

# The strategic thought process

**S**trategic thought process means a situation in which vital issues are dealt as a result of coordination between important elements of state and society in a rational and professional manner. A successful domestic and foreign policy requires a coherent and rational strategic thought process. If a society is educated, developed and led by pragmatic leadership, it becomes easier to identify objectives to be accomplished with precision and in a stipulated period of time. The absence of a strategic thought process in a society can disable state to face challenges at the internal and external levels.

Fifty-four years after gaining independence from the British rule, a major predicament of Pakistani state has been the lack of input of society on issues, which are of strategic nature. Even, at the state level, to a large extent there has existed a vacuum in shaping a thought process, which could help in pursuing policies in a successful manner. Whether it was the question of Pakistan joining the Western alliance system in the 1950s, or responding to the Indian threats to its security, Pakistani State followed policies, which lacked maturity, cohesion and credibility.

In the post-1971 period, whether it was Pakistan's Afghan policy or numerous domestic challenges like drugs, terrorism, ethnic polarization, sectarian strife and proliferation of weapons, one basic thing, which was missing, was an incoherent strategic perception shared both by the state and the society. Given the gap in the strategic approach of state and society on important domestic and foreign policy issues, the outcome has been more insecurity and instability.

What should be the role of state and society in shaping the strategic thought and how an element of matu-

riety and rationality could be inducted in policies pursued at the official level? While all state

policies of Pakistan cannot be called as lopsided and devoid of prudence, the ground realities prove the fact that much is desired in shaping strategic thought, which can provide substantial input from non-governmental sources in the policy-making process.

There are six areas, which should be considered essential while shaping the strategic thought process in Pakistan. First, for launching a strategic thought process it is important that the society should be tolerant and progressive. If ideas on important issues are allowed to be expressed freely it may greatly help in seeking pragmatic solution to intractable conflicts.

**U**nfortunately, because of the absence of a viable democratic process in Pakistan, a high degree of intolerance has suppressed ideas, which tend to be non-conformist by the state. Second, the role of educational institutions, particularly universities, is critical in shaping the thought process because the centres of higher learning can produce people who can help the decision-making bodies in formulating policies which are wise and realistic. Regrettably, the state owned universities of Pakistan are fast turning into a sea of ignorance because of the official interference, absence of qualified staff, non-academic environment, politics of intrigues and meagre funding. Third, the role of research is significant in shaping the thought process because the absence of creative thinking and scholarship promotes irrational and short-sighted policies at the official level. The secret of de-



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veloped societies possessing a culture of strategic thought process is their sound research and development infrastructure. That is not the case in Pakistan where people with research skills are neither encouraged nor their ideas are taken seriously by the policy-makers. As a result, in most cases one can find ad hoc approach both in the realm of domestic and foreign policy.

Fourth, application of a professional approach while dealing with important issues also help in shaping strategic thought process. When rationality is a given fact and rhetoric is rejected by both state and society, it becomes easier to develop a consensus on shaping thoughts on strategic matters. The dilemma of Pakistan is rhetoric instead of rationality as it has not only become a part of state policy but is also considered as an acceptable norm in society. Such a situation is unfortunate because the erosion and destruction of state institutions and also at the societal level has encouraged forces that possess fascist tendencies. Strategic thought process could only be launched in a situation where institutions are playing a leading role and there is no doubt about their survival. When non-professionals run most of the institutions, as is the case in Pakistan, the result is confusion and ad hocism. Fifth, the role of media is crucial in promoting strategic thought process by disseminating correct information and rational analysis about various issues. If the media is not acting in a responsible manner the outcome may be more ignorance and intolerance among people. By creating awareness among common people about resolving importance issues, the

print and electronic media can help reduce pessimism in society. In Pakistan, the question is not about the freedom of press, but the manner in which media is providing information to different sections of society and is being used by the vested interest groups.

Finally, the role of government and political parties is also vital in developing proper thought among people about issues of strategic nature. It is not only the matter of country's defence and security which comes under the paradigm of strategy but all important issues which influence survival of people at all levels should be considered strategic in nature. If the government and political parties have people who are educated, prudent and aware about basic issues, it will become easy to shape the strategic thought process. The problem occurs when neither the government nor political parties hold wisdom or capability to identify issues, which are strategic in nature and require immediate attention.

It is better if the strategic thought process is unleashed at the state and society level. A country, which is devoid of rational perceptions and policies, cannot face challenges. Unless the civil society plays a dynamic role in shaping policies in the arena of security, economy and other areas, there is little possibility of shaping the strategic thought process.

Clarity of perception, analytical approach, critical outlook and political wisdom are necessary tools of taking a position on important matters. Till the time the state and society of Pakistan reach a position of maturity and self-confidence, there will continue to be short-sighted policies. Strategic thought in any nation comes as a result of a process. Pakistan can redefine its domestic and foreign policies when the gap between state and society is narrow