The Resonance of "Islam Versus the West" in Pakistan's Foreign Policy – 1947 to 1957

Imran Syed[*]

Abstract

The ideational construct that postulates a confrontation between Islam and the West is potent and resilient. This paper studies the case of Pakistan's foreign relations and seeks to understand how the Islam versus West construct resonated in the country's first decade after independence. This decade long period was important in laying the foundations of future security alignments for Pakistan. The security concerns for Pakistan in the first decade of independence involved a primary threat from India and, to a lesser extent, threats from Afghanistan and the USSR. These threats were addressed in a context that included an internal debate within Pakistan on the place of Islam in politics and governance. This period also saw Pakistan faced with a lack of strong support from the Muslim countries of the Middle East. Pakistan at this critical juncture of its history chose to align with the West. Thus the resonance of the construct Islam versus the West was not very consequential in the foreign policy of Pakistan during the foundational first decade after independence.

Key words: Pakistan, Islam, West, foreign policy, Middle East

Introduction

Ideas can be very consequential in forging relations of peace or conflict between states. Potent ideational structures can become harbingers of policy; instruments for establishing institution and the basis for formulating and consolidating worldviews. One idea that intermittently appears in the study of the foreign relations of Muslim countries is the idea that there exist a confrontation between Islam and the West.

The proposition of a division along the lines of Islam and the West is a potent idea that from time to time will resonate in the relations between states. The signs of the importance of this idea are reflected in academic publications internationally. In addition to the two better known but controversial proponents of such a division, Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis (Huntington, 1997; Lewis, 1993), it is not difficult to see usage of this construct in a variety of books published internationally (for example Jabbar, 2014; Ramadan, 2009; Siakal, 2003). The construct, therefore, very distinctly does exist.

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*Author is an Assistant Professor in the Social Sciences Department, Iqra University, Islamabad – Pakistan.

In Pakistan this idea that there exists a confrontation between Islam and the West exists and it has its supporters. The idea is propagated by, among others, leading intellectuals, such as, Professor Khurshid Ahmad of the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) who, in addition to being prominent within Pakistan, is recognized internationally as an important contemporary thinker on Islam (Esposito and Voll, 2001). Professor Ahmad views the divide between Islam and the West as a historical reality that spreads across a plurality of causes and "represents a … power configuration" (Abu-Rabi, 2000: 71).

This paper is not aiming to examine empirical evidence to conclude if the idea that there exists a confrontation between Islam and the West is justified or not justified. The paper takes the position that the construct Islam versus the West exists and wields influence. Even though this ideational construct is contentious and brings with it an element of variability, still it wields influence and its influence, applied to the case of Pakistan during a specified period, is what is being studied in this paper.

It is important to recognize that this construct has an inherent structure that is premised on a relationship of explicit confrontation. The potency of this inherently divisive construct is magnified when its religious underpinning are emphasized. Generally, academic scholarship has not actively examined the power of such ideational constructs and international relations in particular, and the social sciences, on a more general level, have largely ignored the role of religion (Fox and Sandler, 2004: 2-9). Still there is limited scholarship available on religion's impact on foreign policy formulation (Fox and Sandler, 2004: 28).

This paper looks at the, somewhat, ignored area of religion and ideas that invoke religion in the study and conduct of international relations. The research explores the power of the idea Islam versus the West in international relations by examining the case of the foreign policy of Pakistan, specifically looking at the formative first decade after Pakistan's independence. This period of study is important because it is a foundational period in the foreign relations of the newly established Pakistani state.

Scholarly publications on Pakistan's foreign policy usually provide an historical and descriptive account of foreign relations of the country without explicitly examining the application of the Islam versus West construct (Amin, 2010; Sattar, 2007; Burke and Ziring, 1990). One publication comes seemingly close to paralleling the research topic of this paper and that is the 1996 book *Pakistan and the West: The first Decade 1947 to 1957* (Bajwa). However, this book is focused on a rational examination of expectations of benefit that Pakistan and the West considered in the forging of alliances with each other,

and the construct Islam versus the West is not the central idea against which foreign policy is measured (Bajwa, 1996: 12). A further limitation of this book is that its approach is in many ways saddled with the general limitations of using a rationality based model to explain foreign policy behavior. These, among others, include the undermining of rationality in the face of cognitive and affective biases of decision makers (Goldstein, 2011: 129).

