

The Real Game Changer: Need for Long-term Security and Stability in Pakistan

Putting people at the centre of security

It is a pleasure to welcome everyone to exchange ideas on a subject of deep importance to the country. There are few issues that are discussed more than security. Yet none seems to be more intractable and hard to resolve. National security is the most important responsibility for a government. Its absence diminishes economic activity and affects the lives of people. While, overall security in Pakistan has improved, acts of violence occur regularly. They take place just as when we feel reassured that such incidents will never happen again.

Clearly, the country must take another look at how it has dealt with security and stability. If we are to have lasting peace, it is time to review some long-held beliefs. Uncertainty about life and property leaves people apprehensive and businesses cautious. Economic progress is not possible without security, nor would any game changer work until the country and people are safe. Safety, security, and prosperity are indivisible.

We have heard from two eminent experts with a lifetime dedicated to the subject and who are known the world over for their ability. I wish to stress on the human dimension in building security and explore how to put people at its centre. I will probe further how state institutions can give comfort to the people. It is important for citizens to have faith that the state protects them and promotes their interests. It is not just armies that must make a country secure. The whole population must contribute.

The present discourse on security, in the public space, is inadequate. Usually, we discuss security as a reaction to a terrorist incident or in response to the machinations of other countries. For a holistic response, it needs deep consideration, which in turn calls for consensus on its definition, goals, and an agreed upon strategy. There should be also clarity on the roles of all actors. They must have resources equal to the task and must deliver on agreed upon timelines. Pakistan has a broad strategy paper in the shape of the National Action Plan, and I am sure someone is working on it, though it would be nice to know who it is.

Before we grapple with the complexity of present day security, it would serve us well to ask what is the goal of national security in Pakistan. Security is more than just absence of violence. Sun Tzu, instructs that we must know ourselves as well as the enemy. Let us look at ourselves to know what should be the aims of Pakistan's security plan. This means that we must state clearly Pakistan's role and interests in the region.

Ideally, we want a plan that protects the country from threats of both state and non-state actors. Firms must be able to conduct business freely within the country and globally. Every citizen should be able to have a meaningful role in the economic life of the country. Our civil institutions must work in support of their welfare. In short, security is not an abstraction. It

affects the lives and interests of each person in the country. Within that overall goal, we may develop a concrete understanding of what national security is and what it is not.

The logic and nature of violence has evolved, since the last century. Though they may still take place, war between two or more states is no longer the norm¹. Nor does violence have a clear beginning and an end. What Pakistan faces today is a situation of neither war nor peace. The lines between what causes it are blurred. A mix of external and internal factors are at play. It is an amalgam of political, sectarian, and criminal factors. Also, violence in Pakistan takes many forms. Varied actors conduct it, such as street gangs, political groups seeking regional autonomy, and terrorists. They have sponsors in domestic political parties or external states. Some are linked with supra national ideologies.

External forces cannot act on their own. They must have alliances with disaffected groups in the country. Thus, external ambitions mix with disaffection at home to create instability. It is the responsibility of government to prevent or break these alliances. The country's security should not be the obligation of the defence forces alone. They must be in the forefront, but each part of the government, and the whole populace is the next line of defence. We need a new approach. It is not possible to quell present day violence with strategies from the past.

With violence taking many forms and its causes both external and internal, our methods too must change. We must find the reasons for disaffection and exclusion. Pakistan policy makers must act to respond to grievances within as much as the machinations of other countries.

As we have seen, violence is not a one-off event. It has been ongoing and repeated for over a decade, and though some areas are affected more than others, no part of the country is safe. This cannot happen without local support. Outside forces and international ideological movements make common cause with local grievances. Pakistan must engage all its citizens in defence of the country.

In several ways, the economy has an important role to play. Sometimes the link between economy and security is clear and direct. United States achieved absolute success in the second world war because of its ability to shift civil production capacity to military ends. The US produced an unlimited supply of war equipment to arm its forces and those of its allies. Economic performance equaled military power.

It also has to do with the fundamental choice that a country makes. In the case of Pakistan, despite economic weaknesses, it has built a strong military that can hold its own against any foe. The country was willing to make sacrifices to strengthen its defence.

But the present time calls for the country to invest equally in the people. There is a natural path that the disaffected follow. Grievances, perceived or real, lead to demands for change and then to

¹ (although one may break out tomorrow and I sincerely caution against it.)

violence. Grievances arise from political, security, and economic dynamics, but then violence breeds violence and it has now become difficult to distinguish cause from effect.

According to the WB, “lower GDP per capita is associated with largescale political conflict.” Corruption and its perception “has doubly pernicious effects on violence because they fuel grievances and undermine institutions.” In short, we need to give hope and opportunity to the people for a better life. This is the only way to regain their trust. It is not an easy task, but with long term effort it can be done.

Pakistan faces a special challenge in the shape of a large and growing young population. Many of the young people have not had schooling or work related training. Many have no jobs.

In citizen perception surveys, World Bank has found youth unemployment as a motive for joining rebel movements and urban gangs. Jobs is not just about income. They are also important for self-respect and status as well as to impart a sense of belonging.

We are also a diverse country. Political exclusion and inequality based on regions, ethnicity, and religion also are associated with violence. Social cohesion and economic opportunity are key. So, while other countries find allies within, we must do everything to stop them from doing so. It is for our state and civil institutions to build trust in all parts of the country.

Violence exacts a high cost on the country. Government’s estimate for loss to our economy runs into tens of billions of dollars. But many of its effects cannot be quantified. The main aim of terrorism is to cause human pain, spread despondency, as well as cause economic and social disruption.

