**New National Security Policy**

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Whether the PTI government is correct in its claim that its new National Security Policy is a “historic achievement” will be seen once the “public version of the policy is launched by Prime Minister Imran Khan in due course.” For the moment, the only known fact about the policy is that it fails to command national consensus.

National Security Advisor Moeed Yousaf, for his part, asserts that the “first” National Security Policy, which the federal cabinet approved last week after its formulation by the National Security Committee, will “help guide sectoral policies for the fulfillment of national security objectives.”

The government also claims that the policy has been formulated with the consensus of the civil and military leadership, though the opposition claims that neither it nor other stakeholders have been taken on board.

Work on the formulation of the five-year (2022-2026) policy was started in 2014 during the Nawaz Sharif government. Obviously, much input might have been made during the tenure of the previous government. But not even a mention has been made of the contribution by that government.

According to whatever scanty details the media has attributed to official sources, the policy boasts to be ‘citizen-centric with economic security at the core.’ It has been framed to leverage ‘symbiotic linkages among human security, economic security, and military security.’

The safety and economic prosperity of the citizens have been given a special place while fixing priorities of national security in the policy.

By security challenges, the policy purports both traditional and non-traditional challenges encompassing economy, food security, water supply, population growth, climate changes, terrorism, and military security.

The government might be correct that it is the first-ever National Security Policy to the effect that no document has ever been produced under this name.

The government claims that the document will guide its foreign, defense, and economic policies and decision-making.

In terms of security, the new policy speaks of aspects i.e. internal security and external security. It lays particular emphasis on dealing with world countries, particularly the major world powers and the neighboring countries.

In his reaction, Director General Inter-Services Public Relations Major General Babar Iftikhar says’ “This comprehensive framework recognizes interlinkages between various strands of national security, which is imperative to meet emerging challenges in the evolving global environment.”

Security is a vital national issue and formulation and approval of the National Security Policy marks an important step in the life of a nation. But why the entire process of consultation on this policy was kept so secret?

Mian Raza Rabbani, the former Senate Chairman and leader of the Pakistan People’s Party, claims that the government has not shared the contents of the policy with any stakeholder, nor they have been disclosed them in the parliament.

He said that instead of the National Security Committee, the process of formulation of the policy should have been initiated in the Parliamentary Committee on National Security.

The government claims that six hundred experts have been consulted during the last seven-year-long deliberations over the policy. But the fact remains that neither academia nor civil society have been taken on board during the entire process.

Not even any debate has been held on the policy inside the parliament or in national media, which casts doubts over the government’s claim that the policy is based on the input of civil and military leadership.

The government might be correct that it is the first-ever National Security Policy to the effect that no document has ever been produced under this name. But frankly speaking, several security and military doctrines have been presented in the past with more or less the same objective of national security.

In terms of national security, Pakistan is faced with two-pronged challenges i.e. internal and external. Internal security is mostly threatened by terrorism, which in recent decades has been posed by religious extremism and ethno-regional secessionist tendencies, particularly in Balochistan.

As to what strategy has been contemplated in the new National Security Policy to tackle these two challenges is yet to be disclosed by the government.

The external aspect of the national security challenge also has two dimensions. Externally, our national security has faced challenge either from our eastern border or from the western side.

The government and the military establishment appear optimistic that after the induction of the Taliban government in Afghanistan. However, recent experiences show that this optimism may not be based on sound footing.

While terrorist activities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan have not ceased after the formation of Taliban government in Kabul, there have also been instances of Afghan Taliban forcibly stopping border fencing by Pakistan Army along the Durand Line in Torkham area. Taliban also claim to have ‘liberated’ several border areas from Pakistan. The new policy appears silent on this issue.

What the new policy has in its store to handle the hoveringthreat to our national security from the eastern border is also not known either to the parliamentarians or to the media and the civil society. The government has not disclosed as to what the new policy envisages for air, land and maritime security of the country.

Maritime security has attained added significance after formation of QUAD group, involving the United States, India, Japan and Australia, which has virtually militarized the Indian Ocean and the Pacific. Has our new policy offered any preemptive measures for the purpose?

It also remains to see as what the policy proposes for situation in Occupied Kashmir, which has a direct bearing on our national security.

Provision of economic, social and environmental security to common man is undoubtedly a major challenge but does the new National Security Policy address the country’s core national security and defense challenges will be known when the government finds it appropriate to make the document public.

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