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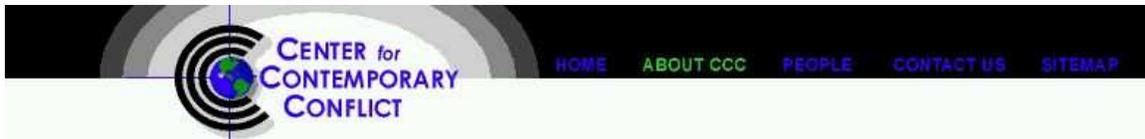
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General Trends, Global Futures, and U.S.–Pakistan Relations

Strategic Insights, Volume VI, Issue 4 (June 2007)

by [Jehangir Karamat](#)

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Introduction

The rationale for the current U.S.–Pakistan engagement is the war on terror. Because this is also the rationale for many other events world wide there is a need to flag some aspects of past U.S.–Pakistan engagements. Pakistan's geo-strategic and geo-political goals were determined by the environment created by the unresolved issues with India and the consequent hostility, the close alliance between India, the former USSR and Afghanistan and the global war against Communism waged by the United States throughout the Cold War period. The USSR's invasion of Afghanistan gave the United States the opportunity to build the Resistance in Afghanistan into a jihad by forging an alliance with the Islamic countries. Pakistan became the logistic base and the front line state in this decade long struggle. This is when the seeds of terror were sown in Afghanistan. These seeds flourished because no one foresaw the consequences—they only saw the immediate opportunities and Pakistan was no exception.

After the defeat of the Soviet Union, Afghanistan drifted into civil war between warlords, and then there was the struggle between the Northern Alliance and the Taliban and finally the al-Qaeda–Taliban alliance that eventually led to the events of 9/11. To these events we should add the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Sikh insurgency in India and the Kashmir freedom struggle in India. Pakistan was also under U.S. pressure and sanctions because of its nuclear weapons program and later, the democracy issue. This entire environment determined Pakistan's policy in pursuit of its geopolitical goals at that time. 9/11 happened when Pakistan had run into the brick wall of the al-Qaeda and terrorism reality and its forward policies were creating an almost uncontrollable blowback. Economic decline and political instability created a weak internal environment that could not cope with the new threat of extremism and terrorism. Pakistan's policy U-turn and alignment with the United States was therefore logical and completely in-line with the reform process that had begun in 1999. Now the U.S.–Pakistan re-engagement has dimensions much beyond the war on terrorism. Pakistan is transforming itself into an economically prosperous, politically stable and deterrence capable moderate Muslim state. The U.S. sees political resolve and potential in Pakistan for this transformation and is helping Pakistan to achieve its goal. When the United States does not see potential and resolve it will cease to help Pakistan. The current focus on the war on terror should be seen as part of this process and not in isolation.

As the United States' interest in South Asia is not confined to terrorism, therefore U.S. policy considers national and global security, nuclear proliferation, economic and strategic opportunities, democracy and anti-Americanism in the Muslim world as issues of interest and concern. General trends and global futures are therefore very significant not just because they lead to speculative

and imaginative scenarios but more importantly because they identify the drivers behind the trends. There have been several studies that have led to debates and discussions and it may be useful to very briefly consider the major ones.

The 1997 report on Global Trends 2010 identified globalization, governance, science and technology, the United States as a preponderant power, natural resources and uncertainty over China as major drivers of trends. A 1999 study by the U.S. Department of Defense studied Asian futures in a 2025 time frame. Besides useful predictions on demographics and military capabilities this study in one very imaginative scenario painted a picture of internal chaos and anarchy within Pakistan prompting a conventional attack by India and a nuclear response by Pakistan. This leads to U.S.-India collusion to take out Pakistan's nuclear capabilities and bring about the disintegration of Pakistan resulting in a Confederation of India that includes a collapsed Afghanistan. Predictably no one in Pakistan was overjoyed by this scenario.

Global Trends 2015 in 2000 built on the 2010 document and focused on demographics, natural resources and environment, science and technology, global economy and globalization, national and international governance and the United States as the primary power and global driver. This study did achieve its stated purpose: "to rise above short term tactical considerations and provide a longer-term strategic perspective."

In 2004 we had "Mapping the Global Future"—a report of the U.S. National Intelligence Councils 2020 project. This study predicted the virtual certainty of the emergence of India and China as global powers based on their high economic growth, expanding military capabilities and large populations. The report stated that "the 21st century may be seen as the time when Asia, led by China and India comes into its own." Globalization was identified as an overarching mega-trend. Governance was given considerable importance with political Islam creating a significant global impact—in fact a fictional scenario was based on Islam's ability to transcend national boundaries by rallying disparate ethnic and national groups to create an authority that was called the Caliphate. The dangers of insecurity from internal conflicts because of poor governance were highlighted. International terrorism was considered a key factor with globalization and technology facilitating al Qaeda like groups linked by a common ideology and able to strike while widely dispersed.

