Introduction

Attitudes toward America developed in Pakistan out of a variety of patterns of interaction between the two countries over the last five decades. Most typically this interaction has been characterized by the one-way flow of American influence, and much less, if at all, the other way round. There were both positive and negative factors involved in strengthening Pakistan-American relations. At the heart of the positive factor lay the American capital and technology that Pakistan direly needed and that the United States was ready to make available to a significant level in different phases of the country’s history. Negatively speaking, the two countries were relatively free of any baggage from the past in terms of hostile relations, being as they were geographically distant and historically and politically irrelevant to each other, especially as Pakistan had emerged as a distinct entity only in 1947. That means that Pakistan-American relations operated essentially from a pragmatic perspective, because both looked at each other as being engaged in a mutually beneficial relationship with no hangovers from the past.

The remoteness of the American public and private life from the experience and imagination of Pakistanis in general lent a peculiarly reductionist character to their attitudes toward the United States. At the bottom of it lay a state-to-state relationship, which was largely understood by Pakistanis in terms of their security and development. For example, the general public in that country looked at relations with America essentially as part of its security framework, conceived and operationalized for defense against the perceived threat from India. Not surprisingly, Pakistani perceptions about Washington often took a turn for the worse in the wake of the latter’s perceived tilt in favor of India. In the case of the U.S. withdrawal from active involvement in the region, such as after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1988, Pakistan felt betrayed in terms of its heavy investment in the resistance movement against the Red Army in Kabul. At the other end, the development orientation of the ruling elite in Pakistan has kept it tied up with the idea of a close economic and financial relationship with the United States as well as global financial institutions controlled by Washington. Apart from the two pillars of Pakistan-U.S. relations, namely strategy and economic development, there have been very few patterns of exchange between the two countries in such fields as art, music, law, literature, sports, diplomacy, and fashion, as well as morals and manners covering vast areas of public and private life. In this sense, Pakistan-American relations are far less comprehensive and meaningful than the relations between the United States and various European countries across the Atlantic. Consequently, the attitudes

* This article is a revised edition of a report presented to a commemorative international symposium at the fiscal 2003 annual convention of the Japan Association for Asian Studies (JAAS), held at the Hitotsubashi Memorial Hall in Tokyo on November 8, 2003.
Perspectives on the United States

One can outline three broad features of Pakistani attitudes toward Washington. One is rooted in the insecurity syndrome, which underscored the foreign policy options of Karachi-Islamabad for decades. It has led to consideration of the U.S. role as a stabilizing factor and therefore a positive input in the region. The second approach represents the leftist and generally antiestablishment position as a carry-over from the Cold War period. However, this has grossly declined in recent years in political significance and is now somewhat irrelevant for our purposes. Thirdly, the resurgent Islamic position has moved to the center stage during the last decade, as far as its potential to influence the political discourse in Pakistan about the United States is concerned.

Insofar as the first approach is concerned, the security apparatus of Pakistan essentially and comprehensively operates in the field of Indo-Pakistan relations. Anti-Indianism is a legacy of partition in 1947. The outward projection of the bilateral conflict between the two countries took two separate lines of argument. Indian analysts found the prevalent dichotomous model backward-looking and argued in favor of a nondichotomous model which “casts binary conflicts as nested within larger, regional structures.” However, the Pakistani perspective typically conceives the nondichotomous model in an extra-regional framework. It stresses the role of an external “equalizer,” such as the United States as a mediator of conflicts with its eastern neighbor. Therefore, it seeks internationalization of the Kashmir conflict inside and outside the U.N. framework. Thus, globalism rather than regionalism is a typical response of Pakistan in its attempt to outgrow the vicissitudes of the dichotomy in the region. While Indian leadership is understood to resent any policies and postures that equate the two states, Pakistan feels constrained to “borrow power” from outside. This despite the fact that Washington has periodically withdrawn from the region and left Pakistan to fend for itself whenever American foreign policy objectives were not directly served anymore.

