

Report: Roundtable on “South Asian States Turning into Security States and its Larger Implications” with Gen. (Retd.) Jehangir Karamat, former Chief of Army Staff (COAS) of the Pakistan army

How to transform from a national security to a social welfare state?

Aarish U. Khan

ISLAMABAD: Gen. Jehangir Karamat, former Chief of Army Staff (COAS) of the Pakistan army, said that to transform from a national security state to a social welfare state, Pakistan will have to increase the number of stakeholders in the power sharing arrangement by devolving powers to the lower levels as well as among institutions. He was the main speaker at a roundtable on “South Asian States turning into Security States and its Larger Implications” organized by the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) here on Wednesday.

Gen. (Retd.) Karamat defined national security state as a state with inordinate resource allocation towards defense at the cost of social welfare, and said that India was gradually moving away from being a national security state on that account. Pakistan, on the other hand, according to Gen. (Retd.) Karamat, is still quite defense-oriented and, thus, rooted in the national security paradigm. He attributed Pakistan’s national security concerns to its history, unresolved border disputes with India, internal problems such as insurgencies, and the recent emergence of trans-border issues, such as terrorism.

Pakistan, according to Gen. (Retd.) Karamat, could not over-extend its limited resources to alter its regional environment to take care of its inhibitions and threat-perceptions. To shift from a national security paradigm to an effective governance and social welfare paradigm, Gen. (Retd.) Karamat argued, Pakistan will have to change internally. He suggested greater sharing of power within the state for incorporating the stakes of a larger pool of stakeholders in the decision-making processes, which he thought could make Pakistan more welfare-oriented than security-oriented. He specifically called for greater power sharing not only between the federation and the federating units, but also between the federating units and the local governments. “Gone are the days of integration through force or false slogans,” said Gen. (Retd.) Karamat. “When other countries are making contingency plans for Pakistan, we should put ourselves in their shoes and think why they are doing that,” he added.

Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Mahmud Durrani, former National Security Advisor, emphasized that the threat to Pakistan was internal rather than external and that it needed to improve its governance, economy, and justice system. He added that balancing civil military relations was part of improvement in governance. Taking his point forward, Gen. (Retd.) Karamat opined that only a credible and functioning democratic government could bring about balanced institutional relations—including a balance in the relations between the civilian and military leaderships. He added that the military would support

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any political government with good service delivery credentials in balancing the civil-military relations.

Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Talat Masood called for an enhanced debate not only on the concept of comprehensive security but also on cooperative security in the region. Prof. Zhou Rong of the Chinese Guang Ming Daily added that being a primarily South Asian state, Pakistan needed to open up trade with India to improve its economy and, thus, internal security.

Amb. B.A. Malik, called for holding free, fair, and transparent elections in Pakistan to counter the status quo and, thus, national security tendencies of the establishment. Amb. Khalid Mahmood, was of the view that Pakistan’s defense expenditure should have ideally reduced after the acquisition of nuclear capability, which has not happened. He questioned the utility of nuclear weapons on this premise.

Mr. Stephan Roken, Minister Counselor and Deputy Head of the German Mission in Islamabad, said that Germany wanted a strong Pakistan and that it was supporting Pakistan in various ways to achieve that objective. Mr. Chadwalton, Political Officer of the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad said that different power centers in the U.S. had divergent views about Pakistan. He added that Congress, being a popularly elected institution, was more inclined to be influenced by negative publicity about Pakistan in the U.S. Permanent bureaucracies like the State or the Defense Departments had a more balanced view about Pakistan, according to Mr. Chadwalton. Gen. Karamat replied that he saw the emergence of a thaw in Pak-U.S. relations with the U.S. showing concern over the retirement of Gen. Pasha, the head of an institution they had earlier criticized as attacking the U.S. in Afghanistan.

Other participants of the roundtable were: Mr. Ashraf Azim, President of IRS; Brig. (Retd.) Bashir Ahmed, Senior Fellow at IRS; Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Asad Durrani; Dr. Tanvir Ahmed Khan; Amb. Tariq Fatemi; Mr. Dragos Luca, First Secretary at the Romanian Embassy in Islamabad; and Ms. Arshi Saleem Hashmi of the National Defense University (NDU).