

# Dangers of Complacency

**Policies are not etched on stones, but they are difficult to change**



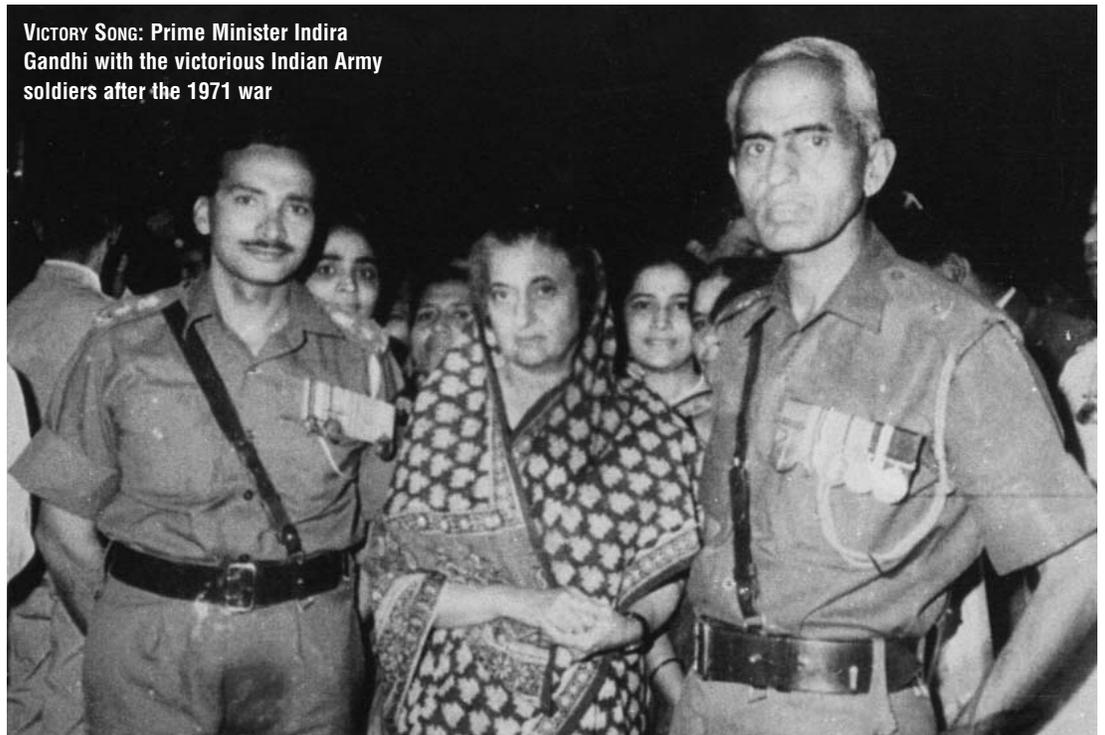
■ **Gen. Jehangir Karamat**

**T**he criticism most often levelled against retired military men is that wisdom seems to dawn on them only after retirement. This is true. While in service these men are pursuing careers and implementing policies. Their own input into policy making is based on current events because they rarely have time for meaningful interactions and creative thought. Policies are made on the basis of evolving situations and their predicted outcomes. Once made policies acquire a momentum of their own that creates lobbies giving them a sort of permanence. Policy changes are equated with admissions of strategic misperceptions and lapses. Quite often the domestic pressures drummed up in support of policies are so strong that reversals or changes start looking like compromises on national interests. That is why you have 27-year follies like the Vietnam War by the US. Policy changes become even more difficult if the pressure for change is seen as coming from external sources seen to be acting in their own

interests. This is where the time and space factor becomes important. You have to realistically assess the time that will be required to change policy tracks without serious destabilisation and you have to determine the space that will be needed to create the environment in which major policy shifts become acceptable. This assessment has to include a consideration of both domestic and international factors that may be constraints on policy changes.