This research takes the view that while on the one hand there is a need to recognize the influence of rationality in foreign policy decision making, on the other hand the focus on rationality should not eclipse the importance of ideas, norms and identity (Goldstein, 2011: 93). Though there is some literature to be found that covers the importance of Islam in the foreign policy of Pakistan (Pasha, 2005), still, no literature could be found to combine the study of Islam with foreign policy and, further, with the ideational construct Islam versus the West.

Definitional Issues

One challenge faced in this paper was with relation to definitional issues. Firstly, the terms Islam and the West are not neatly symmetrical. Islam is a religion and the West is not. A more symmetrical division would have been Islam and Christianity. Bernard Lewis addresses this dichotomy by saying that though Christendom had at one time existed as an identifier of a religious community but with time it has "undergone a process of reform and secularization and has come to be known, in various contexts, as Europe, as the free world, and, nowadays, principally as the West" (Lewis, 1993: vii).

Nonetheless, this apparent incongruence in the construct Islam versus the West is not the primary research concern of this paper. The paper takes a position that the confrontational construct exists, albeit as a contested phenomenon, and it has a history. The West, as defined by Lewis, has its roots in Christendom and before morphing into its present semblance it was, at one stage, equated with Europe. However, Europe as a constructed entity is less than five hundred years old (Curtis, 2009: 9). The formation and consolidation of a European identity is constituted over the course of history. One historical event that lends itself to the institution of an Islam versus the West construct is the capture of Constantinople by the Ottomans in 1453 (Mastnak, 2003: 207). Therefore, Europe's identity is demarcated by a Muslim Otherness and Lewis points towards the mutually constitutive nature of the construct Islam and the West by saying that "in a sense, each is defined and delimited by the other" (Lewis 1993: vii). These aspects of the Islam versus the West construct contribute towards further consolidating the confrontational characteristics of this idea.

The conceptualizations of a global Islam and, in similar vein, a monolithic West are riddled with inconsistencies. The inconsistencies are reflected in the heterogeneity that detracts from any sweeping racial, religious, political, or developmental homogeneity. The conceptualization of a global Islam has to contend with considerable variation and complexity and this variation is sometimes overlooked in the thrust for homogenizing a Western identity (O'Hagan, 2002: 43). For the purposes of this paper the West is taken to broadly imply, primarily, USA and countries of Western Europe and Islam is broadly taken to imply all Muslim majority countries, but, particularly, countries of the Middle East, Persian Gulf and South Asia.

Thus, the construct Islam versus the West is confrontational, complex and mutually constituted. The relationship between Islam and the West comes across as one that is necessarily confrontational by initially drawing on historical conflicts between Islam and Christendom, and, later, Islam and Europe and, finally, the present day iteration of Islam and the West.

The idea of Islam versus the West has been viewed as "civilizational" (Huntington 1993) in terms of its role as identifier and global in terms of its spatial application. In both cases the idea supersedes the boundaries of the nation state. However, on a practical level the structure of the nation-state mitigates the application of this global idea and the boundaries of the nation-state provide a concrete demarcation that receives and dispenses international action (Adib-Moghaddam, 2011: 173) that can be categorized under the umbrella of the idea Islam versus the West confrontation.

Huntington addresses this point when he writes that the "nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations" (Huntington 1993, 22). An important point to note is that different states take their own particular path to cementing their formation, Ideology, culture and religion, and the application and manifestations of these phenomena, to a certain extent, are steered by dynamics within the states. This lends credence to the importance of the nation state as a structure that arbitrates and moderates the application of ideologies and ideas.

In Pakistan's case the views on the West are continuations of a history that begins before the partitioning of the subcontinent. These historical roots fit in with the post-partition foreign relations of Pakistan. Prominent in these relations were the security threat posed to Pakistan by India, and to a lesser extent from Afghanistan and the USSR. The recourse to align with the Muslim countries of the Middle East was an option for Pakistan. However, the internal

contention within Pakistan on the extent to which Islam should figure in politics and governance contributed to diluting Pakistan's identity as an Islamic polity.

Historical Perspective

The period before the creation of the state of Pakistan is important because what happens in this period has an influence on Pakistan's views of the world and Pakistan's foreign policies. The lines of confrontation established between the Muslims and the British in this period provide a foundation for continuities of difference and confrontation that persist in subsequent periods.

The idea that there exists a conflict between Islam and the West has foundations that are sometimes purported to extend back in history to the conquests by the Arab Muslims during the seventh century. However, in the Indian subcontinent the dominant lines of confrontation that were experienced by the Muslims were primarily built around the difference between the Hindu and the Muslim. Even though the distinction between the Hindu and Muslim communities was primarily based on a difference in religion, still, there were distinct divisions between the two that extended beyond just religion. The wider social and cultural divisions were reflected in the language, dress, poetry, music, etc. The maintenance of these differences over a period of centuries of contact was a consequence of attitudes that were in many cases sanctioned by religion.

