteristics of a misplaced state relates to the incongruity between Self and Other’s perceptions in a certain region that comes into being through the interaction of role and counter-role. We often witness how misplaced states experience the processes of ‘role differentiation’ that can just as easily be initiated from outside these states as from within (Aslam et al. 2020, 8). The phenomenon of misplaced statehood is closely related to the recognition claims that remain unacknowledged. The extent to which misplaced states experience such claims vary due to many factors, such as historical conflicts or trauma a state

may have faced (e.g. colonialism). That is why it is important to consider how the degree of such states' 'misplacedness' varies. We can locate misplaced states on a spectrum ranging from 'well-placed' states at one end to extremely misplaced states at the other end. States situated in between these two extremes experience 'soft misplacement' (Aslam et al. 2020, 11).

We characterise Pakistan as an example of hard misplacement (Israel and apartheid South Africa are some of the other examples of such states). These states are known for persistently voicing dissatisfaction with their regional location; they try hard to distance themselves from their geographical regions. We assert that in such cases 'misplacement is not primarily reflected through mere manifestations of cognitive aspiration but can also affect interstate relations at a deeper, fundamental level to the extent that regressive regional relations become institutionalised through diplomatic and even military security practices' (Aslam et al. 2020, 13). A cursory glance at the history of such states reveals that such extreme examples are rare, and they experience a complete cognitive disconnect from the geographical region they are located in.

This project relies on Hagstrom & Gustafsson's (2015) 'layered model' to develop an analytical framework through which to analyse misplaced states. We assert that change and continuity can be best understood if identity is viewed as layered 'and [is] simultaneously constituted on mutually interacting levels of intersubjective meaning making' (Hagstrom & Gustafsson 2015: 6). Hagstrom & Gustafsson (2015: 6) contend that 'identity change in the less institutionalized layers interact and builds upon layers that are more institutionalized.' More institutionalised layers are more "solidly sedimented and more difficult for actors to politicise and change"' (Wæver 2002: 31 quoted in Hagstrom & Gustafsson 2015: 6). In

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other words, ‘more sedimented layers of identity construction can enable different identity constructs in less sedimented layers and even sharp turns in identity construction, but changes in the latter can also affect the former’ (Hagstrom & Gustafsson 2015: 6).

The ‘layered model’ is useful as it helps us observe how the location of roles related to misplacement as well as the role behavior related to this phenomenon unfurl (Aslam et al. 2020, 25). Self and Others interact in these layers, and such an interaction is critical to understanding ‘role and counterrole interaction’ that helps in mapping the phenomenon of misplacement. We utilize role theory instead of the concept of identity to build our analytical framework; the latter does not help us understand motivational dispositions of an actor whereas roles symbolise the external faces of an actor’s identity. The three-layered model of identity mentioned earlier helps us understand the processes of role-location and the way certain states perform different roles in different settings and situations.

3. Base layer: Pakistan as a sovereign and independent state

Pakistan came into being in 1947 as a result of the partition of the Indian subcontinent. Since its foundation, its leadership has held that India has attempted to weaken Pakistan. As President Ayub said in 1967:

[T]he cause of our major problems is India’s inability to reconcile herself to our existence as a sovereign, independent state. The Indian attitude can be explained only in pathological terms. The Indian leaders have a deep hatred for the Muslims... From the beginning, India was determined to make things difficult for us... it threat[ened] [the] diversion and stoppage of river waters flowing into our territory. Contrary to all agreements and principles India forcibly occupied a major part of the State of Jammu and Kashmir and concentrated her forces there, thus posing a constant threat to our security. At the back of it all was India’s ambition to absorb Pakistan or turn her into a satellite state (Khan 1967, 115).

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Pakistan was also challenged by Afghanistan in 1947, which believed that the former was created on its territory. Similarly, China also refused to acknowledge Pakistan's sovereignty over certain territories in the north (such as Hunza) from the beginning of the 1950s. It claimed that their rulers had long acknowledged Chinese suzerainty over these areas (Small 2015, 21).

