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**A new security paradigm**

A new security paradigm was unveiled during the recently concluded Islamabad Security Dialogue. The refreshing change was highlighted by the transformative nature of the discourse where the government, the military and the academia sang from the same score sheet, laying out the lineaments of a new notion of comprehensive national security.

During his address, the prime minister had clearly laid out a new notion of comprehensive national security which was a clear departure from the traditional notion of security based on military sinews and hard power in favour of a soft power based non-traditional model of security.

The prime minister spoke of climate change, food insecurity and economic vulnerability as the main threats that imperiled human security. A people-centric anti-elitist governance model predicated on a strong economy was the leitmotif around which he wove his prescriptive remedies like targeted subsidies for the poor. Overt reliance on the geostrategic importance of the country in the past had taken our eyes off the geo-economic potential of the region. In the PM’s opinion, the great untapped potential of connectivity between South, West, and Central Asia is waiting to be tapped.

Per the PM, economic and food security can ideally be enhanced through sustained economic growth and climate protection as well as adaptation strategies. None of the above however can be achieved without peace in the region. Pakistan therefore needs to pursue regional peace through adroit use of creative diplomacy based on Barry Buzan and Ole Waever’s notions of liberal institutionalism and economic integration as opposed to Lippmann and Lasswell’s model of hard power.

The new Pakistani security paradigm therefore needs to follow a regionalist approach to peace based on a study by Lake and Morgan in 1997. The geographic location should be leveraged to derive optimum economic advantages for which infrastructural, trade and digital connectivity in South Asia is de rigueur. Pakistan’s economic security imperatives demand creation of an East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC) linking India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Central Asia and Iran that could act both as an ideal complement to CPEC and a heat sink for dousing the fires of competition generated by the China-US rivalry. The regional peace initiative has to be indigenous and homespun.

The statement of ex US ambassador to Pakistan Cameron Munter during the Islamabad Security Dialogue – that the US is not likely to engage in Indo-Pak peace diplomacy – is a clear pointer to the new US strategic thinking. The silver lining was his observation that after the American exit from Afghanistan Pakistan had a great opportunity to reinvent itself as a development-oriented state and a regional connectivity hub. But in order to achieve such a dream, old habits and security paradigms would need a sea change. Interestingly, such a sea change was palpably visible in the discourse of the COAS on the concluding session of the dialogue.

The COAS’ championing of a human security centric national security approach should be music to the civilian government’s ears. It was interesting to hear him say that because what his statement did was instant securitization of economic development. Securitization as per Copenhagen School’s definition means declaration of a subject as a national security threat and its consequent elevation into a national security priority. Since in the past subjects like defence spending, procurement of hardware and defence policy were securitized subjects, priority was accorded to those in resource allocation. Now with economic, climate and food security making the same grade the civilian component of the state will find it easier to accord budgetary and planning priority to these.

Four pillars of the geo-economic vision that can lower the politically motivated bellicosity in South Asia were also mentioned in the COAS’ speech. These included lasting peace within as well as outside the region, non- interference in internal matters of neighboring countries, boosting intra- regional trade and connectivity, and sustainable peace and security through establishment of investment hubs. The new notion of comprehensive national security that factors in traditional security apparatus as well as human security can only be translated into an implementable strategy through a reorientation of foreign and defence policies as per the new peace and development centered vision.

To achieve the above objectives, internal and external bulwarks to the new vision would need to be removed. Internally, such bulwarks might be experienced in the shape of political criticism emanating out of a divisive polity and the pushback by the ossified remnants of state centric notion of traditional security. It would take a very strong strategic communication effort to bridge the epistemic gap between those who are still wedded to the archaic notions of perpetual conflict as per the ethos of a national security state and those who envision Pakistan as a development state. Pakistan would also need to strengthen its institutions and their wellspring – constitutional governance along with its system of justice.

The perceptual and material gap in the outlook of the civil and military components of the state need also be narrowed for effective civilian control. Foreign policy of the country that had been tailored in the past to serve the demands of the traditional notion of national security would have to be reoriented to serve the interests of economic and human security. The economic diplomacy function therefore would have to be melded in the traditional diplomacy. The above might call for a restructuring of the Foreign Office on the lines of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office and the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

On the external front, the revival of peace talks with India and the revitalization of Saarc is the need of the hour. Convincing the US to be a part of EWEC for win-win regional and global connectivity, and concomitant peace is vital for a sustainable architecture of comprehensive national security for Pakistan. Fortunately for Pakistan, the civil-military components of the state are in harmony while pushing for the above.

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