While Pakistan was born with threat perceptions vis-à-vis India in 1947, it had deep apprehensions of Moscow from even earlier times. Pakistan inherited a broad foreign policy perspective from British India. This was rooted in the suspicion of the Soviet Union as a country that was searching for a warm water port in southern Asia. From the perceived support of Moscow for successive Afghan regimes, along with their Pakhtun irredentism, up to the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan in 1979 and beyond, Pakistan remained steadfastly anticommunist and anti-USSR for most of the period after independence. All along, Moscow’s occupation of the classic Islamic lands of Central Asia for over a century provided a base line for an ideational sanction against the USSR and its “atheist” philosophy of communism. As the Red Army withdrew from Afghanistan after the 1988 Geneva Accord, followed by the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War soon after, Pakistan tried to adjust itself to the new realities in the region, especially to the emergent Central Asian republics. Besides, inter-state relations between the regional powers, including Russia, China, India, Pakistan, and Iran, and their conflicting or overlapping interests in Afghanistan have held back a real advance in Islamabad’s relations with Moscow. The lurking anti-Russian suspicions in Pakistan will perhaps continue to keep the country away from any real breakthrough in its relations with the polar bear in the near future.

All this provided a classical scenario for an unstable regional setting that laid the basis for the foreign policy ambitions of Pakistan for establishing close ties with the United States. Provision for cultivating an abiding relationship with Washington has been a cornerstone of
Pakistan’s foreign policy. This line of thinking has been facilitated by the fact that there is no negative historical legacy of the United States in this part of the world. If at all, there is a memory of a fleeting moment in history close to partition when the United States pressed imperialist powers for decolonization. Nor was the United States remembered as an occupier of Muslim lands, as opposed to the Soviet Union. Its occupation of Afghanistan by proxy in 2001–02 and Iraq more directly in 2003 were to come later. Similarly, Pakistan had no legacy of war with America as opposed to its situation of being in a persistent combat position vis-à-vis India. Indeed, there had been no direct war of any Muslim country with the United States up to the 1993 Gulf War against Iraq, which itself was professedly fought for a Muslim (Kuwaiti) cause. It is clear from these observations that anti-Americanism has had no historical and cultural roots in Pakistan. Therefore, it never acquired the status of an ideology, unlike anti-Russian, anti-Indian, and anti-Zionist perspectives.5

This, however, does not mean that there was no opposition to the American involvement in the political, economic, and strategic matters of Pakistan, either directly on a country-to-country basis or indirectly as part of U.S. policy about the region as a whole. This brings us to the second approach to the United States, which is characterized by an overtly negative attitude to that country. Anti-Americanism in Pakistan has two clearly identifiable sources: leftist politics and ethnic politics. The left in Pakistan has generally represented a ramshackle movement. Various leftist groups, including the Pakistan Communist Party, Azad Pakistan Party, Mazdoor Kissan Party, and Pakistan Socialist Party, looked at successive governments as pawns in the hands of America. They interpreted the power of the state in Pakistan in terms of the American superordinate role in shaping the framework of politics and foreign policy in that country. The greater the perceived repression of a government, especially a military government, the more severe was the criticism of what was understood to be the U.S. policy of supporting military dictators in Pakistan. While constantly criticizing successive authoritarian governments of Pakistan, leftists kept anti-Americanism alive in certain sections of the mobilized public at the edge of the political community.

