

National Security Policy

Dr. Sania Nishtar

Pakistan's prevailing situation should lend impetus to strategic thinking about a holistic vision for a National Security Policy. The imperative to do so is two-fold: one, the contemporary understanding of security within the context of a nation state has broadened from one centered on territorial sovereignty and therefore, military and political prowess, to one encompassing a holistic vision. The latter enables addressing both, factors upon which territorial sovereignty is dependent as well as human security—economic security, environmental security, food security, demographic security, and health security assume importance in this respect. Two, because sustainable state security is dependent on human security.

A review of several decades shows that some key solutions, which had the potential of securing sustainable economic security for the country have not been effectively deployed. Ensuring economic security is key to maintaining security systems and ensuring people's welfare. Pakistan debt burden, dire conditions of its balance sheet and reliance on development assistance to finance vital areas does not inspire confidence in that respect.

The water crisis has remained unresolved and has become a subject of political point scoring; as a result an energy crisis has become deeply entrenched. Pakistan's 3000 MW shortfall in the context of the estimated 40,000 MW potential is a stark reminder of institutional and political impediments, which have played to the detriment of needed investments in infrastructure vital for ensuring energy security—the lifeline of economic development and a prerequisite for ensuring economic security.

Measures to mobilize revenues by widening the tax net have remained stalled because of vested interests of the elite, which have captured the public policy process. Curtailment of expenditure has also not been possible for the same reason. The balance sheet, therefore, provides very little space and the realization that Pakistan's fiscal equation can be hit hard by an external factor in a globalized world—such as international oil prices and another financial downturn—is a cause of great concern.

Lack of consistency of policy direction, the internal security environment and pervasive power shortages are leading to under-performing industrial and business sectors and are hurting investments and employment as a consequence. All these considerations do not auger well for ensuring economic security. In addition weaknesses in governance are leading this country with an agrarian economy towards food insecurity.

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On national security policy

Governance
Sania Nishtar

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Lack of consistency in policy direction, the internal security environment and the pervasive power shortages are leading to under-performing industrial and business sectors and are hurting investments and employment as a consequence. All these considerations do not auger well for ensuring economic security. In addition weaknesses in governance are leading this country with an agrarian economy towards food insecurity.

With strict enforcement in Asia now well established and past experience with the have disease pandemics can cause, health security has become a genuine cause of concern — something the public health system has limited capacity to cope with.

To add to these security concerns are internal security threats. Pakistan's unique pattern of conflict and ethnic and religious divisions have paved the way for unprecedented violence and terrorism. These threats are being compounded by two factors: one, economic hardship and two, the rapidly growing impoverished population which is vulnerable to exploitation. Both of these are the result of poor governance. The cost of inattention to these is precisely the reason why FEMA is such a hotbed of trouble today.

High unemployment rate, inflationary pressures, escalating tariffs and limited opportunities for fall back on welfare services have pushed the poor and even the middle-class people to unprecedented levels of economic hardship. People are additionally being drawn to the limits of tolerance with the prevailing commodity shortages, which can be easily prevented and averted with careful economic management.

With the eroded capacity of the state to dispense justice at the level of subordinate judiciary people are out on the streets and are taking law enforcement in their own hands. The parading of 'thieves' is a grimy indicator of impending anarchy and spells disaster. These circumstances are creating a breeding ground for ingraining extremist ideologies—a situation the extreme elements in the society are exploiting to the core. With a burgeoning population and failure to ensure demographic security as a result thereof, the quantum of these internal security threats will unfortunately increase over time and will continue to challenge the writ of the state and nurture and demote its populace. This situation has not developed overnight; 'strategic' mistakes of several governments are contributory to what prevails today.

Although weak governance, limited accountability, pervasive corruption, inefficiencies, lack of democracy in previous years can all be blamed for these trends, there is one determinant whose relative contribution in the prevailing turmoil is most salient, particularly with respect to economic and human security—the lack of policy consistency and the absence of an accountability framework to monitor how policies are followed through. Nowhere is this more manifest than in areas which are of vital security interest to the country.

For developing countries, the lack of policy consistency can be most damaging. Continuity of policy direction has been the key determinant of the growth, development and prosperity that most countries in Asia now experience, weakness in their democratic credentials notwithstanding.

In Pakistan's 63 year history, except for certain elements of our foreign policy, there has been no consistency of policy direction particularly with reference to macro-economic and social sector management. Governments have adopted policies and subsequent governments have disregarded them, have sidestepped, detracted or retracted.

Every incoming government aspires to have its 'own' policy on every issue and deems it necessary to re-provision or repackage an existing policy regardless of the time implications and without consideration for the value of time, intellectual input, or resources lost in changing course. Technical input is often overlooked in the process, feasibility are set aside, negotiated plans remain unhonoured, and projects funded with loans to be repaid with taxpayer's money don't come to fruition in the process. The fixation to show that new policies have been enacted and the motivation for new contractual agreements are grounded either in gaining short-lived political mileage or opportunities for markups in new arrangements.

In such an environment, strategic decisions are held hostage to political point scoring. With a style of governance characterized by ministers focused on these objectives and with technical capacity of ministries eroded, the majority of bureaucrats politicised and the credible ones either sidelined or disempowered, there are very few custodians of state interest in the decision making hierarchy who want the pendulum of decision making to swing in the favour of national security interest, defined in holistic terms.

It is within the context of this vacillating stance on policies and politically expedient decisions that I would like to pose a question: is there a need to enunciate a national security policy as a result thereof, so that there is a fundamental multi-partisan broad-based consensus on a set of policy measures that need to be protected from ad hoc whims and need to be implemented regardless of the government in power. Although many things come within the rubric of security outside of what is included in the traditional security sphere, consensus should be generated on some key projects and plans of strategic interest to the country and its people—water reservoirs, plans for ensuring energy and food security, resource mobilisation plans, curtailment of expenditure, policies to signal confidence to potential investors and key directions with regard to the state's redistributive role.

Pakistan's unique problems demand equally unique solutions that have to be ingeniously driven and led by credible leadership. There isn't a multilateral cookie-cutter approach to such changes, neither is there a comparable precedent which can be mirrored. Beyond tinkering at the margins, one of the tests of Pakistan's leadership today is to enable a consensus on a holistic national security policy and use its strategic leverage in a globalized world to secure support for its implementation.

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It is within the context of this vacillating stance on policies and politically expedient decisions that I would like to pose a question: is there a need to enunciate a National Security Policy as ‘state policy’ so that there is a fundamental multi-partisan broad-based consensus on a set of policy measures that need to be protected from *ad hoc* whims and need to be implemented regardless of the government in power. Although many things come within the rubric of security outside of what is included in the traditional security sphere, consensus should be garnered on some key projects and plans of strategic interest to the country and its people—water reservoirs, plans for ensuring energy and food security, resource mobilization plans, curtailment of expenditure, policies to signal confidence to potential investors and key directions with regard the state’s redistributive role.

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