The violence in Kashmir is a 'proxy war' in Indian perception. The same violence is a 'freedom struggle' in Pakistan's perception. The violence in Kashmir erupted because of India's flawed policies and mis-governance. India's policy response was, and remains, brutal repression and suppression. Pakistan, firmly committed to the Kashmiris' right of self determination and wiser after the events of 1971, followed the predictable course of exploiting the situation. These basic policy thrusts remain in place in spite of truly epochal changes that have

**VICTORY SONG: Prime Minister Indira Gandhi with the victorious Indian Army soldiers after the 1971 war**



The real danger lies in the comfort level that India and Pakistan have with minimum credible deterrence and in the confidence that they seem to have in their policies

taken place in recent years. If anything, the aftermath of these changes has been exploited to push the respective policies. India seeks to exploit the war on terror by doing everything possible to give Pakistan the tag of a terrorist and extremism sponsoring state. Pakistan, while exposing Indian machinations, highlights the righteousness of the Kashmiri cause and India's state terrorism against the people of Kashmir. There is periodic talk of dialogue. There is an ostensible thawing of hostility through statements of political leaders and exchange visits by politicians, retired people and media persons. Western governments and think-tanks tirelessly drive home the dangers of active hostility between two nuclear weapon states and stress the need for conflict resolution through dialogue. India looks at the political options and Pakistan looks at allegations of cross LoC infiltration. The basic policies continue with hardly any change. Tens of thousands of lives later both sides have convinced themselves that time is on their side.

Both, India and Pakistan, fully comprehend the dangers of a nuclear war. They know that there will be no winner – both will be losers. The damage and loss of life will be enormous. If this is so then neither is likely to initiate a nuclear war – so why worry? India is going to continue to do its maximum to forge a 'minimum' credible deterrence against China and India also has to do enough to



TOWERING HEIGHTS: An Indian soldier on the Siachen Glacier

ory is the Indian exploitation of its self-created problems in former East Pakistan – can Kashmir be different? The Indian aggression in Siachen has also not been forgotten – why should Kargil be a surprise? India sees itself as forging ahead in all the elements of national power and perceives Pakistan as declining. India seeks to exploit the environment of its relations with the US, Israel and Afghanistan and the war on terror to isolate and destabilise

**Fresh in Pakistan's memory is the Indian exploitation of its self-created problems in former East Pakistan – can Kashmir be different? The Indian aggression in Siachen has also not been forgotten – why should Kargil be a surprise?**

give it a 'big power' image in line with its perceived perimeter of security. Pakistan will do its maximum to have a 'minimum' credible deterrence against India. They cannot be satisfied with 'sufficient' or 'enough' in terms of 'minimum credible' because deterrence has to be dynamic to remain credible so they will have to keep doing more and more. India and Pakistan are also constantly improving their command and control arrangements and security measures so that there is no danger of accidental or unauthorised use - ever. They are willing to accept Western help to make their control and security foolproof. The 'West' is also educating the both on the 'near misses' that they experienced so that they avoid such dangers. So again there is no cause for concern. Conflict – 'proxy war' or freedom struggle – can continue indefinitely as long as certain un-stated but known (to India and Pakistan only) thresholds are not crossed.

India rattles its existing and growing conventional force superiority and loudly proclaims 'no first use' as a doctrine. Pakistan trashes India's 'no first use' and uses the conventional force imbalance to justify its stance on 'first use' as a survival strategy. The military balance also forces Pakistan to use all strategies to level the playing field or at least to manage the tilt. Fresh in Pakistan's mem-

Pakistan so that the imbalance is accelerated till eventually coercion becomes feasible. With time on its side, India just has to constrict Pakistan's space. Pakistan sees itself as central to the stabilisation of Afghanistan; it refuses to be pressured into hasty actions internally but is deliberately working to protect itself against extremism and is pushing moderation and economic progress. Pakistan has to forge strategies that give it the time and space to achieve internal and external security. India sees dialogue as Pakistan's ploy for giving itself time and space therefore its response is to attach impossible conditions to the initiation of dialogue. Pakistan wants the start of a dialogue to bring reciprocity to any improvement in its relations with India – a reciprocity that India does not want. So, even if dialogue was to start would it be anything more than what it has been in the past?

To what conclusion do these rambling thoughts take us? Changes in policies will come when human suffering and destinies of people become more important or when people decide to take charge of their own futures. The real danger lies in the comfort level that India and Pakistan have with minimum credible deterrence and in the confidence that they seem to have in their policies. ●  
*Gen. Jehangir Karamat is former chief of army staff, Pakistan*