For example, Muhammad Ayub Khan was ousted from power in 1969 through a mass agitation, which clearly dubbed him and his colleagues in the army as well as others—civil bureaucracy, industrialists, and ulema—as American stooges. The “new” left initially represented by the populist leadership of Zulfikar Aki Bhutto and his Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) cultivated a mass perception that American intervention had worked against democracy in favor of the military establishment. Under Bhutto (1971–77) the leading idiom of politics—if not necessarily public policy—remained “leftist” and antiimperialist, largely couched in the emerging context of Third Worldism. Under both Zia ul Haq (1977–88) and Pervez Musharraf (1999–), the U.S. policy has been geared to the establishment of a strategic alliance with Pakistan. This was in the backdrop of a continuing Afghanistan war in the post-Soviet incursion in 1979 and the post-9/11 situation, respectively. In public perception, the role of the United States in Pakistan is again identified with protection and support for military rulers at the gross expense of democratic and liberal forces. The process of government formation after the October 2002 elections alienated large sections of the political community due to concentration of major constitutional powers in the hands of President Musharraf. However, the political class in general feared that Musharraf was impregnable because of the U.S. support for his role in the continuing war against terrorism. The general realization is that democracy in Pakistan was never a part of the U.S. agenda for that country. Not surprisingly, there is a feeling that Americans are responsible for creating and increasing the imbalance between the civil and military wings of the state in favor of the latter.

At the other end, the center-province dichotomy created ethnonational movements in various federating units—East Bengal, Sindh, Northwest Frontier Province, and
Baluchistan—which conceived the American role in Pakistan as antagonistic to their cause.\textsuperscript{7} Throughout the Cold War era, the perspective of ethnonational activists who pursued their struggle against Karachi-Islamabad was firmly couched in the larger superpower rivalry. Not surprisingly, the Pakhtun and Baluch nationalist elite sought to cultivate links with Moscow against Washington. In this scenario, Pakistan was criticized as an agent of American imperialism out to crush movements for national self-determination.\textsuperscript{8} One can argue that the more the state of Pakistan was identified with Washington, the more the leftist and ethnic movements cultivated anti-American feelings. In this framework, activists from the left of the political spectrum everywhere, including Punjab, which was otherwise closely identified with the establishment, joined hands with ethnic nationalists, both ideologically with reference to “the national question” and politically. However, anti-Americanism of the antiimperialist variety has been rapidly losing ground. Some of the reasons can be outlined as: the decline of the left over the last decade, especially as the PPP moved to the center of the political spectrum under Benazir Bhutto; passing of the old generation of Sindhi, Pakhtun, and Baluch ethnic leaderships; and the rise of Islamic forces, which sought to shape the political idiom along a different pattern. In this way, the leftist approach to the United States has lost its teeth and is therefore not a part of the present analysis of Pakistani perceptions about that country.

The third approach is rooted in the Islamist framework. From the 1980s onward, the question whether the United States was for or against Pakistan has been generally recast in broad religious terms. People now posed the question to themselves whether the United States was for or against Islam. This question was underlined by the public consensus that Pakistan as a premier Islamic country was inextricably linked with the destiny of the Muslim world. As an increasing number of inter-state and intra-state conflicts involved Muslims as underdogs in one or other part of the world, the public in Pakistan grew restive and reared suspicions of the United States in its capacity as the architect of the post–Cold War world. In the light of these observations, we need to discuss various shades of perceptions about America in Pakistan in the context of regional and global changes with reference to two broadly defined factors, i.e. the country’s strategic interests on the one hand and the increasingly important worldview of the general public based on a dichotomy between Islam and the West on the other.

On-Again, Off-Again Allies

As far as the attitudes of the Pakistani elite toward the United States are concerned, these have been characterized by structural imperatives of the strategic alliance between the two countries. Whenever Washington opted for a policy of showing a tilt toward India or imposing sanctions on Pakistan relating to its nuclear program or dismissal of a democratic government through a military coup, anti-American sentiments gripped the imagination of Islamabad. For understanding this line of anti-Americanism, we need to analyze the more stable and consistent pattern of pro-Americanism among the ruling elite, which provided the context for the emergence of a periodically negative attitude leading to a sense of betrayal vis-à-vis the American friendship. A major source of Pakistani perceptions about the United States, both positive and negative, lies in the way the latter has been understood to be addressing Islamabad’s security concerns.\textsuperscript{9} The ruling elite of Islamabad has remained steadfastly committed to American friendship as a potential equalizer in the context of the superior military power of India vis-à-vis Pakistan. A secondary interest in Islamabad, which was indeed the first priority for Washington in the regional context, was the Soviet threat from the north. Whenever the two perspectives of Washington and Islamabad differed in terms of a joint commitment of diplomatic or strategic resources to one or other of the two
issues, it led to the exposure of Pakistan to what it considered a security threat, and hence to mistrust of Washington.

