

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Irfan Husain, *Fatal Faultlines: Pakistan, Islam and the West***  
(New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2012), 218 pages.

The author Irfan Husain is a Pakistani journalist and the book is written in a journalistic style. He has highlighted divergent interests and perceptions of Muslims and the people of the West. He has attempted to explain why millions of Muslims and Pakistanis are against America. Anti-Americanism is all over the world but it is more pronounced amongst Muslims. The first Gulf War, Israeli crackdown on Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and invasion of Lebanon in 2004, invasion of Iraq in the second Gulf War on the wrong pretext of weapons of mass destruction, and attack on Afghanistan are some of the causes of anti-Americanism (114-15).

In the opinion of Irfan, the modern day conflict is also the continuation of past crusades and warfare. The post World War II era has witnessed the rise of Islamic radicalism. They have resorted to militancy perhaps due to despotic governance in their own country (161). Muslim militancy has pushed them further apart from their host communities in the West (139).

The strategy of President Bush towards winning Muslims seemed to be based on former US President Lyndon Johnson's famous dictum: "If you've got 'em by the balls, their hearts and minds will follow." As against this dictum, the resistance to America hardened and broadened in Iraq, Afghanistan and other places in the Muslim world where it has little credibility. The treatment of Muslim prisoners at Abu Gharib and Guantanamo Bay led to the belief of American hostility towards Muslims (178). The West is only now realizing that extremism has to be countered with a more nuanced approach (175).

Irfan states that the American foreign policy is based on geopolitics and economics (9). Americans are more interested in events at home. The intervention in foreign countries is perceived by them as acts of self-sacrifice for greater good of mankind (4). It is difficult for them to understand why Muslims are against Zionism and the occupation of Palestinian land (10).

Apart from the Muslim world, the author has specifically dealt with why Pakistanis in particular are anti-American. His answer lies in what he sees as the Pakistani paradox. On the one hand the country produces broad minded individuals such as academics and technocrats who compete successfully with the rest of the world but on the other hand "mindless fundamentalists rampage across Pakistan". For example, Dr Abdus Salam the first Muslim to win the Noble Prize in Physics, was not allowed to address students in a

university, just because he was a follower of the Ahmadi sect. If a person belonging to Ahmadi sect uses Islamic salutation “Assalam-u-Alaikum” (peace be upon you), he is prosecuted but if a non-Muslim foreigner uses this expression it is appreciated. “Such contradictions expose the hypocrisy rampant in Pakistani society today,” he says (95-96).

Enumerating the fault lines in the Pak-US relations he says that Pakistanis are in a state of denial (24). There is an American perception that Pakistan is not cooperating fully in its war on terror and is playing a double game (198). The Pakistani perception is that Pakistan is in an invidious position of fighting alongside Americans and as a result having to suffer disproportionately (199). Americans complain that Pakistan is not doing enough to justify the billions in military aid and the Pak Army deeply resents the implication that US considers it as a mercenary army (211). The perception being spread by Pakistan’s media is that Americans are arming Taliban who are targeting Pakistan’s security forces. American drone attacks are considered to be trampling Pakistan’s sovereignty (104), but citing NIRRA’s survey he says that two thirds of the people viewed al Qaeda and the Taliban as enemy number one and similar percentage considers that drone attacks used against them is not a violation of sovereignty (106-7). He seems wrong when he says that people in tribal areas welcome drone attacks (11).

Americans want the Pak Army to go after the Haqqani network, without realizing Pakistan’s forces have their hands full dealing with local terrorists who are spreading mayhem across the country (200). Irfan has cast aspersions on the ISI for the terrorist attacks on GHQ, Rawalpindi, and later on the Mehran Naval base in Karachi. He is inclined to agree that there is a possible nexus between certain militant groups and elements in the ISI, a charge generally propagated in Indian and Western media (197). He quotes Carlotta Gall of *New York Times* that Pakistan military uses “proxies against its neighbours and American forces in Afghanistan” (203).

