

EXTERNAL THREAT PERCEPTION

LT. GENERAL ASIF YASIN MALIK (RETIRED)*

Introduction

Security implies the absence of real or perceived threats whether originating from internal turmoil, external sources, or economic disparities and inequalities. Nations seek power (economic, political, and military) and take adequate measures either to ward them off or minimize their perceived adverse impact. These efforts are, moreover, directed towards endless pursuit of power. Founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, once said “The weak and defenceless, in this imperfect world, invite aggression from others.” While tactics and strategies are devised to effectively handle visualized threats and an anticipated undesirable situation, efforts are also made simultaneously to inculcate a sense of security among the citizens.

National Security is the requirement to maintain the survival of the state through use of all instruments of national power such as population, economy, natural resources, military, geo-strategic location, etc. This conception of national security, which initially focused on the military might, now encompasses a broad range of facets, all of which impinge on the non-military or economic security of the nation and the values espoused by the society. The distinctive meaning of national security means freedom from foreign dictation in all or maximum spheres of national life.

The end of the last century witnessed a transformation of the concept of National Security. Military as a primary instrument of policy started to fade and became a supporting instrument to a new domain of geo-economic hegemony. Today this phenomenon has attained a

relative permanence and is being applied in different forms. At individual level, for a majority of the world's people, security is defined in the very personal terms of survival. The primary threats to human security have far less to do with terrorism than with poverty and conflict, with governments that do not or cannot deliver turning on their own citizens under a global economy that offers differentiated access and opportunities to the powerful and the powerless.

Pakistan's Security Landscape

Pakistan's security landscape is essentially shaped by the circumstances that surrounded its birth in 1947 and the current regional environment. Political circumstances of Pakistan's creation have placed the country in a conflict prone relationship with India. The British departed from the sub-continent in a disorderly way leaving behind numerous unresolved border and sovereignty issues. Firstly, the alignment of the new boundary dividing India and Pakistan violated the principle of division of India. Instead of majority population, the Revenue Demarcations became the basis, thus, complicating the borders, both in East and West Pakistan. The other issue was of princely states, particularly Kashmir, Hyderabad Deccan and Junagarh. In Kashmir the Maharaja connived with the Hindu leadership of India and announced joining India against the wishes of the Muslim population, thereby laying the foundation of perpetual conflict between India and Pakistan. The issue has been source of military conflict on numerous occasions in the last seven decades. The non-resolution of Kashmir dispute has directly impacted the security of Pakistan.

Pakistan's geopolitical location being at the confluence of South, Central and West Asia; implies that turmoil in any of these regions directly affects it. Being located in the neighbourhood of big powers such as China, Russia and India, makes Pakistan relevant to the great power competition, as well. In the aftermath of emergence of geo-economics, the struggle for economic dominance has made this region the center of attraction. Between Russia, China, India and other regional countries nearly half of global population is the target as a market. This also entails political dominance in the wake of likely demise of unipolarity due to resurgence of Russia and efforts by China to assert itself on the global canvas. The US in particular, and China and the EU in general, will continue to remain militarily and diplomatically engaged in the region. Consequently, overriding influence of geo-economics on strategy formulation has propelled energy security and trade interests of regional and extra regional powers to the forefront as prime security considerations.

Prevailing Western perceptions of Islamic extremism and asymmetric threats are spawning the trends of coercive strategy against non-conformist states. At the same time poor governance coupled with weak economies has made most countries vulnerable to exploitation by extremist religious as well as separatist elements. This causes an overflow of threats beyond the borders, even up to, far off Western states. Hence, the powerful countries take this as a premise to coerce states into accepting their demands. The bogey of 'Pakistan's strategic assets falling in the hands of terrorists' is one case in point.

Nuclearization of regional states and a tenuous spectrum of strategic stability continues to dominate policy discourse. India and Pakistan's

entry in the Nuclear Club and perceived Iranian efforts to acquire nuclear technology are projected as threat to international stability as all these states are in a conflict environment. Strategic capabilities of Pakistan and Iran are also perceived to be threatening the security of Israel, which is itself warring with its neighbors, and the population of areas occupied by it.

In Afghanistan, persistent turbulence is having direct fallout for Pakistan and the region. Failure of dialogue and Afghan peace efforts could plunge Afghanistan into a Civil War. That in turn would cause not only a demographic disaster but also an economic catastrophe for the region, particularly Pakistan. Overall it will be a catalyst for political instability in the region too.

India's strategic realignment with the West and its efforts to become a regional hegemon has only one impediment i.e., a sovereign Pakistan. India has realized that military adventure will not achieve the desired results. Actions taken after revocation of Article-370 by Delhi point to growing Indian frustration. A frustrated bully can cause disastrous consequences. Most social media activities creating socio-political dissatisfaction among the masses and loss of faith in the state are originating from sites outside Pakistan. Consequently, the Indians, with the support of West, are resorting to a very aggressive Fifth Generation attack on Pakistan. Kulbhushan Jhadev case is just one documented case. India seeks to build resistance against Pakistan Army's counter terrorism operations, thereby eroding the faith among the masses about their ability to defend the country against internal or external threats. Meanwhile, India has increased its presence in Afghanistan with the goal to fuel sub-nationalism in Balochistan and terrorist activities in the newly merged districts of KP province or the erstwhile

FATA. Larger objective appears strategic encirclement of Pakistan, thus, creating a multi front threat scenario. It would cause a priority dilemma as well as resource stress on our security forces.