There is much more in the report but some quotes are significant—"the U.S. will retain enormous advantages, playing a pivotal role across the broad range of issues—that no other state will match by 2020."—"A counterterrorism strategy that approaches the problem on multiple fronts offers the greatest chance of containing—and ultimately reducing—the terrorist threat" and the last one—"the possession of chemical, biological, and/or nuclear weapons by Iran and North Korea and the possible acquisition by others by 2020 also increase the potential cost of any military action by the United States against them or their allies."

The *Economist* in 2000 while discussing the "geopolitics of 2026" based its vision of four new world orders on certain trends—China's economy becoming bigger than the United States and India's economy larger than any European country; a fierce global scramble for oil, water and skilled labor; the "privatization of destruction" that will allow groups of individuals to take on nation states leading to "defensive imperialism"; an economic shift from the north and west to the south and east; and finally new concepts of democracy, freedom and rule of law. The predicted quadri-polar world was predicted to be split on two axes: between democracies and autocracies and between countries seeking a balance of power and those that want a world organized around international law and institutions. The American World with India in its embrace would be the most powerful pole. An expanded Euro-sphere would be the second pole. China and Russia would be the third pole united by their autocratic systems with the SCO turned into a G7 of repressive countries. The fourth pole was called the Faith Zone with the Muslim world as the front line and would have Islamists with international connections. There would be a new balance of soft power between these poles because of a single global economic system.

From Pakistan's point of view there are common factors in these trends and futures that can help formulate future policies and also shape the U.S.–Pakistan strategic partnership in a longer time-frame. In fact many of these figure in Pakistan's ongoing reform and its current policies:

1. The primacy of U.S. power is understood and Pakistan considers the current strategic partnership with the United States to be in its long-term interest.

U.S. concerns of ambivalence in Pakistan's state policy are misconceived as this would not be in Pakistan's interest. Pakistan has gone well past the point of no return in its commitment to the United States and from its point of view the future is in going forward to add depth, breadth and new dimensions to this relationship. Pakistan is gaining from this partnership. It accepts U.S. policy in South Asia and it is in Pakistan's interest to help stabilize Afghanistan, resolve issues with India and be part of a South Asia that serves as a base for trade, investment and energy flows to and from Central Asia. Pakistan does have to permit its internal dynamics to evolve into coherent support for the relationship with the United States—for this it has "red lines" and short-term policies that support and lead to the longer term U.S.–Pakistan converging objectives. These should not be seen as signs of ambivalence or lack of resolve—Pakistan has a problem and it is trying to solve it. It does not help if Pakistan is seen as part of the problem.

2. Pakistan is fully committed to being an active part of the globalized world.

Pakistan's highly successful ongoing economic reforms are focused on trade, investment and robust financial institutions. There is understanding of the competition for energy resources, the need for educated and skilled human resources, likely water shortages and the need for science and technology—particularly information technology. Given the environment around Pakistan and the memory of past events the dangers of the negative trends in the global environment are very clear to Pakistan—extremism with international linkages, unauthorized access and proliferation, exploitation of financial loopholes and lapses in security. Economic growth and economic security demands an environment that has to be created and maintained—political stability and representative government are a part of such an environment.

3. A secure internal environment created through effective governance is a priority for Pakistan.

This can come from strong institutional development, rule of law and resolution of conflict. Such an environment is a pre-requisite for political and economic stability and depends on them for its continuity. External factors, the trend towards a continuation of extremism and terrorism world wide and the sectarian cleavage that is creating conflict in the Islamic world will inevitably impact on Pakistan's endeavor to secure and strengthen its internal situation. Policies that encourage trans-border conflict or create centrifugal tendencies are not in Pakistan's interest now or in the future—whatever may have been the perception in the past. The focus on social sector reform is Pakistan's long-term plan to eradicate weaknesses that have crept into the social fabric over a period of time. Internal instability can be disastrous for Pakistan but equally disastrous would be an expedient policy that does not tackle the problem squarely or a democratic government that cannot control the escalating situation of violence. Pakistanis are seeing the remarkable change that sustained economic growth can bring.

4. Pakistan is in sync with U.S. policy for South Asia and this drives the trend for normalizing bilateral relationships, being part of regional and extra-regional alliances, moving to cooperation and competition instead of confrontations of the past and seeking the resolution through peaceful means of issues that led to protracted conflict.