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Domestically, the state lacked a large industrial base, depriving it of the capital needed to shore up its defence. Two of its four ethnic groups (Baluchis and Pashtuns) had loyalties beyond its boundaries and identified little with the new state (Zaidi 2009, 37). These challenges laid the foundation of an obsession with its sovereignty and territorial integrity from the very beginning. Due to its traumatic birth and difficulties with its neighbours (some of which continue to this day), Pakistanis seldom identify with the rest of South Asia. As President Ayub (quoted in Zaidi 2010, 2) stated in 1961:

Pakistan is in a particular position of having cultural, historical and spiritual ties with the Middle East, Europe and North America. This rich heritage is itself a national asset and provides an ideal starting point for teaching international understanding and a realisation of our membership in a comity of nations.

A key role crafted by Pakistan to ensure its sovereignty and territorial integrity was that of being an alliance partner. Given India's tilt towards the USSR during the 1950s, Pakistan looked towards the West to find allies. In a visit to the US in 1961, President Ayub portrayed the country as 'the only people who will stand by [the US]' if needed (quoted in Talbot 2009, 172). It joined the Southeast Asian Treaty Organisation and Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) (Moskalenko 1974, 275). Its leaders believed that Pakistan was

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‘compelled’ to join these alliances because it was ‘involved in a bitter and prolonged struggle for her very existence and survival’ (Khan 1967, 116).

Pakistan’s conception of itself as an alliance partner has not been validated by its Western allies, nor by China, and none of these have ever provided help in its wars with India. Fears over its security led Pakistan to strive for nuclear capability in the 1970s. It emerged as an overt nuclear power in 1998. However, the country failed to seek acknowledgement for that role either from the international community. It was placed under severe sanctions after the tests. Where the West has recently acknowledged India as a responsible nuclear power (visible from the signing of a civil-nuclear deal between the US and India in 2006), the case of Pakistan is different. After the disclosures in the early 2000s that it had supplied nuclear technology to Libya and North Korea, Pakistan [has been viewed](#) with serious mistrust by the international community (especially the great powers) [and its legitimacy as a responsible nuclear power has been in doubt.](#)

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4. Middle layer: Pakistan as an insecure state

Pakistan was born an insecure state in 1947 (Fair 2010). Its leadership has asserted throughout history that Pakistanis have been the victims of the ‘evil’ designs of Hindus and their Western masters. In the discussions concerning the pre-partition India, school textbooks in Pakistan portray Hindus [as in cahoots](#) with the British rulers ‘to humiliate and suppress their Muslim subjects by all means at their disposal. The [British] showered favours upon the Hindus, while they denied all opportunities for education, employment, wealth and progress to the Muslims’ (Saigol 2005, 1018). A recent Pakistan Studies textbook for undergraduate students (quoted in Mohammad-Arif 2005, 151) asserts that the Muslims

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of the Subcontinent created Pakistan in the face of a united opposition by all major communities:

The Hindus and the Sikhs accelerated their pace for Muslim mass killing. So, when Pakistan emerged on the map of the world, communal riots were on the increase: Religion was employed to justify the raging storm of resentment and hatred and to stimulate and glorify the atrocities against the followers of Islam.

Many Pakistanis believe that the British and the Indians colluded to deprive Pakistan of military hardware and economic resources, ensuring that the new state started its life on a weak footing (Sayeed 1964). The fact that Afghanistan was the only state that voted against Pakistan's membership of the UN further exacerbated Pakistan's insecurity. The victim identity got a further boost after East Pakistan became independent after a bloody civil war between the two wings in 1971. A Civics textbook for Class IX (quoted in Saigol 2005, 1027) shows it clearly:

India used the insurgents and miscreants and started a poisonous campaign against Pakistan all over the world. When India saw that it is achieving its nefarious designs, it attacked Pakistan..... So, finally East Pakistan became separate from Pakistan due to treason of Awami League (the party that created Bangladesh), and the Indian aggression. The whole Pakistani nation was tormented and writhing in the pain of this deep wound.

The book also specifies that the Indian plot to dismember Pakistan in 1971 had 'British sympathy' (Saigol 2005,1028). Another textbook for high schoolers claims that 'hiding the story of his two-century old sins, atrocities, and pillage,' the Hindu 'punished

innocent West Pakistanis for sins they had not committed' (quoted in Hoodbhoy and Nayyar 1985, 174).