The American tilt in favor of India in the post-1962 NEFA war situation led to the first major disillusionment with Washington in Pakistan. The country had become used to enjoying American support in and outside the United Nations in its conflicts with India. This led to what can be considered the second most important policy initiative in Pakistan’s history, namely turning to China, after the initial and in the end even more consequential initiative of turning West in the 1950s. The Pakistani establishment was shaken out of complacency because it had already started considering American support as an immutable fact of life. A sense of betrayal of American friendship opened Pakistani diplomacy to wider options in the East. It found China a willing partner in the new relationship, in the aftermath of the latter’s partial estrangement from the Soviet Union in 1959, and more recently the American tilt toward Delhi in an expedient mode of diplomacy in the post-1962 framework.

The 1965 Indo-Pakistan war led to an American embargo on the supply of weapons to both countries. Islamabad felt deeply hurt because it had virtually put all eggs in the American basket, as opposed to India, which had diversified its sources of arms supply over the years. The withdrawal of American strategic support was followed by a gradual decline of Washington’s economic assistance. The sense of frustration with the United States led to Ayub Khan’s vision of the national destiny in terms of “friends not masters.” A series of events followed, which were characterized by a sense of displeasure with Washington. During the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war, the promised arrival of the U.S. naval vessel Enterprise in the Bay of Bengal turned out to be a non-enterprise and therefore a bleeding wound in the U.S.-Pakistan relationship in an hour of the latter’s defeat in Dhaka. Again under Z.A. Bhutto, Pakistan received a stern warning from Henry Kissinger against harboring nuclear ambitions. The country remained under the U.S. embargo up to 1981. The civil and military establishment and the articulate public in general became fiercely critical of what they considered America’s discriminatory acts against Pakistan.

The Soviet incursion into Afghanistan opened up a new chapter in the history of Pakistan-U.S. relations, as it again led to a close strategic alliance between the two countries, almost fulfilling the original purpose of the U.S.-led military alliances CENTO and SEATO. There was an obvious overlap in the aims and objectives of the two countries as they got deeply engaged in the Afghan conflict. For the United States, it was the presence of the Red Army in Afghanistan that remained a critical factor in its decision to build up a resistance movement against Kabul in the first place. It did so despite its deep suspicions about Pakistan’s nuclear program. In this context, the U.S. withdrawal of support for Afghan mujahideen after the signing of the 1988 Geneva Accord and departure of the Red Army from Kabul in 1989 was bound to create misgivings among Pakistanis. The presidential noncertification of Pakistan’s nuclear weapons program for the next decade, as per the Pressler Amendment, kept Pakistanis tense and therefore committed to the idea of the United States as a nondependable ally.

