

Recognizing Pakistan's international roles: Why the United States needs to engage with non-conforming states

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While a great deal of attention is devoted to the Pacific region as the new chessboard of international politics, Pakistan remains a key actor in terms of both threat and potential. Two observations back this argument: first, Pakistan's fundamental roles as a state are challenged by its ongoing conflict with India and internal insurgencies. Second, due to a power-status gap, Pakistan experiences difficulties in holding specific self-conceived roles. In addition to hampering its socio-economic potential, these developments prevent Pakistan's quest for normalization in the system. As a consequence, we argue that engaging with Islamabad should be a priority for Washington so as to prevent the country from further aligning with Beijing, thus reinforcing China's regional leadership and status as peer-competitor to the United States. Indeed, as the potential for deviance in the international system arises from its normative dimension, the US, as the global leader, counts among its roles that of norm-setter and primary socializer for most states.

Our research proposes to look at an old puzzle with new theoretical insights. By addressing the question of Washington's engagement towards non-conforming states, we aim to document a set of socialization processes as intervening variables linking American global role as leader and primary socializer to Pakistan's process of social integration (normalization/deviance). Drawing from sociology and social psychology, the paper seeks to explore the ability of the leader to act as a primary source of role location and status recognition towards non-conforming states so as to integrate them (back) into the US-led system.