**Celebrating the Past, Looking into the Future**

[Muhammad Nauman Jalil](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/muhammad-nauman-jalil/)

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Every year, Pakistan celebrates September 6 as Defense Day to commemorate the sacrifices rendered by Pakistani forces in defending the motherland against Indian aggression in the 1965 War. It serves as a reminder when the Pakistani nation transcended ethnic, political, cultural, and linguistic differences and stood in unity to preserve its sovereignty and independence. While Pakistan celebrates the day with fiery speeches and military parades, the outstanding issue of Kashmir, over which the two countries have fought three wars, remains unsolved.

Even after more than seven decades, India continues to dominate Pakistan’s threat perception. The threat has even been magnified under the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government. This was evident by India’s aggression in Feb 2019, when its Air Force conducted airstrikes in Pakistan’s Balakot. While the misadventure cost India a fighter jet along with its caught pilot, Pakistan’s relevance in India’s domestic political dynamics will continue to shape India’s aggressive approach towards Pakistan.

Hence, while the threat from India is real and growing, this should not blind Pakistan towards focusing on other sectors, such as building an educated workforce, improving human development, and a greater focus on the emerging technologies that hold the key to future growth.

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India is a case in point. It is investing in technology, promoting its soft power, developing sustainable energy projects, and endeavouring to become a great power. Last month, India became the first and sole nation to have sent its Chandrayan-3 probe to the Moon’s surface. Meanwhile, Pakistan is in the midst of a ‘poly-crisis’ with political instability, economic crisis, hyperinflation, growing poverty, rampant extremism, and a complete sociopolitical breakdown.

Therefore, celebrating past achievements, such as Defense Day, is essential for national unity and cohesion, but living in the past with a sole obsession with external security could cost Pakistan its present and future. Defense Day is a powerful reminder to foster national unity against common threats. It is also essential to use this as an opportunity to promote a culture of peace and diplomacy and take steps towards improving relations with the neighbouring countries including India.

It is high time for Pakistan to learn from its mistakes and focus on economic security and regional cooperation. Furthermore, Pakistan must prioritize technological progress. Investment in digitalization and technological infrastructure will improve different sectors, such as healthcare, agriculture, education, infrastructure development, and industry, resulting in greater effectiveness and efficiency. Focus on improving the quality and accessibility of education is the greatest need of the hour. Pakistani education is not contributing to the knowledgeable and skilful workforce of the society. Moreover, Pakistan should also focus on green energy projects to promote sustainable energy and meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Beyond the security threats to each other, India and Pakistan need to focus on efforts toward peace, development, and stability in the region. The world is moving towards multi-polarity and improved peaceful ties between Pakistan and India can contribute to the public welfare of both nations. India and Pakistan should need to promote bilateral people-to-people ties, and cultural exchanges, and make use of cricket diplomacy to achieve stability in their bilateral relations.

In a nutshell, Defense Day provides the nation with unique opportunities to come together in the face of challenges, to put greater emphasis on human development. The shared experience and sacrifice during the 1965 war created a lasting sense of national unity that continues to influence the collective identity of Pakistanis today. It also allows us to learn from the past and focus on the betterment of the future.

*The writer is a researcher at the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) and can be emailed at Naumanjalil22@gmail.com*