Toward the end of the 1990s, Pakistan came under heavy U.S. sanctions after it opted to go for nuclear tests on May 28, 1998, in response to Indian nuclear tests two weeks earlier. These were followed by the “democracy sanctions” imposed after the 1999 military coup. Among various hiccups on the way, the nondenial of F-16 fighter planes for which Pakistan had already paid and later nonreimbursement of the payment for several years grossly alienated Islamabad. It looked as if the 1996 Brown Amendment had only temporarily put a halt to the downslide of Pakistan-American relations. It was only after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon that the two countries rediscovered each other, much the same way as they did in the 1950s and 1980s. The post-9/11 resumption of the U.S. interest in Pakistan as a partner in its war against terrorism has enkindled a new spirit of friendship between the two countries.
The periodical and recurrent gaps in the Pakistan-American friendship can be defined in terms of an overlap in the objectives of the two countries: For Pakistan, strong ties with an external “equalizer” vis-à-vis its much stronger adversary next door is the first principle of foreign policy. For the United States, disappointment with India’s unwillingness to join its Cold War against the Soviet Union was the prime reason to align with Pakistan in the 1950s. However, the United States never supported any of Pakistan’s wars with India, be it the 1965 war or the 1971 war, or small wars around Siachin in 1984 or Kargil in 1999. On the other hand, the United States joined Pakistan’s war effort in support of mujahideen who were fighting the Soviet forces in Afghanistan from 1981 to 1989. When the 1988 Geneva Accord led to Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the U.S. strategists concluded that it was time to disentangle themselves from the region. Not surprisingly, a sense of betrayal on the part of the ruling elite in Islamabad set in throughout the 1990s as the United States withdrew from its active presence in the region, leaving Pakistan to deal with millions of Afghan refugees on its soil. It can be observed that U.S.-Pakistan relations have been historically problematic. The latter has been committed to keeping the former engaged in the region, obviously on its own side. However, the former’s priorities and preferences, often in relation to India but also negatively and indirectly in relation to the Soviet Union in the Cold War era, often pushed Washington away from what could be too warm an embrace with Pakistan. In the year 2003–04, the uneasy process of moving from friendship to a sense of betrayal to friendship again in a circumlocutory pattern was still visible.

At one end, Washington and Islamabad experienced periodical shifts in the patterns of their strategic alliance, thus leading to anti-Americanism of the variety of friendship-betrayal syndrome in Pakistan. At the other end, both countries displayed a consistent pattern of their willingness to understand each other’s exclusive commitments. For example, Pakistan and the United States voted frequently on opposite sides of U.N. resolutions about various contentious issues. These included Arab-Israel wars, apartheid in South Africa, specific human rights issues, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Pakistan’s official and unofficial responses to the American stance on some of these issues ranged from outright criticism of Washington to allegations of discrimination against the Islamic world exercised by the United States and its allies. Especially, anti-Zionism in Pakistan has been a persistent feature of the country’s foreign policy. Israel has been the target of Muslim hatred in Pakistan as elsewhere for seeking to wipe the whole Palestinian nation off the map of the world. The profile of two Palestinian intifadas is rooted in the scenes of Israeli tanks shooting at stone-throwing young Palestinians, razing their houses, building Jewish settlements on the occupied lands, and denying basic human rights to Palestinians. Not surprisingly, the state and society in Pakistan carry an anti-Zionist feeling, which is intense, permanent, and uncompromising. The U.S. support for Israel and the U.S. nuclear nonproliferation regime in general elicited strong anti-U.S. reactions from the elite as well as the articulate sections of the public in Pakistan.

It is not surprising that the sense of betrayal at the hands of the United States often led Pakistan to active consideration of rival friendship patterns. Enthusiasm for friendship with China is proverbial in Pakistan. Elite groups as different from each other as the mainstream political leadership, military elite, and public intelligentsia, as well as leaders of major Islamic parties, have all shown great admiration for the Chinese friendship, which is described as permanent and unflinching. Similarly, Pakistan crucially and pronouncedly befriended Soekarno’s Indonesia during and after the 1965 war, as well as Muammar Gaddafi’s Libya during and after the 1971 war. After the dawn of the era of the petrodollar in the post-1973 Arab-Israel war period, millions of Pakistani workers migrated to Saudi Arabia. This led to the emergence of a vast network of Islamic organizations, banking operations, media activities, and economic cooperation between the two countries. Saudi Arabia
reportedly helped Pakistan through its financial crisis in the aftermath of the 1998 nuclear tests. In the hour of the perceived betrayal of the United States, Pakistan has continued to invoke its “real” and lasting friendship with both China and Saudi Arabia. However, the fact that Pakistan’s foreign policy is inherently India-centered has put a constraint on the strategic impact of Pak-Saudi and Pak-China relations. Neither China nor Saudi Arabia could fulfill Pakistan’s perceived security requirements and the need for diplomatic support in world forums. In 2004 Pakistan continues to cooperate with the United States for a joint operation against terrorism. However, in the long run, the elite in Islamabad could be expected to revert to its old position of considering Washington a nondependable ally as and when the latter withdraws from active alignment with Pakistan in the region. Its fears about the Indian and Israeli lobbies in Washington achieving exactly that have generally kept Islamabad on its toes throughout the period after 9/11.