Most Pakistanis believe that Indian animosity towards Pakistan continues until the present day, as India 'constantly endeavor[s] to harm Pakistan' (a textbook quoted in Durrani and Dunne 2009, 226). That identity of victimhood imparts a sense of a mission to Pakistan as one newspaper asserted that '[i]f the main concern of the Christian West is the containment of Chinese Communism, the main concern of Muslim Pakistan is the containment of militarist and militant Hinduism' (quoted in Syeed 1964, 746). A Pakistani leader declared that the

[t]hreat from India to our security and existence was both real and constant. Indian efforts in the field of foreign policy were all directed towards one aim, the isolation of Pakistan and its disintegration. We had done all that we could to convince India that we wanted to live in peace with her, but India could not accept the existence of a strong and independent Muslim State next door (Khan 1967, 117).

Importantly, none of Pakistan's allies came to its rescue in its different wars with India in 1948, 1965, 1971 and 1999 (Fair 2010). These developments made Pakistan deeply suspicious of its neighbours, the great powers and even the countries friendly to it. This Pakistani insecurity explains a number of roles that Pakistan has adopted in order to mitigate against this insecurity. These include the role of a 'chancer' state, the role of a regional intermediary and the role of the regional leader. Below we examine these roles and study the extent to which these roles have been granted legitimacy by its neighbours and beyond.

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Given its insecurity, Pakistan has often adopted **the role of a chancer state** – a state that has played double games on several occasions which has deepened its misplacement. For example, it chose to side with the US in 2001 when it decided to invade Afghanistan, but its ongoing alliance with the Afghan Taliban continues to concern the international community. Every American administration since the invasion of Afghanistan has criticised Pakistan for providing sanctuary to those hampering international efforts to stabilize the country.

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Similarly, Pakistan has been active in sponsoring Islamist militants in Indian-occupied Kashmir for decades. Haqqani (2005, 240) asserts that ‘if forced to summarize the key traits [of a Hindu]’ in the Pakistani mindset, ‘then the most appropriate would be a “presumptuous, persistent and devious” [person]. [Accordingly], the description of Hindus as devious justifie[s] dealing with them with similar deviousness’. Playing the role of a chancer state allows it to hedge its bets in what it sees as an uncertain and dangerous neighbourhood. That role is often condemned by the international community as an example of irresponsible **behaviour**. That has had a negative impact on Pakistan’s role location process in a region outside South Asia. Civil society groups in Pakistan have also criticised the country’s support of terrorist groups as it often results in **a blowback** within Pakistan. This highlights the state/society disjuncture in the country, typical of misplaced states.

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Whilst the country does not openly talk about its support of terrorists, it does try to portray itself as **a regional intermediary** between the US and a variety of militant groups active in Afghanistan. But that role has also failed to gain acknowledgement from Pakistan’s neighbours (Afghanistan and India) and the United States, none of whom trust it to be an impartial stakeholder genuinely interested in ridding the region of terrorism. Instead, Pakistan

has often been shunned in different contacts between the Taliban and the United States (BBC 2018).

Suspicion of India's intention has also led Pakistan to occasionally assert its regional leadership role in South Asia albeit without much success. The cancellation of the latest South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit, which was scheduled to be held in Islamabad in November 2016, is quite instructive in this regard (Rediff 2016). The summit was seen by Pakistan as an opportunity to brandish its leadership credentials in South Asia. However, India pulled out of the meeting after the September 2016 Uri attack in Kashmir that targeted its security forces, blaming Pakistan for being behind the incident. India's withdrawal was followed by Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bhutan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. Almost every country cited terrorism in South Asia as a reason for withdrawing from the meeting – although, like India, they did not blame Pakistan directly for supporting terrorism. The incident left Pakistan isolated once again, depriving it of any legitimacy for its bid to appear as a regional leader and depicting its hard misplacement.

5. Top layer: Pakistan – A Muslim state

Where there is a broad agreement among different stakeholders in Pakistan regarding its identities as a sovereign – as well as a victim – state, the country's identity as an Islamic state is undoubtedly the most contested and least sedimented. That contestation started before the creation of the state itself and continues through today. That is why we have specified it as the 'top' layer in Hagstrom & Gustafsson's (2015: 6) layered model of identity change. As this identity is least sedimented, different stakeholders have the opportunity to contest it more than the other identities, keeping open the avenues for change.