The rise of extremism and militancy is possible in countries where government control over large territories is tenuous and clerics are free to encourage their audience to commit violence against anyone who follows a different interpretation of Islam (182). In order to justify killing of Muslims, they have resorted to the doctrine of *takfir*, i.e. denouncement of a believer as an apostate, whose punishment is death (164). This Islamic injunction came into force immediately after the demise of the Prophet and many Muslims follow the letter of their faith while ignoring its spirit.

Internet has become a provider of news, views, rumour and gossip along with networks like Twitter and Facebook and incessant text messaging around the world (181). Al Qaeda has become the first guerrilla movement in history to move from physical space to cyberspace (212). Cyberspace is where extremists gather to exchange views and to radicalize new recruits for Jihad (181). Islamic websites resound with ideological splits and doctrinaire conflict.

The internet has become a marketplace for selling various strands of Islamic thought (126-27).

The current revolt in the Middle East, in his view, is because most countries are poorly governed and their economies have not created jobs to accommodate educated young men, who have high aspirations and lower acceptance of authoritarian governance (187). He expresses hope in the Arab Spring that it would end the dictatorship and usher in an era of moderate Islamic democratic government. If the West supports people's governments, the relationship between the West and the Muslim world would improve in future.

He seems correct in saying that al Qaeda is not popular (23). Few Muslims mourned the killing of Osama (27). His judgment that this is a war without an end in the foreseeable future looks somewhat ominous (13) particularly when he thinks and correctly so that "power is shifting from the nation-state to multinational corporations" and ideology was becoming "increasingly irrelevant" (14).

The author whose western bent of mind is often reflected in his newspaper columns does not fail to show the same predilection (for accepting influences from Western media) in this book too but here at least he makes an effort to present a balanced account by interviewing political and religious leaders as well as ordinary citizens, and projecting the views and perceptions of both sides. The book is highly readable, informative and useful to understand the mindset of both Muslims and the Westerners. ■

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**Usama Butt and Julian Schofield, eds., *Pakistan: the US, Geopolitics and Grand Strategies***

(London: Pluto Press, 2012), 272 pages.

The book titled *Pakistan the US, Geopolitics and Grand Strategies* edited by Usama Butt and Julian Schofield discusses the future of Pakistan's foreign policy and the country's "special relationship" with the United States. The main thesis presented in the book is that Pakistan's foreign policy is not determined by the requirements of the US-led "war on terror" alone or the country's India approach but other factors such as domestic sensitivities and relations with regional allies and non allies also influence it. Pakistan's steadfastness in preserving its core interests is also highlighted.

The book comprises two parts: Pak-US Relations are discussed in the first six chapters and Pakistan's Foreign Relations in the next five. The preface, introduction and conclusion of the book have been written by Usama Butt and Julian Schofield.

Discussing the “Changing Dynamics in War on Terror: The Islamic Orientation of the Pakistani State and the Islamic Reaction of the Masses,” Usama Butt says that Pakistan’s relations with the US and regional countries will be affected by the much-weakened Islamic orientation of the state and the considerably strengthened Islamic reaction of the masses as a consequence of the war on terror. It will now be difficult for the politicians and the military elite to muster domestic support for the war on terror while domestic pressures will continue to bring Pakistan-US relations under strain.

Michael Rubin, in his article titled “when Realities Collide: Different US-Pakistan Threat Perceptions” asserts that non-realization of each other’s national interests and threat perceptions mars US Pakistan relations as US will remain focused on the interplay between radical Islamism, state terror sponsorship and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (57). While Pakistan wants a friendly government in Afghanistan, US wants a stable Afghanistan with the capacity to deny use of force by any Afghan faction. He believes no outcome in Afghanistan is likely over which both the US and Pakistan can agree.

Marium Mufti discussing the “Influence of domestic politics on the making of US-Pakistan foreign policy,” thinks that the traditional factors affecting US-Pakistan relations have been overtaken by domestic pressures on Pakistan’s foreign policy which the US now realizes.