Islam and the West: The Emerging Dichotomy

If India was the crucial factor in Islamabad’s quest for an external equalizer and thus for its periodical frustration with the United States for not matching its friendship with an equal and lasting commitment, it is the Pan-Islamist profile of the society that often engendered negative perceptions about Washington. The world of Islam perspective is the key to understanding the frustration of Muslims in Pakistan and elsewhere with the perceived American policies about regional conflicts. The Islamic community is a unique phenomenon inasmuch as it is a mini-world in the larger world. For comparison, one can argue that there is no Hindu world. The state of India comprehensively represents the world of Hinduism, with Nepal being the only other Hindu state. There is no Buddhist world either, unless one puts together China, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka as building blocks of a faith-based community of states. Nor indeed is there a Christian world whereby countries ranging from the Philippines to Kenya, Tanzania, and South Africa, to England, France, and Germany onward to the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Brazil would make a coherent bloc of countries bound by religious ties.

The core of the world of Islam comprises 54 Muslim states. In addition, it includes significantly large historical Muslim minorities belonging to such countries as India, China, Russia, as well as the Balkan states. The third major component of this world is the expatriate Muslim community in Western countries. In the second half of the twentieth century, various regional conflicts involving Muslim communities provided what was generally defined as Islamic causes, which increasingly welded the world of Islam together. The Palestinian issue can be considered the oldest and the most consistently frustrating Islamic cause in this regard. It has cost the United States a huge loss of goodwill and political support among Muslims of Pakistan and elsewhere. A series of Islamic causes followed: Kashmir, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Chechnya. Muslim publics in various countries got restive about Islamic causes whenever these emerged in any part of the world of Islam. However, it would have been a U.S. foreign policy disaster in general if the Muslim outrage had been accommodated in the decision-making channels of Muslim states. This would have turned Muslim countries against Washington in a big way. However, authoritarian state systems in the Muslim world have been functional for Washington’s pursuit of certain policies that are unpopular among Muslims. This leads us to consideration of a model of Muslim perceptions about the United States that is based on a dichotomy of the state and society.

Pakistan presents a good case study of this dichotomy. We can point to three major events in the country’s history that highlight the gap between state policy and public demand relating to Islamic causes. In Pakistan, the 1956 Suez crisis put the state under a severe challenge
from the public outrage. People demanded condemnation of the joint British, French, and Israeli attack on Egypt and sought to mobilize both moral and material support for the Muslim brotherly state from the Arab world. However, Prime Minister Hussain Shaheed Sohrawardy brushed aside the idea of cooperation between Muslim countries by publicly stating that zero plus zero was equal to zero. Decades later, the Nawaz Sharif government became part of the international coalition against Iraq during the 1991 Gulf War, in the teeth of opposition from the larger public. Finally, the Musharraf government’s decision to join hands with President George W. Bush in the latter’s war effort against Taliban and Osama bin Laden in 2001–02 led to a total reversal of Islamabad’s foreign policy commitments in Afghanistan, even as large sections of people opposed the move vigorously. In all three cases, i.e. in 1956, 1991, and 2001–02, the society at large reacted sharply against what it considered Western (in the last two instances, American) encroachment on the sovereignty and integrity of a fellow Muslim country. In every case, the government was placed under severe pressure. Each time, it faced a moral crisis but managed to deflect the pressure and survive in office. The clue lies in the kind of social and political milieu of Pakistan, which has been defined in the Russian context as an hour-glass society as opposed to a civil society. Pakistan society, similarly, comprises two half spheres of activity, joined like an hour glass, where there is only one-way flow of authority and value from top to bottom. There are very few links available to society at the bottom to influence and shape the policy on top. Thus, it has been possible to have a pro-American state elite and an anti-American society in Pakistan at the same time.