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Pakistan was created as a home for the region's Muslims and it was declared an Islamic republic in 1956. Studying the role of Islam in building the state of Pakistan, Khalid bin Sayeed (1968) notes how the distrust in citizens and undemocratic orientation of the leaders led them to use religion as a uniting ideology. This was done at the cost of stressing a national identity through representative democracy. Pakistan's national identity was primarily defined in religious terms. The task of establishing a single national identity in those terms was given precedence over laying strong foundations of democracy in the country. The result was a longer-term Islamization of the country (Abbot, 1963, 193). Sayeed notes how Pakistan was unwilling to reconcile the cultural and political outlook between its eastern and western wings and the ruling elite believed that religion would provide answers to the pressing but controversial questions along with being the glue that would link the two wings together (Williams, 1962, 283). It was not the uneducated masses but the inability of the educated masses to reconcile the differences among themselves which led to the distrust between E ast and West Pakistan. In the absence of a common bond, the only uniting factor was religion which was overemphasised. (Binder, 1962, 590).

The cultural differences between the two parts of the country were so vast that the leadership of the Muslim League had considered the idea of creating two Muslim states in the subcontinent instead of one (Sayeed 1960, 114-115; Harnetty 1968, 471). East and West Pakistan were inhabited by several 'strongly self-conscious groups' and in the absence of a deeply rooted historical tradition of the rule of law, it was inevitable that Punjabi dominance appeared quickly on the horizon instead of an equitable institution of federalism (Bagley 1961, 439).

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The project of Pakistan was a project to protect the interests of the Punjabi and Sindhi landowners disguised in the garb of Islam (Syeed 1968; Bagley 1961, 440). It depended on the clerics to ensure a wider appeal for it among the Muslim masses who found the idea of an Islamic state attractive. After the creation of the country, the leadership realised that the prescriptions of the clerics concerning the new state clashed with the idea of a modern and industrialized country that could accommodate multiple cultures (Sayeed 1968: Bagley 1961, 440). East Pakistan suffered from shortages of decent land to cultivate and did not receive a fair share of resources from **West Pakistan**. Instead of responding to the demands of respect and a fair sharing of resources, the leaders turned to Islam which led to the breakup of the country. In the remaining country, the distance between the rulers and the ruled kept on widening and democracy has failed to take roots **while** cynicism and corruption have been on the rise (Bagley 1961, 440). According to some, Pakistan's Islamic identity was over-emphasised to resist the Western onslaught and to deny the Western dominance of a post-colonial state (Sayeed 1995: Esposito 1997, 431). The rise of Pakistan is compared to the rise of Turkey. Where the latter sought to abandon the political framework, if not the spirit, of Islam, **the former chose to look to the faith** to construct a state and unify a disparate set of people (Smith 1951; Fakhry 1955, 336).

Pakistan has often tried to adopt **the role of the leader of the Muslim world**. Its political elites believe that it is uniquely qualified for that role because it was the first country to be created in the name of Islam. The exceptional nature of Pakistan's identity is often highlighted (a key feature of misplaced states). The first Prime Minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan (quoted in Rizvi 1983, 58) said that the unity of the Muslims worldwide was key to the accomplishment of the mission for which Pakistan was created:

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Our relations with the Muslim countries should not only be friendly, but brotherly, and that they should be made stronger everyday because the mission of Pakistan can achieve its success only when we make other Muslim countries join it.

In the decade after independence, Pakistan conducted the groundwork of a permanent multilateral body for uniting and representing the world's Muslims (Rizvi 1983, 49). Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto also organised a major summit of the world's Muslim leaders in 1974 in the eastern city of Lahore. Pakistan has also used its nuclear capability to persuade the rest of the Muslim world that it has substantial capability to be their leader (a typical feature of a misplaced state). However, these efforts to propose a new role for Pakistan have been rejected by the other nations and bodies involved. The country's inability to obtain validation for a mission believed by some to be key to its foundation has exacerbated its misplacement. Referring to Pakistan's overtures to the anti-imperialist movements of the Middle East soon after gaining independence, Rizvi (1983, 50) argues that

Islam did not play the same strategic role in the nationalist movements of most Middle Eastern states as was the case in Pakistan. For most of them it was a straight struggle against a colonial ruler. They were not a minority community and did not feel that their social, political and economic interests were threatened by a non-Muslim majority. Thus, Islam did not appear prominently in their struggle for nationhood. It was not the *raison d'être* of their state and nation.

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Furthermore, the role of the 'leader of the Muslim world' has often been championed by Saudi Arabia and post-revolutionary Iran. Some countries such as Egypt were suspicious of Pakistan's stance from the beginning and believed that it was performing that role at the

behest of Western powers to neutralise revolutionary Muslim states (Rizvi 1983, 51). It was hard for Pakistan's bid to be acknowledged as the leader of the Muslim world when its immediate (Muslim) neighbour, Afghanistan, laid claims to its very sovereign territory.