Attacks in one area effects a cost on the rest of the country. For one, there is the direct cost of reconstruction and relief and resettlement of displaced persons. There are also lost economic opportunities, volatility in prices, and the cost of added security. Economic activity in violence affected regions drop sharply. These ripple to the rest of the economy. Death, destruction, and delayed development create a cycle of want in the conflict affected areas. Its spillover effect resonates through the country.

If violence is deeply linked with unemployment and low GDP, why do many poor countries not have violence? According to the World Bank, this is because internal and external stresses have not mixed. Also, these areas cope well with disadvantage, because of social cohesion. In an ethnically uniform region, there is more trust in the leadership. Or leaders in such areas transcend sectarian or political differences and gain confidence of everyone.

So, what should our response be?

It is important to develop a stake for the young in the future of the country. To begin with, our leaders must understand that when people feel that their government does not protect them, or guard their interests, or offer access to justice and when markets do not provide jobs, they

compromise their ability to govern. They must do everything to restore confidence in collective action. This is the absolute least for the government to do, to restore order. As Harvard law professor, Noah Feldman, suggests that a call for ‘Sharia’ is a call for rule of law and a way to resist states that they find “plainly unjust.” (Note: Lal Masjid devotees).

Investing in citizens’ security, justice, and jobs is essential to reducing violence. Some data is instructive. There are 22.6 million out of school children in Pakistan. We spend less than one percent of GDP on public health. Forty-five percent of our children have some form of stunting by age five and 32% are born with low birth weight. At 4.7 years, we have one of the lowest average for years of schooling anywhere. Just 2.3% of our senior citizens receive a pension. 63% workers are classified as vulnerable. Clearly, we have not equipped well our young to enter the job market. It is no surprise that forty-four percent of the country’s workforce is in low productivity farm sector. Whereas, overall unemployment is less than 6%, youth unemployment is 11%. I share the tip of what is a human security nightmare in Pakistan. In UNDP’s Human Development Index, Pakistan ranks 147 out of 185 countries, much below countries at an equal stage of economic development.

Governance indicators are worse. The number of outstanding cases in courts and the time it takes to dispose them is the stuff of legend. Weak policing and overall poor services are the rigour with which a large part of the country lives with daily.

For a sense of inclusion, citizens must feel that they are taking part in decision making. Pakistan’s constitution resolves this with a layered approach. Federal, provincial, and district or local governments afford a sense of participation to the people. But major political parties are averse to sharing power. It is surprising that what a person from the military encouraged, elected representatives have resisted.

We must allow local governments full play to meet the everyday challenges that people face in their lives. This cannot be done at higher levels of government. Seven elected assemblies, including the Senate, have 1,207 members. Put together, local governments have more than 85000 representatives. Yet, the power is with the executive and the 1,207 parliamentarians and the over 85,000 representatives feel disempowered. It is hard to believe that a democratic dispensation would take away democracy from the people.

Participation is important. It pays to remember that, while discontent may have been brewing for a while, the Arab spring began with a single act of immolation. Boaz-Azizi set himself on fire protesting police high-handedness and extortion. Despite its enviable military prowess, the Soviet Union did not stay as one country. It arranged to peacefully separate into several states. These are, of course, extreme examples. Pakistan is nowhere close to any threat of disarray. In fact, repeatedly polls have found Pakistani people to be deeply nationalistic. There are small groups that are open to violence and external stresses.

Inclusion is about empowering the people so that they can play a role in the economic life of the country. In doing so, we take away the feeling of discrimination that may have arisen. Participation strengthens a country. It does not weaken it. Offering inclusion and a stake to people in state institutions prevents them from seeking recognition among groups that promote armed violence or unlawful activities. It also strengthens economic development.

Even in the conventional sense of economic power supporting military capability, Pakistan must strengthen its economy to meet fully its defence needs. Pakistan is the 25th largest economy in the world, but in terms of GDP per capita it is 137th in the world. For the last twenty-five years, Pakistan's economic growth rate has been moderate at best. The growth rate crossed 6% in four of the twenty-five years. It touched 7% in three of those years and 8% in one year. In thirteen of 25 years, the economy grew at a rate below 4%. Contrast this with some of the high growth economies that grew annually at 7% or more for twenty-five years.

The combination of large budget deficits, foreign exchange pressures, reliance on external aid, infrastructure deficit, and inability to invest in our human resource is unsustainable. The longer we delay action to redress these, the more difficult the problem becomes. We must have the material resources necessary for a strong defence and an effective foreign policy.

It is time to think in terms of merging our separate economic, security, and development plans into a national security strategy. We need an integrated approach with each part of the state fully on board with the plans of the other.

All this is important in the context of today's discussion. Repeated research shows that economic and institutional factors have a bearing on conflict resolution and stability in a society. Just as our economic ministers sit on the National Security Council, I feel that defence officials must attend ECC and NEC meetings. I will go as far as to say that fiscal issues challenge our economic performance and our national security. Education, skills training, R & D, power, and water shortages are national issues. They need all institutions to act in unison.

A layered approach must look also beyond national borders. Today, there is a real danger of disputes getting out of control. Resolving differences with neighbours is a way to reduce meddling in each other's affairs. Creating opportunities for economic cooperation builds business stake in each other. South and Central Asia offers special potential because of its rapidly growing economies and abundance of natural resources. There are economic gains to be had from stability and connectivity with the region.

Strength abroad begins at home. In addition to the armed forces, our society and the people of Pakistan, the strength of the economy, and the effectiveness of our civil institutions add to the efficacy of our security and foreign policy. This does not mean lessening of traditional importance of security. We need a formidable defence based on well trained and equipped armed forces, but what we propose is a wider concept. We must put people at the centre of the issue of "repeated bouts of violence."