Many Hindus viewed the non-Hindus and even Hindus of a lower caste (such as the Untouchables) as impure and unclean and, therefore, restricted contact with such people. Muslims, who were in a minority, also restricted contacts with Hindus, in part because they were weary of the loss of difference and also because the Muslim beliefs were in many ways the very antithesis of Hinduism (Qureshi, 2000: 4-12).

The threats from the Hindus to the Muslims were evident in the pre-partition Hindu movement of *Sangathan* which aimed at organizing the Hindu against the Muslims and the *Shuddhi* movement which "used social pressure against poor and ignorant Muslims to get converted to Hinduism" (Qureshi, 2000: 36). These two movements were significant overt attempts at fomenting conflict, especially, the *Shuddhi* movement which attempted to strike at the very heart of the Muslim existence.

In addition to the threat to the Muslims of the subcontinent from the Hindus, there also existed a sense of conflict between the Christian British from Europe and the Muslims of the subcontinent. The nineteenth century saw Britain consolidate its hold over the Mogul Empire and in 1857 the British

officially colonized India and made it part of the British Empire. The rebellion of 1857 intensified the confrontation between the Muslims and the British because the British felt the Muslims were responsible for the rebellion and, consequently, the Muslims were persecuted (Yunus and Parmar, 2003: 230-231).

This persecution of the Muslims strengthened resentment against the British at that time but it, eventually, also produced a counter-balance in the person of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan. A key South Asian Muslim modernizer, Khan argued that the Muslim should lift themselves out of their disadvantaged position by obtaining a modern education and by cooperating with the British (Yunus and Parmar, 2003: 235). From 1857 onward, primarily on account of the ideas of Khan, the Muslim versus the European colonizer or the Islam versus the West confrontation weakened and the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent, to a large extent, cooperated with the British.

Threats to Pakistan

As the British Empire withdrew from the Indian subcontinent, the nationalist struggle against the British, which had intensified in the period preceding partition, lost its momentum. Thus the Islam versus the West ideational structure did not fare prominently in the competition with the other threats that Pakistan faced in the post- independence period.

From the very outset of partition, the threat from Hindus and India showed itself in the shape of massive loss of life and property during the partitioning of the subcontinent. Many of the migrating Muslims on their way to Pakistan experienced violence and the same was the fate of many of the Hindus migrating to India. The violence inflicted on the migrating population resulted in the deaths of around half a million people and over ten million were displaced (Johnson, 2003: 188). This violence left a deep mark on the consciousness of the population of both India and Pakistan.

The partition also created the dispute over Kashmir and this single territorial dispute has been the main factor in the two wars between Pakistan and India in 1965 and 1971. Along with the issues of the refugees, the violence of the migration and the issue of Kashmir, there were also other issues of contention between India and Pakistan in the period immediately following partition. These issues included important matters such as the sharing of the waters of the Indus basin and Pakistan receiving its share of the cash balances left by the British (Burke and Ziring, 1990: 11-13).

In addition to the Indian threat, another territorial threat at the borders of Pakistan materialized in the shape of Afghanistan. The dispute with Afghanistan had its genesis in areas that lie in the northwest and west of Pakistan. These areas were part of the territory conquered by Afghan ruler Ahmad Shah in the sixteenth century. After a period of conflict with the British the border between the British and the Afghans was settled in 1893 at the Durand Line. The Afghans government in order to reclaim its lost territory, approached the British in 1944 to regain those lands that extended beyond the Durand Line into, what was to later become, Pakistan. The British refused the Afghan claim and after the partitioning of the Indian subcontinent the contention continued between Pakistan and Afghanistan over this territory (Burke and Ziring, 1990: 68-74). In July of 1947 the *Pakhtuns* of the North West Frontier Province voted to be a part of Pakistan and subsequently, the tribes of what later would become the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) held a *loya jirga* that also decided to stay with Pakistan. Afghanistan grudgingly accepted these decisions but the issue of territory remained a source of tension between Pakistan and Afghanistan (Runion, 2007: 95).