Instead of Pakistan, leaders like Nasser (Egypt) and Seokarno (Indonesia) 'found greater identity of views with Nehru and developed closer ties with India than with the leaders of Pakistan' (Rizvi 1983, 51). The mismatch in role expectations (between Pakistan and the Muslim countries) were at their starkest when Pakistan found it difficult to understand 'why a number of Arab states did not take its side in its disputes with India – a non-Muslim state' in the mid-1960s (Rizvi 1983, 51).

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 made Pakistan utilise its Muslim identity to adopt a new role of **an Islamic crusader**. Portraying the *Mujahideen* as the soldiers of Islam, a Pakistani general (quoted in Small 2015, 79) declared at the time that

We are fighting a jihad, and this is the first Islamic international brigade in the modern era. The Communists have their international brigades, the West has NATO, why can't the Muslims unite and form a common front?

Though Afghanistan was the primary theatre for this Islamic crusade in the 1980s, the dispute over Kashmir was also repainted in Islamic terms (Delvoie 1995/6, 142). The role of Islamic crusader obtained initial acceptance from countries within the Muslim world and beyond due to their compulsion to disrupt the flow of communism. After the Soviet withdrawal, however, Pakistan's links with Islamist militants have been seen suspiciously by the rest of the world. The events of 11 September 2001 and the ensuing global war on

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terrorism took all legitimacy away from Pakistan's conception of itself as an Islamic crusader country, followed by subsequent global rejection of that role.

Pakistan's Islamic identity has also led it to often adopt a **defender of the faith role**. Soon after its creation, it moved 'aggressively' to champion the causes of Muslims anywhere in the world and to promote Muslim brotherhood (Rizvi 1983, 49). In the 1950s, Pakistan supported its fellow Muslims in places like Indonesia and Tunisia, who were fighting against colonialism. In the 1990s, Pakistan engaged in significant diplomatic efforts at the UN and the OIC to highlight the plight of the Bosnian Muslims affected by the Yugoslav wars. The country offered several million dollars in aid to affected Bosnians and welcomed several hundred of them to find sanctuary in Pakistan (Delvoi 1995/6, 141). The country has always been very active in supporting various UN peacekeeping missions in the Muslim world (such as Somalia, Bosnia), a fact very much rooted in Pakistan's Islamic identity in its conception of its role as the defender of the world's Muslims.

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A focus on its Islamic identity helps understand Pakistan's bid to look for a cognitive home in the Arabian peninsula instead of a "Hindu dominated" South Asia. Commentators have described it as the country's attempts to *Arabise* its identity (Rahman 2014). However, the states and the people of the Gulf tend to look down upon Pakistani citizens, especially the migrant workers. Such reactions heighten Pakistan's misplacement as it is unable to get the Middle Eastern states to treat it as one of their own.

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Pakistan's Islamic identity is a topic of heated debate at home and abroad. It is not as sedimented as the identities of a 'sovereign' or an 'insecure state' discussed in the preceding two sections. Some leaders have attempted to distance the country from its Islamic

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identity and to portray it as a modern and enlightened state (Musharraf 2006). As Delvoi (1995/6, 146) asserts

There have, of course, always been a number of politicians, officials, and scholars ready to remind participants in seminars and conferences that Islamic ideology and Muslim solidarity are no substitute for military and economic strength in defending and promoting the nation's interests, and to point to Pakistan's continuing heavy dependence on the West and Japan for trade, investment, and aid.

Liberal sections of the society refer to the speeches of the country's founding father who, they believe, did not want Pakistan to become an Islamic republic. A year before the creation of Pakistan, Jinnah (quoted in Hoodbhoy and Nayyar 1985, 171) had said that 'the new state would be a modern democratic state with sovereignty resting in the people and the members of the new nation having equal rights of citizenship regardless of their religion, caste or creed.' He also asked: 'What are we fighting for? What are we aiming at? It is not theocracy, nor a theocratic state.'