In “Triangle of distrust,” Nasir Islam holds that US-Pakistan relations have been fully tested in Afghanistan. Whereas Pakistan supported the US in dismantling al Qaeda, it did not forego its strategic interests in the region like security of its western borders, internal security and its issues with India. In this regard Pakistan has resisted US pressures by fine-tuning its balancing act.

Shamshad Ahmed, discussing “Pakistan’s quest for security and survival: US-Pakistan relations,” concludes that in the past these relations consisted in managing conflicting goals but future relations should go beyond the war on terror and focus on the people of Pakistan.

In his article Ishtiaq Ahmed dilates on Obama’s Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy. Despite irritants in implementing this strategy he notices a tendency to move forward with the relationship which he suggests should be used for institutionalizing the strategic partnership.

Julian Schofield analyzing “Pakistan-China strategic relations, energy security and Pakistani counter-terror operations,” thinks that Pakistan-China relations are based on neutralizing the threat of a common enemy, India. China’s interest in Pakistan lies in counter-balancing India, assisting in countering Islamist terror threat in Xingjian and acting as a route to oil rich Gulf States. She thinks China’s support enables Pakistan to safeguard its policies from becoming subservient to US foreign policy priorities and neutralizing American overtures to India.

Christian Koch, in “US-Pakistan relations in a regional perspective: shifting perspective from the Arab-Gulf and the role of European Union,” discusses Pakistan’s relations with GCC countries which consider Pakistan as a reliable strategic partner. The wrong policies of the US towards the Muslim world are forcing the GCC countries to reduce dependence on the US and strengthen ties with EU, China and India.

Gawdat Bhagat discussing Pakistan-Saudi Arabia relations thinks that the long, multifaceted relations are based on both shared values and mutual interests (203). The similarity in foreign policy orientation has reinforced military and economic cooperation (189). This partnership is likely to continue. Since the Arab countries are wary of Shiite Iran, Pakistan finds it difficult to balance its relations between Arab friends and close neighbour Iran.

In “Pakistan and Iran: a relationship in search of meaning,” Harsh V. Pant feels that Pakistan remains concerned about the growing relations of Iran with India and Afghanistan. Pakistan’s relations with Iran remain difficult because of their differing interests in Afghanistan. It is very likely that the situation in Afghanistan will continue to determine the nature of Pakistan-Iran ties (222).

Discussing Western concerns about security of Pakistan’s nuclear assets Shaista Tabassum dilates on how these concerns have become a dimension of US-Pak relations.

Summing up the findings of the articles in the book the editors conclude that the deficit of trust in Pakistan-US relationship is due to the US and western demands for Pakistan to “do more” and Pakistan’s resilience in doing only that which does not hurt its national interests and which is according to its own national strategic threat perceptions. Pakistan’s delicate balancing act to resist US pressures will depend largely on its domestic strength, its relations with regional allies like China, Saudi Arabia and GCC countries and non allies, Iran and India and Pakistan’s degree of success to influence the end game in Afghanistan. China, besides the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia, is the main bulwark of Pakistan’s resilience in the face of the current and coming strategic challenges. The set of essays in the book analyse the Pakistan-US relations and the underlying tensions in the context of the “war on terror” in Afghanistan. ■

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**M.J. Akbar, *Tinderbox – The Past and Future of Pakistan***

(New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2011), 343 pages.

Pakistan has been a hot topic in international affairs studies since 9/11. The country, a victim of terrorism and the war in its wake, has also been implicated in almost all major terrorist activities around the globe due to alleged connections of its citizens in such incidents. This one sided depiction of the

country as the villain has prompted at least some neutral analysts to leave the trodden path and have a fresh look at the country. M J Akbar's *Tinderbox – The Past and Future of Pakistan* is one such work..