A consequence of this territorial dispute between the two countries was disruption of the trade transit between Afghanistan and Pakistan. For Afghanistan, a landlocked country, the transit through Pakistan was very important. In times of tension between the two countries Pakistan would restrict the cross-border transit to and from Afghanistan, thus placing pressure on the Afghan government. To reduce its dependence on Pakistan the Afghan government looked to the USSR for transit facilities. In 1950 Afghanistan signed a trade agreement with the USSR and the relationship between the two countries grew rapidly after this signing (Burke and Ziring, 1990: 75-76).

The USSR emerged as more of a threat to Pakistan as a result of the growing cooperation between the USSR and Afghanistan. To examine the broader scope of the confrontation between Pakistan and the USSR we need to look at how the leaders of Pakistan viewed the Communist ideology. The seeds of the ideological opposition to Communism are clearly demonstrated in the letter by the influential Muslim thinker and poet, Muhammad Iqbal in 1923 to the daily *Zamindar* newspaper in which he writes that "to hold Bolshevik views … is to place oneself outside the pale of Islam" (Burke and Ziring, 1990: 92). Mulana Bahshani of the National Awami Party even more clearly elucidates the opposition to Communism when he says that he would never accept a "Godless system" because Pakistan was established as a state that had been "fashioned after the dictates of Islam". In contrast to the views on communism the views of Pakistan's leaders on "Christianity and Western countries was noticeably benevolent" (Burke and Ziring, 1990, 94 - 99).

The USSR emerged as a more concrete threat to Pakistan because of the growing cooperation between the USSR and Afghanistan. The USSR was viewed as a threat in two different ways. Firstly, there was the threat was posed by the ideology of Communism and, secondly, there was recognition that the USSR was interested in attaining access to the warm waters south of Afghanistan and along Pakistan's coast. There was a very brief period when the USSR did make diplomatic moves towards Pakistan by extending an invitation in 1949 to the Pakistani Prime Minister to visit Moscow. Following Moscow's invitation UAS reacted and invited the Pakistani Prime Minister to visit the US in 1950. The Pakistani Prime Minister postponed the visit to Moscow and proceeded to USA. Thus the prime threats that Pakistan faced in the period 1947 to 1958 were from India, Afghanistan and to a lesser extent from the USSR.

Islam and Political Contention in Pakistan

One political reason for the weakening of the importance of the Islamic in the foreign relations of Pakistan was that even though the movement for independence had emphasized the importance of Islam still after the gaining of independence Pakistan did not evolve to become an Islamic theocratic state. Pakistan ostensible credential as an Islamic ideological state masked serious internal struggles over the extent to which Islam should play a role in the politics and governance of Pakistan. These cleavages, in the early period of Pakistan's history, manifested themselves in the shape of a confrontation between the Muslim League (ML) and the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI). The ML, the party that led Pakistan's independence movement, had promised a state guided by Islam, but it had done so in vague terms and without a specific road map for the future (Cohen, 2004: 161). After partition there was pressure on the ML from the religious parties to establish an Islamic state in Pakistan. At the forefront of this pressure were the JI and its *Amir* Mulana Mawdudi.

The ML believed in the "application of Islamic principles but certainly did not want to create a theocratic state" (Moten, 2003: 33). In Mawdudi's view Pakistan was not to be just a state for Muslims but it had to be state that was governed along Islamic lines (Cohen, 2004: 164). At the time of partition the ML was a mass supported party that was at the head of the popular Pakistan Movement. The JI was never a political party in the liberal-democratic sense of the term (Nasr, 1994: 13). Unlike other political parties of Pakistan the JI never tried to grow into a mass organization and it also restricted it membership by setting a very high standard for its adherents to qualify as members (Mahmood, 2000: 153). This lack of a mass organization diminished the leverage of the JI in the political process. Still the JI was successful in pressuring the government in a variety of ways. One place where the JI was

successful in pushing forward its views was in the process of constitution making in Pakistan.

One critical task before the newly independent state of Pakistan was the drafting of a constitution. An important precursor to the drafting of the constitution was the preparation of the Objectives Resolution (OR) which would provide a framework for the drafting of the constitution (Ziring, 1999: 106). The OR was passed in March 1949 and the pressure by the Islamic parties, like the JI, resulted in the OR including the text that the "sovereignty over the entire universe belongs only to Allah Almighty alone" (Ziring, 1999: 106). However, indicative of a schism, this Islamic reference was juxtaposed alongside liberal-democratic references such as the "State shall exercise its power and authority through the chosen representatives of the people" (Ahmad, 2004: 79). Overall, the contents of the OR were relatively broad and thus able to accommodate both an Islamic and a secular political position. The OR was in some ways a postponement of the resolution of the debate on the primacy of the secular or the Islamic in Pakistan. The contention over this basic issue remained and this unresolved contention helps in understanding how the importance of the Islamic was affected. Still, there is a need to further understand the inclination towards the West for a country that was founded using Islam as a rallying call. A policy that would have been very much in consonance with Pakistan's Islamic credentials would have been to align with other Muslim countries. Factors for this disinclination towards the Muslim countries included, that Pakistan had made efforts to forge a pan-Islamic alliance but these efforts had faltered and, also, the Muslim countries did not garner a consensus on strategic objectives.