From the early years after independence, Pakistan’s ruling elite committed itself to alliance with the United States and other Western countries in the context of the Cold War between the capitalist and communist blocs at the global level. As far as the domestic scene was concerned, the general public was far from mobilized in the sense of joining an ongoing process of political participation. From the 1970s onward, a vehement process of sharing the fate of other Muslim communities in crisis started in earnest in Pakistan. In the aftermath of the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war, which resulted in the emergence of East Pakistan as Bangladesh, Islamabad turned its back on South Asia. There was an acute feeling that the region belonged to India’s area of influence. Under these circumstances, Pakistan turned to the Middle East in a big way. This move for turning away from its eastern neighbor in the wake of a military defeat and embracing its western neighbors with prospects of entering the larger Muslim community could not come at a more opportune moment. The post-1973 war boom in oil prices made this move increasingly more meaningful in financial terms.

If the first phase of Pakistan’s history in terms of perceptions about America can be described in terms of strategic alliance against the perceived threats from India and secondarily from the Soviet Union, the second phase can be understood in the framework of the world of Islam perspective. Two new dimensions were added to the old phenomenon of the elite’s pro-American policies in the last quarter of the twentieth century. First, Western perceptions about the role of Islam in the region around Pakistan were now focused on the Afghan resistance movement against the Soviet presence in Kabul. This opened up new channels of public activity, operationalized through the use of Islamic identity in pursuit of foreign policy objectives. Secondly, the focus of the new movement went beyond the anti-Indian sentiment per se. By the 1990s, it was the fate of the Islamic community in the larger context of global politics that inspired the action and belief of the enterprising sections of the population in Pakistan and other Muslim countries. In this process, the 1991 Gulf War served as the turning point in the context of Pakistani perceptions about the United States. The traditional pro–Saudi Arabian Islamic parties, such as Jamat Islami, as well as some officers in the army high command, including COAS General Aslam Beg, condemned the U.S.-led attack on Iraq. The transnational Islamic networks, which had operated against the Soviet
presence in and around Afghanistan in the 1980s, found a new adversary in the United States in the 1990s as the latter made its presence in the Gulf noticed all around militarily, diplomatically, and otherwise.¹⁶

The general public in Pakistan has become gradually more indulgent in pursuit of Islamic causes in recent years. The circuit of activity mobilized by the commitment to these causes, sometimes involving continental distances, has expanded during the last decade. A major contribution to this phenomenon can be traced down to globalization, especially the communication and media explosion. Together, the Internet and TV brought about a revolution in the perceptions of both the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds and their encounter in various conflict zones. Public opinion in Pakistan, holding the United States responsible for the underdog position of Muslims in different parts of the world—especially in the heart of Islam in the Middle East—found a loud and thumping voice in the 1990s. The ruling elite could no more afford to be dismissive about it as a mere reflection of the lack of information and sensibility on the part of an ignorant and gullible public. Instead, it sought to tackle it through a dual policy of change at home and continuity abroad. As for the former, it opened the doors of the state to Islamic groups through elections and sought to bring them in rather than leave them out. Apparently, this was a pragmatic way of tackling the radical elements within the framework of the existing political system. As for the continuity factor, it followed a policy of maintaining or reviving the old pattern of strategic alliance with the United States.