An eminent Indian editor, Akbar is a prolific writer and author of a number of well known books including *Nehru – The Making of India*, *Riot after Riot, India: The Siege within*, *Kashmir – Behind the Vale*, and *Shade of Swords: Jihad and the Conflict between Islam and Christianity*. Like his previous books, *Tinderbox* takes a journey through history starting with the “age of defeat” for the Muslims. The origin of the “theory of distance” between Hindus and Muslims is traced to the colonial era until the “breaking point” is reached for Hindu Muslim relationship, Pakistan is born and Maududi is dubbed as “the godfather of Pakistan,” Zia as “God’s general” and Kashmir “the long jihad.” The country is seen finally as besieged from within

Akbar draws a graphic simile for Pakistan as a toxic jelly state: “driven by the compulsions of an ideological strand in its DNA, damaged by the inadequacies of those who could have kept the nation loyal to Jinnah’s dream of a secular Muslim-majority nation, Pakistan is in danger of turning into a toxic “jelly state,” a quivering country that will neither collapse nor stabilize.”

Akbar holds that “A strange alchemy of past superiority and future insecurity shaped the dream of a separate Muslim state in India.” Navigating through the history of British rule in India, he shatters the myth of British administrative skills by noting that in 120 years of British rule up to 1877 India had experienced thirty-four famines compared to only seventeen in the entire period of the past two millennia.

Akbar describes Indian leadership’s role and policies during WWI and defends Gandhi’s support for the British during the war as a political investment. It was after events like the Jallianwala massacre that convinced Gandhi that “British rule was satanic.” This new assessment enabled Gandhi to lead non-violent jihad in the cause of Khilifat. The theory of distance, originally propounded by Shah Waliullah again emerged on the scene. Religion started to play a dominant role in politics. Appealing to Muslim voters in 1937 Jinnah said that “the Muslim League has been established with a view to coordinate the actions of Muslims according to the dictates of Allah and the Holy Koran.”

Akbar considers Islam as inadequate glue for nationalism; separation of Bangladesh is put forward as a proof of this claim. However he provides space for those who would contest this argument by highlighting the imbalance between East and West Pakistan’s representation in the armed forces. He notes that there were three Lt. Generals and 20 major generals in Pakistan army; all from the West Pakistan. There were 34 brigadiers, 49 colonels, 198 Lt. Colonels and 590 majors from West Pakistan against 1, 1, 2, and 10 from East Pakistan in 1955.

While criticizing Zia particularly, he maintains that jihad was made a central determinant of Pakistan's India policy as early as 1947, under the leadership of Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan. He holds that "Jihad was the first child of the two-nation theory." And to grab the attention of western audience—Akbar is a nonresident senior fellow at Brookings—he notes that "Exporting jihad...became the Pakistan government's first substantive project."

Whereas *Tinderbox* strongly criticizes Pakistan's policy on Kashmir, it also acknowledges that impasse on Kashmir "leaves the road open for continuing jihad." Unsurprisingly, Akbar steers clear of the United Nations' resolutions as if there were no obligations on the international community with regard to Kashmir.

Finally, Akbar expresses his skepticism about Pakistan army's role in the war on terror and subscribes to the popular account in western media about its alleged collusion with the Taliban. He mentions three factors that can prevent Pakistan from falling into the extremist fold: urban Pakistan, domestic military muscle and American money. He notes, "The best-case scenario for Pakistan is that the 'Islamic-subaltern' revolt in impoverished areas is brought under control by the military, and elected governments appreciate that a real solution demands social and economic reforms: land redistribution; high economic growth which can facilitate rapid redistribution of national wealth; Keynesian investments in low-skill jobs and artisan products; secular, gender-equal education; health care and infrastructure, with democracy as a non-negotiable necessity, which in turn means that the 'doctrine of necessity,' the judicial cover for coups, has to be eliminated." Here, he asks a key question: what will happen if both military and political parties lose credibility? And comes with an answer: "If Pakistan does not find modernity, it will sink into medievalism. There is no third path." This however is no novel finding and the formulaic solution offered is as hackneyed as it should not have been coming from a pen like Akbar's.

*Tinderbox* may be read to know the Indian view of Pakistan or acquaint oneself with how liberal thinkers who are not necessarily hostile to Pakistan assess the situation in South Asia.

The usual prophecies of Pakistan's instability could have been withheld to make *Tinderbox* less clichéd and something more than just a strong journalistic work. ■

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