[Javid Husain](https://www.thenews.com.pk/writer/javid-husain)

January 27, 2021

**Demands of security**

It is axiomatic that there cannot be anything more important than national security for an independent country.

Security has two main aspects: external and internal. Without external security, a country cannot take the steps necessary for the economic and social well-being of its people, free of foreign interference and coercion. In other words, external security is a sine qua non for enabling the people of a country to keep control over their destiny in their own hands. Internal security is an indispensable condition for the provision of justice and for ensuring orderly social and economic activities.

Finally, in this competitive world with rising expectations of the people, mere security would amount to little unless it also leads to economic progress and prosperity enabling the people to lead progressively better lives economically, socially and culturally. Any discussion of national security must encompass all of these ingredients to be of any use to leaders and policymakers responsible for taking decisions affecting a country’s destiny.

External security requires the ability to deter and, if deterrence fails, defend the country against threats originating abroad. Foreign policy is the first line of defence to ward off external threats, both real and emerging, to a country’s security and economic wellbeing. In case foreign policy fails, armed forces supported by economic and technological strength and political unity and stability will have to come into play to ensure national security. Each of these elements of national defence has an important role to play.

Ideally, foreign policy should be proactive rather than reactive – that is to say, it should be able to identify emerging trends and developments and take necessary measures nationally and in concert with a country’s friends and allies to overcome the threats to national security, economic well-being and cultural identity or way of life.

In the case of Pakistan, our foreign policy has generally been reactive rather than proactive. This is because at the national level we have not invested enough in improving the quality and skills of our diplomats manning the foreign office and embassies abroad, and also because of the absence of the capacity for long-term policy planning in the Foreign Office, dearth of institutes and study centers engaged in research in emerging foreign policy challenges to feed the foreign ministry and other policymaking organs with their conclusions and recommendations, and the growing role of the security apparatus to.

Our Kashmir and Afghanistan policies in the 1990s were a prime example of the violation of sound principles of foreign policy. We continue to suffer from the adverse consequences of those flawed policies.

The failure of foreign policy to ward off external threats puts the burden primarily on the armed forces to ensure national security under the command of the federal government. It is imperative therefore that the armed forces are adequately trained and equipped to perform their duties when the need arises. It must be underscored, however, that in the modern world wars require the employment of a nation’s total resources including the armed forces, economic and technological strength, and political unity and stability.

An enemy like India would try to weaken us in all of these areas for the fulfillment of its nefarious designs. We must not allow it or any other enemy to succeed in such efforts. Therefore, while maintaining a credible security deterrent we should not overlook the importance of developing economic and technological strength and maintaining domestic political unity and stability.

Unfortunately, economic and technological weakness and political instability constitute the Achilles’ heel in Pakistan’s security architecture. As far as the current political situation in Pakistan is concerned, the country is badly polarized and deeply destabilized – the last thing that we need for safeguarding our national security.

Our political parties and national institutions undoubtedly have played their own deplorable role bringing the country to this pass. But India, which poses enduring threat to Pakistan’s security, has also fully exploited and widened the political, institutional, ethnic and sectarian fault-lines in the country to aggravate our political crises. It has not desisted even from fomenting terrorism in Pakistan for achieving its evil designs.

The situation poses a grave threat to the country’s security. All the stakeholders, including the political parties and national institutions, should take necessary steps to promote mutual understanding and harmony with a view to putting the country back on the track to political stability. This will require, amongst others, arrangements for fair and transparent elections in the future to elect governments free of the stigma of political engineering and electoral rigging.

All national institutions should play their role in national affairs within the limits laid down by the constitution, in accordance with the principle of the supremacy of civilian elected governments representing the will of the people. Any attempt to do otherwise will merely aggravate political instability in the country, thus posing a grave threat to national security.

The internal situation in Pakistan is equally disturbing on the economic side as figures demonstrate. According to the World Bank, Pakistan’s GDP which was estimated to be $314 billion in 2017-18 dropped down to $278 billion in 2018-19 and declined further by 0.4 percent in 2019-20. By way of comparison, the GDP of Bangladesh reportedly increased from $274 billion in 2018 to $318 billion in 2020. According to The Economist’s yearly forecast for 2021, Pakistan’s GDP per head would be $1180 as against $2200 for Bangladesh and $2150 for India.

These figures paint an extremely dismal picture of the state of Pakistan’s economy and reflect poorly on the performance of the government’s economic team. The poor performance of the Pakistan economy has substantially increased poverty, unemployment and inflation levels in the country aggravating the economic plight of the masses. In addition, our economic stagnation combined with our backwardness in industrial, technological and scientific fields constitutes a grave threat to Pakistan’s security. The nation can ignore this pathetic state of affairs only at its peril.

The writer is a retired ambassador and president of the Lahore Council for World Affairs.

Email: javid.husain@gmail.com