Pakistan's relationship with China, with Iran, with the Islamic world and inevitably with a stable Afghanistan should give it the confidence to accept U.S. perception of India as the pre-eminent

regional and potential global power. Pakistan now wants secure borders on all sides because drugs, weapons and non-state actors are a very real danger. Pakistan is also looking to total reconciliation with India. In fact even as Pakistan grapples with its internal and external situation it tries to act as a bridging nation between Islam and the West and a motivator for harmony within the Islamic world—especially now with serious and violent divisions within Islam. There is a very realistic appreciation of India that acknowledges political stability, military power and growth but tempers it with the statistics on literacy, disease, poverty and inadequacies in effective governance.

5. Demographic considerations are important for Pakistan as it looks at its growing population and the future structural make-up of that population.

Infra-structure and resource development are priority policy objectives—in fact Pakistan has lost time for which it has to compensate. Skilled labor and human resource development have to take priority and this is what the present policies aim at achieving.

6. Scenarios can seem outlandish at first.

If someone had predicted the events before during and after the loss of Pakistan's eastern part and the emergence of Bangladesh the scenario would have seemed far-fetched. Scenarios are, however, useful because they identify trends and take them to one possible conclusion if the drivers of those trends do not change. From this point of view the scenarios in the NIC studies are relevant and should be noted not just because of the end-result that they predict but because of the drivers and trends that they are built up on. Today with so many drastic changes having taken place Pakistan has to evolve and consider its own scenarios. The "attack on Iran" scenario is one. Failure to resolve issues with India and renewed Indian hostility with Pakistan is another one. A resurgence of Taliban in Afghanistan, a decline in the situation in Afghanistan and a premature withdrawal by the United States from Afghanistan can lead to many scenarios. Pakistan's internal situation particularly the trends in the Tribal Areas and Baluchistan if not strongly handled with a multi faceted response can lead to situations that could support scenarios like the "loose nukes conundrum" and "extremist dominance"—these seem far fetched right now when considered against the backdrop of the structural and organizational changes that have brought about very strong control arrangements. Memories of the enduring Russian-Indian and Northern Alliance relationship still linger as does the reality of an India-Iran and an Iran-Russia relationship. These will continue to influence thought as will the more recent events in which Hezbollah, Hamas, Iran, Syria, Israel and the Sunni-Shia divide in Iraq are prominent actors. There are, of course, many positive scenarios that can be built on the present trends but policies have to consider "worst case situations" to focus on concerns. It is, therefore, important that we discuss these concerns to see the extent of convergence between the United States and Pakistan.

Pakistan has made remarkable progress in the last several years through consistent policies and effective implementation. The results of this growth are visible. The landscape of our cities is changing rapidly. Banking, real estate, telecommunications, energy, automobiles and the services sector—are all thriving with enormous opportunities for investors and entrepreneurs. There is dynamism in society as the social conditions change in the urban and rural areas. Pakistan sees these trends as the best countervailing factor against the many negative trends that it confronts and therefore it is in Pakistan's interest that this growth be sustained together with social sector reform.

The concern is, that based on the performance over the last few years, whether governance will be able to create and maintain the internal environment that is needed for continued economic growth. This environment would include political stability and resolve, law and order, justice, social sector reforms, rule of law, institutional development and administration. There has been a tacit acceptance of recent military interventions in Thailand and Bangladesh as being in the national interest and there is unstated approval of the way those militaries are handling the post-

intervention situation to bring about reform and improvement. Pakistan has to find its own answers to the problems it faces. It needs support and not pressure because hitting rock bottom again under external pressures is not the answer in the present overall environment—and this is a risk that cannot and should not be taken. This is where the concerns raised by drivers and trends become very significant.

The U.S.–Pakistan Strategic partnership jointly focuses on many concerns and gives Pakistan significant advantages but U.S. policies for Pakistan and the regions around us have effects and consequences. Just as the United States considers its own interests Pakistan also has to see what is best for it in the long run because our geographic location will not change so geopolitical realities become a very significant consideration. Domestic public opinion in terms of anti-Americanism is not based on any cultural or religious considerations—it is part of the overall perception of U.S. policies not just in the world but within the United States itself. This trend is part of globalization in general, and the internal globalization within the Muslim world. So what happens in Iraq, or Iran, or Palestine, or Afghanistan sends waves all over the world and Pakistan is no exception.

Yet in spite of this perceived anti-Americanism, so far there has been no suggestion of a viable strategy for Pakistan without a strategic partnership with the United States. This is a partnership that has a future and is in the interest of both countries.

About the Author

General (retd.) Jehangir Karamat is a former Chairman Joint Chief of Staff and Chief of Army Staff until October 1998. He was also the former Ambassador to the United States from 2004-06. Gen. Karamat has had an illustrious military career at critical periods in Pakistan's history. He has written extensively articles on international relations, strategic issues, and is widely known for his scholarly contributions

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