Commentators assert that Pakistan was created to give freedom to Muslims to lead their lives according to their distinct culture and not to become an 'Islamist' state. As the country's Education Policy of 1998 specified that Islam was the only common feature among Pakistan's inhabitants and its utilisation was in making obvious the country's 'sole identity' (quoted in Durrani and Dunne 2009: 222). Pakistan's Islamic identity remains a topic of contestation among identity entrepreneurs who continue to disagree over the question of whether Pakistan should be a 'normal' state or an Islamic state with associated missions. The answer to the question of where Pakistan belongs depends on the way the respondent looks at

the role of Islam in Pakistan's internal and external orientation. Though the Pakistan movement succeeded in helping the Muslims of the subcontinent achieve a country of their own, the same solution could not be applied for the country's later problems. Instead of facing the reality, the country's leadership opted in favour of a greater doze of Islam as a solution of every problem trying to enhance Pakistan's 'virtual relocation' (Pande 2013, [136](#)) closer to the Middle East. This focus on Islam has deterred Pakistan from developing a distinctive identity based on its geographical location and the history of its people (Malik 1969, 641).

The lack of clarity regarding the role of Islam in the working of Pakistan has been a matter of discussion since its creation. Interestingly, the project of Pakistan was inherently a project of Westernized upper and middle-class leaders of the Muslim League who wanted a separate country on the basis of economic as well as cultural motives (Sayeed 1968; Bagley 1961, 440). That led them to demand a separate homeland for Muslims but inwardly they wanted a secular Pakistan. However, establishing the institutions of the country on a secular basis would have rendered the need for a separate homeland for Muslims redundant.

Islam was a force that brought Pakistan into being and which held it together ([except for the separation of East Pakistan](#)) and the processes of state building were all about finding social and political embodiment of Islam (Smith 1951; Fakhry 1955, 337). However, it has not been clear whether Pakistanis want the notion of Islam to be an ideal which they must ascribe to (despite not knowing what its content would be) or [what an Islamic Pakistan would look like as a country](#). The latter version may look towards identities other than Islam to consolidate the processes of state-building (Fakhry 1955, 337). On the other hand, the problems with perpetually pursuing the ideal of an Islamic state makes different groups within Pakistan think that they need a constant reinterpretation and 'reconstruction' of Islam.

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The focus remains on the achievement of an 'ideal' Islamic Pakistan that remains perpetually misplaced at the cost of building a modern state that has answers for crucial questions concerning representation, fair treatment and equitable provision of services.

6. Conclusion

Pakistan was created as a separate homeland for the region's Muslims and it will be difficult for it to find a natural cognitive home in a multi-faith South Asia. But its efforts to find a cognitive home in the Middle East have also been unsuccessful. In addition, Pakistan has been unable to find a sympathetic audience in Europe. Due to the country's hard misplacement and its inability to find a cognitive home anywhere in the world, the leadership portrays it as a *sui generis* case that has an exceptionalist orientation. As President Ayub asserted in 1967 (quoted in Jha 1970, 136):

India's neutralism was at best a posture of sitting on the fence and seeing how best it could take advantage of both sides; at worst it was a kind of hypocrisy and a subterfuge attempt to act 'big' and to create a cover for the expansion of her influence. We entertain no such illusions. Our approach is essentially intended to conserve our resources and to cut our commitment.

Pakistan's chief problems include 'how to make it a viable state' and 'how to make it an Islamic state'. That means that an Islamic Pakistan could be a democratic Pakistan only if the central tenets of its democracy are in conformity with the teachings of Islam (Smith 1951; Jaschke 1955, 67). Though there has been an agreement on the role of Islam, it is not clear which interpretation of Islam will be followed. Most Pakistanis followed a more pacific *sufi*

interpretation of Islam which is closer to the norms of the Indian civilisation (Jaschke 1955, 68). In times of difficulties, the country has decided that the answers to its problems were not only more Islam but the ‘right’ kind of Islam which, according to some, resembled the Saudi version of *wahabi* Islam.

There is limited appetite either among the masses or the state’s elites in Pakistan to belong to the South Asian region given the lack of desire from within and lack of legitimacy from outside. Zaidi (2009, 37) contends that if Pakistan were to accept and embrace the idea of South Asia ‘wholeheartedly’ the ‘rationale for Partition and for an independent homeland for Muslims, would be undermined, or at least, questioned.’ Where, for instance, Israel is often able to find some global recognition in the absence of regional recognition, Pakistan has neither. If the past is the best predictor of the future, this misplacement is set to continue.

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Commented [A73]: Should this be ‘partition’?

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