

Title: Ontological Security: Explaining Continued State-sponsorship of Militancy in Pakistan

Abstract:

Why do states sponsor violent religious militant groups? Geostategic interests, domestic politics, and deniability have all been used to explain why states would resort to using and sponsoring violent religious militant groups as proxies. But what happens when the group turns onto the sponsoring state? Can a state stop sponsoring a group? More importantly, why would a state continue sponsoring violent religious militant groups when they become a threat to the state itself? Using Pakistan as a case study, this paper argues that states continue to sponsor violent religious militant groups to achieve ontological security, and civil institutions play a prominent role in facilitating the state's understanding of and need for its ontological security and national identity. Confronting the "survival" and "deterrence" assumptions of IR theory, this paper presents a theory for continued state-sponsorship of militancy, arguing that sponsorship is linked to how a state perceives itself and wants to be perceived by other states. Furthermore, it makes a case for why IR theorists should go beyond the traditional security institutions and analyze the role of civil institutions when studying state-sponsorship of militancy.