**Comprehensive security**

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Daunting challenges await the new governments as they get ready to assume the reins of power. In particular, the new federal government will face an extremely difficult situation as it will have to come to grips with the formidable tasks of putting the country’s economy back on the track of rapid and sustainable growth and ensuring the country’s security on a viable and long-term basis.

There is, of course, a close link between these two national goals which needs to be properly understood by our policymakers in the interest of Pakistan’s security and economic prosperity.

The structure of comprehensive national security is based on the four pillars of political stability, a strong economy, military power, and a proactive foreign policy. The strengthening of national security requires the strengthening of each of these pillars and the right balance among them. The weakness of any of these pillars of security or imbalance among them can lead to a national disaster as Pakistan’s historical experience and the history of the modern world clearly demonstrate.

A country must undoubtedly have the necessary military power to deter threats to its security by potential aggressors and, if the deterrence fails, to defeat the enemy. However, in the modern world military power must be supported by economic and technological strength to provide the wherewithal for defeating external threats to national security. As the role of technology, artificial intelligence and space-based systems grows in modern warfare, the importance of technological advancement has correspondingly increased in fighting and defeating an external enemy.

The developments in the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine as well as in the fighting in the Middle East region, particularly the use of drones, have highlighted the critical role of technology in modern warfare which military planners can ignore only at their peril.

The importance of economic strength and technological advancement cannot be over-emphasized in dealing with even short-term threats to national security. However, economic and technological power assumes a decisive role in any long-term war or contest for supremacy between nations. It is not surprising, therefore, that, as pointed out by Paul Kennedy in his seminal work ‘The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers’, “all of the major shifts in the world’s military-power balances have followed alterations in the productive balances; and further, that the rising and falling of the various empires and states in the international system has been confirmed by the outcomes of the major Great Power wars, where victory has always gone to the side with the greatest material resources.”

The Soviet Union was defeated in the cold war primarily because of its comparative economic and technological weakness vis-a-vis the United States and other Western countries rather than any shortage of conventional and non-conventional forces. On the other hand, China wisely concentrated its resources and energies on the task of economic and technological development for about three decades after the initiation of economic reforms at the end of 1978 before embarking on an ambitious programme of building up its military power.

Washington fully understands that the ongoing long-term contest for global supremacy between the US and China would be decided ultimately by the outcome of their competition in the economic and technological fields. It is mainly for this reason that the US has imposed economic and technological sanctions against China to slow down its advancement in these areas.

The internal political stability of a nation is perhaps the most important pillar of its security structure. Obviously, a country weakened by internal conflicts and dissensions is in no position to safeguard its security against external threats. It is primarily the responsibility of the political leadership to adopt enlightened political, economic, and social policies that promote internal unity and cohesion.

In modern times, democratic governments which give a feeling of participation to the people in running their affairs at national, provincial, and local levels, have a much better chance of ensuring internal unity and cohesion than dictatorial or unrepresentative governments that are alienated from the people. Pakistan’s dismemberment in 1971 is a classic example of internal divisions leading to a military defeat. There are numerous other examples in the history of foreign powers encouraging internal dissensions in their adversaries through policies of divide and rule to bring them down on their knees.

Finally, a proactive foreign policy is critically important in any scheme of comprehensive national security. It is for good reason that foreign policy is called the first line of defense of a country. It is imperative that foreign policy is closely synchronized with the country’s political, economic, and security policies to form a coherent whole in the shape of a grand strategy in the service of national aims and interests. In short, a nation requires internal political stability and cohesion, economic strength, military muscle, and a proactive foreign policy in an optimum mix to ensure national security.

India poses an enduring and long-term threat to Pakistan’s security because it views the latter as a major obstacle in the realization of its overarching strategic goal of establishing its hegemony in the South Asia region. In addition, several disputes, especially the Kashmir dispute, have bedeviled the relations between two countries.

Unfortunately, Pakistan has not heeded the lessons of history and in facing this threat has relied primarily on military power to the neglect of other pillars of security especially political stability and rapid economic growth. It should therefore be a matter of great concern to Pakistan’s policymakers that, besides suffering from political instability, it is steadily falling behind India in economic and technological fields. For instance, according to the latest IMF forecast India’s GDP growth rate is projected to be 6.5 per cent in 2024 as against 2.0 per cent for Pakistan.

There is thus a dire need for structural economic and taxation reforms to accelerate Pakistan’s annual GDP growth rate to 7-8 per cent over the next few years with a view to enhancing the country’s prosperity and the people’s welfare and enabling it to successfully face the challenge posed by India.

For this purpose, it is imperative that Pakistan, besides other measures, should rapidly raise its national saving and investment rates and the tax-to-GDP ratio to above 25 per cent as against the current dismally low rates in these areas. Pakistan also needs to revamp its educational system to raise the literacy percentage to above 90 per cent and enhance its academic standards to international levels, especially in scientific and technological fields, within a short span of time.

There is no way Pakistan can attain these goals unless it assigns the highest priority to the goals of rapid economic growth and advancement in scientific and technological fields in terms of the allocation of national resources and the attention of the federal and provincial governments. Finally, in the interest of restoring political stability in the country all the political parties should join hands in strengthening democratic institutions so that national affairs are ultimately decided by the people’s representatives.

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