

Summary: General Ehsan UI Haq: The Pakistani Security Dilemma – An Insider’s Perspective

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General Ehsan UI Haq, a retired four-star General of the Pakistani army and former Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, gave the CSIS South Asia Program an inside look at the key security concerns of Pakistan today. General UI Haq focused on the need for better understanding on both sides of how these issues affect Pakistan’s relationship with the U.S.

General UI Haq described Pakistan as being in the midst of several crises of existential proportions. Among the external threats facing Pakistan are the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, the hegemonic aspirations of India, and the strategic objectives of the U.S. and other foreign powers in the region. He also highlighted the negative effect of internal insecurity, political turbulence, and the recent floods on the country’s economy.

Pakistan has been on the front line of the fight on terrorism, the General said. Although Pakistan and the international community struggle together, Pakistan has suffered more, with total fatalities (including 2,700 military fatalities) ten times higher than those of the terrorist attacks of 9/11. General UI Haq described Pakistan’s holistic approach to fighting terrorism as a “CHB” strategy: clear, hold and build. 150,000 troops have been committed to implement the military prong, or clear and hold aspect of this strategy. In the mean time, there is a lack of attention toward the build prong.

Pakistan desires peace and stability in the region but retains its position on many of the challenges to achieving these goals. In terms of Afghanistan, the General sees the problem of insurgents in the border provinces as a result rather than a cause of terrorists in Afghanistan and believes that the border should be a joint responsibility of Afghanistan, Pakistan and the international community. Pakistan also insists that the border be recognized, and that a reasonable time frame for the return of refugee resettlement be set. The General stressed that Pakistan must be kept fully on board for any developments in the Afghanistan situation.

General UI Haq then discussed U.S.-Pakistan relations in greater detail. Connections between the countries have existed for over sixty years, although often under volatile circumstances. Government to government relations are stable and mostly satisfied, he said, but these feelings have failed to diffuse. The result is an overall trust deficit on both sides. Enhanced cooperation is crucial and the U.S. and Pakistan should harmonize military and strategic objectives, said the General.

He criticized the U.S. media for showing imbalanced projections of Pakistan, creating anxiety over its nuclear weapons, and even questioning the survival of the state. Many Pakistanis rely on U.S. media hence these doubts from abroad undermine citizens’ confidence in their own government and state.

Pakistan was also very displeased with the results of President Obama’s trip to India in early November. The U.S. support for India joining the United Nations Security Council, as well as its lifting of bans on high technology imports were viewed with disfavor in Pakistan. It was also disappointed that President Obama did not visit Pakistan on his travels to Asia, especially after the devastation of the floods.

General UI Haq also felt that the U.S. had failed to recognize India’s reputation on Kashmir, the defining unresolved issue of the India-Pakistan relationship. While the war on terrorism is a priority, the General explained that Pakistan cannot feel secure unless the Kashmir is resolved and India discontinues its high

levels of military spending. He said there has been little meaningful progress with any of the peace processes and that for India these serve as a mere pretext to soothe international concerns. He described India as having an aggressive mindset, increasing its military spending while calling for peace. However, ultimately both countries are very aware of the nuclear environment in which relations must be managed.

General Ul Haq's comments reflected his extensive experience in the Pakistan military and security establishment. As Pakistan continues to be an important part of the United States' security interests in South Asia, his comments revealed Pakistan's perspective on key issues such as the fight against domestic extremism, border issues on the western frontier with Afghanistan and its troubled relationship with India.