Muslim Countries and Pakistan

Pakistan's attempts at forging a movement for pan-Islamic unity were unsuccessful. The attempts made by Pakistan to establish pan-Islamic institutions included hosting the International Islamic Economic Conference in Karachi in 1949. However, after a few follow-up conferences this initiative floundered. In 1952 Pakistan tried to invite the prime ministers of twelve Muslim countries for a conference in Karachi but interest was low and only seven out of the twelve invitees expressed a willingness to attend.

Within the countries of the Middle East there was also some resentment over Pakistan assuming a self-appointed role as catalyst for bringing the Muslim countries together. This sentiment is reflected in the comment attributed to the Rector of Al-Azhar University in the *Economist* issue of 24 May 1952 in which he reportedly says that "too many Islamic conferences had been called in Pakistan (Pasha 2005, 32 - 39). Some scholars have reasoned that one

serious impediment to the establishment of a pan-Islamic unity that spanned across the Muslim world was Arab nationalism (Ahmad, 1996: 81).

The divergence in regional political concerns was also an impediment to the forging of a concerted response from the Muslim countries. Separated by geography and history, the issues facing Muslim countries in one region were quite different from the issues facing Muslim countries in another region. India, for instance, at that time was not a strategic concern for the Muslim countries of the Middle East or the Muslim countries of the Persian Gulf (Burke and Ziring, 1990: 65).

The Alignment with the West

In the early years following independence, Pakistan pursued security alliances to balance the power of India and, in establishing these alliances, Pakistan leaned towards the West (Burke and Ziring, 1990: 91). The inclination of Pakistan towards the West was instantiated in Pakistan's officially joining the Western security alliances in the 1950s. In 1954 South-East Asia Collective Defense Treaty (SEATO) took shape in Manila and the signatories of this treaty included Pakistan, Thailand, Philippines, USA, UK, France, Australia and New Zealand. The signatories agreed to develop the capacity to resist armed attack from countries outside the alliance.

A mutual cooperation pact was signed by Iraq and Turkey in February 1955 and later by the UK, Pakistan and Iran. This pact was named the Baghdad Pact and in 1959 the name was changed to the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). Pakistan's joining of the SEATO and CENTO alliances was viewed by the USSR as collaboration in the Western hostility towards the USSR and in response the USSR leadership "openly supported India's claim to Kashmir and Afghanistan's demand for 'Pakhtunistan'" (Burke and Ziring, 1990: 208).

Joining these Western alliances, in addition to having negative consequences in the relationship with the USSR, also had unfavorable consequences on Pakistan's relations with certain Muslim countries, notably, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan. In Egypt it was a matter of concern because they feared that if the Western countries were able to establish alliances without Egypt's participation there would be less of an incentive for Britain to resolve its outstanding issues with Egypt (including the matter of the British base in Suez). Saudi Arabia also reacted strongly to Pakistan signing the Baghdad Pact. This was mainly because Saudi Arabia resented Turkey's cooperation with Israel and urged Pakistan to drop its membership in the Pact. Afghanistan also reacted sharply in 1953 to the news of USA possibly supplying military aid to Pakistan as it saw this aid strengthening Pakistan and thus a weakening

of the Afghan claim over part of Pakistan's territory (Burke and Ziring, 1990: 205).

Conclusion

The prime external threats that Pakistan faced in the period 1947 to 1957 were from India, Afghanistan and to some extent from the USSR. These threats detract from an Islam versus the West confrontation because the threats come from a Hindu majority country, a Muslim country, and a communist country. The USA and the West emerge in Pakistan's first decade not as threats but as a counter to the threats. Islam remained important for Pakistan in this period. However, the sway of religion was dissipated by the internal political contention over the extent to which Pakistan should be Islamic. Also, in the international realm, the Muslim countries were divided on the basis of diverging regional dispositions and strategic objectives. In the foundational first decade after independence the power of the idea of a contention between Islam and the West had limited resonance in Pakistan's foreign policy.

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