On the other hand, society at large moved on to focus on the world of Islam as its main area of commitment. It felt alienated from the United States at varying degrees according to the latter’s perceived role against one or the other Islamic cause. Negative perceptions of America in Pakistani society were now getting deeply entrenched in the perspective of the gruesome fact that three Muslim societies were currently under foreign occupation. Americans were held responsible for backing Israel in its policy of continuing occupation of the West Bank, with all the attendant problems of building settlements and committing atrocities against Palestinians. The United States played the key role in keeping the Hamid Karzai government in Kabul, which was backed by American and other NATO armed contingents. On the other hand, Iraq had come under direct and essentially unilateral American occupation in 2003. From Palestine to Iraq, Pakistanis have been increasingly mobilized and radicalized in religious, political, and diplomatic modes of thinking and patterns of behavior. Prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Pakistanis had staged several “million marches” against Washington. After the invasion, various Islamic parties’ activist groups continued to bring out demonstrations against the occupation of Iraq. The liberal and mainstream forces across the nation lost out in terms of legitimacy, while radical and militant Islamic groups were upholding the cause of sovereignty of Muslim nations and unity of the Islamic world. Islamists have been able to hold back any possible decision on the part of President Musharraf to send troops to Iraq as part of the occupying forces. The fallout of the U.S. war against Afghanistan led to intense radicalization of people in the adjacent provinces of Pakistan, North Western Frontier Province, and Baluchistan. As a consequence, proto-Taliban groups operating from the platform of Muttahida Majlis Amal (MMA) won a credible number of seats in the 2002 elections in the national and provincial assemblies and formed governments in two provinces. The rising tide of anti-Americanism in the background of the continuing occupation of Iraq boded ill for the liberal and democratic forces in that country.

The decade from the early 1990s to the early 2000s represents a widening gulf between the Islamic world and the United States on the one hand and the state and society within the Muslim world on the other. Pakistan typically and eminently represented these aspects of the growing tension within and between Islam and the West. The pervasive trend in the Western thinking as epitomized by the U.S. academia and media seemed to be that the roots of Islamic terrorism lay within the Muslim world; that faith-based agenda had taken over the domain of
public policy in Muslim countries; and that Islam-in-movement was the real problem. On the other hand, the pervasive trend in Muslim thinking in Pakistan and elsewhere was that the roots of radicalism lay outside the Muslim world, in the domain of its relations with the United States and other Western countries; that American policies were the primary source of alienation of Muslim societies both from the West and from their respective state elites; and that Islam was under siege. The emerging dichotomy of the modes of thinking a year after the invasion of Iraq was pushing the two sides to a clash of civilizations, which threatened to be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Conclusion

The preceding sections have outlined three major patterns of Pakistani perceptions about the United States. Insofar as the friendship-betrayal syndrome is concerned, a persistently India-centered worldview characterized Islamabad’s attitudes toward the United States as a balancing factor vis-à-vis its stronger neighbor. However, since the United States did not share this perspective on India, there was an overlap between expectations from each other. The elite in Pakistan felt betrayed whenever the United States opted for playing a neutral role in Indo-Pakistan conflicts. At the other end, the general public was becoming increasingly anti-American at the start of the new millennium in the larger framework of the world of Islam. The U.S. policies were largely perceived to be against Muslims in various regional conflicts. A lesser current of opinion criticizing the US role in Pakistan and elsewhere was couched in an antiimperialist mode of thinking. In Pakistan, the leftist and ethnonational parties and groups opposed what they considered imperialist designs of the United States and its allies, especially in the context of their support for military dictatorships in Pakistan. Together these critical approaches to the United States occupied a larger area of public space than ever before, even as the ruling elite continued to be a partner in the American-sponsored war against terrorism. As long as perceptions about the conflict between the United States and the Islamic world persist, anti-Americanism can be expected to expand in the larger society in both scope and intensity.

Notes

15. See Marvin Weinbaum and Gautam Sen, “Pakistan enters the Middle East,” *Orbis*, Fall 1978.

( Mohammad Waseem is a professor in the International Relations Department at Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad. )