Iran's role in Gulf and global politics is undergoing paradigm shift as its approach towards its neighbours is also undergoing a change. Such initiatives will reduce friction in the region as well as reduce external interference. Meanwhile, crisis in Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf is having serious socio-political implications for Pakistan, primarily due to large scale deportation on various pretexts as well as a pro-India tilt in their national policies. The Syrian and Yemeni conflicts are nurturing terrorism and sectarian extremism well beyond the regional confines.

Russia is emerging as a different player than before and expanding its influence in parallel with China. The emergence of multipolar order will create a more positive and stable security situation. It will also be a check to US and West's unilateral pursuits of their policies that are not necessarily in the interest of the regional countries.

In Asia, China remains the main anchor of stability, security and prosperity in the region and is flexing its muscles on the security plane too. It is focused on providing an enabling security environment to its geo-economic pursuits. Pakistan-China strategic partnership remains the bedrock of strategic stability in South Asia. CPEC has now fully cemented the Chinese interest in the region, particularly, Pakistan. This in turn strengthens Pakistan's security parameters. While CPEC will have positive impact on the security environment of Pakistan, conversely the West is perceiving it as a threat to their dominance in the region.

Pakistan remains under a very intense and multipronged Fifth Generation attack. A serious escalation on this front in the last two years of political transition can be witnessed. This was directed at creating despondency and anti-state sentiment among the masses. Meanwhile, menace of terrorism and violent extremism threatens the very fiber of Pakistan's society and national security. Poor governance and weak economy further adds fuel to the fire, particularly in the backdrop of a large young population.

Threat Spectrum

Pakistan faces multidimensional threats ranging from conventional military to nuclear to proxies to Fifth Generation, which are both internal and external and also have complex interlinkages. Mostly external threats emanate from the geo-politics, pan-Islamism and juxtaposition between a nuclear and a nuclear aspirant nation. US presence in Afghanistan as well as the simmering conflict in the Gulf have had major influence on the geo-politics of the region. The external environment and present threats help us draw some conclusions and the significant ones are the following:

- i. All-out attack is not likely to be undertaken by any country alone or as part of an alliance.
- ii. Physical military threat is, however, likely to remain in place on land and sea for foreseeable future. Differential in Indo-Pakistan conventional capabilities is increasing by the day as a consequence of massive weapon sale to the Indians, which in turn would lower the threshold of strategic deterrence built by Pakistan.
- iii. Foreign military threat would be used to support other coercive measures to bring Pakistan to at best a 'pliant status'.

- iv. Such military forces may be employed under the umbrella of UN in the eventuality of enforcement/application of any UNSC resolution meant to directly or indirectly control strategic assets.
- v. Pakistani internal instability would be accentuated directly causing internal unrest and by keeping the borders hot, causing political instability as well as stretch on the armed forces.
- vi. National morale and resolve would be undermined by creating an environment of insecurity as well as fear amongst the masses.
- vii. National cohesion would be negatively influenced by reducing the trust of the people in the state and its armed forces due to their perceived inability to protect against foreign aggression.
- viii. Direct encouragement to anti-state elements in their pursuits against the interests of Pakistan. Emergence of PTM etc. is the latest manifestation.
- ix. Compulsion to closely guard the national strategic assets to maintain a credible deterrence against all military threats.

Whole of Nation Approach

Analyzing the landscape and threat environment makes it clear that threat is not restricted to enemy's military prowess but extends to numerous other forms, so national security is not only about military solutions and responses. It cannot be totally left or relegated to the military to defend against various internal and external threats. It also emerges that no military can perform its security tasks successfully unless it enjoys the complete support of the nation. Pakistani armed forces have gone much beyond their call of duty in performing numerous military and non-military assistance duties like Bhal Safai, Ghost Schools Survey, Tax

net Registration, WAPDA duties, Election Duties, Polio Eradication Campaign and Census Duties in addition to disaster relief during natural and manmade calamities. Some of these duties even caused resentment against the military as well as were source of friction within the rank and file. The last decade and half also witnessed heavy employment on security duties initially in erstwhile FATA and now almost across the whole country. This not only caused operational stretch but also huge cost in terms of lives and equipment. All this has been the most vivid reflection of the military's desire to play its part in implementing the concept of 'Whole of Nation Approach'. This response mechanism should be implemented across the board. All it requires is the realization of the nature and quantum of threat and a visionary leadership to channelize the national energy to not only meet the threat but also go beyond and rise in the comity of nations.

Contours of Whole of Nation Concept

The whole of nation concept is very wide and encompasses a plethora of ideas, components and actions. It is rooted in the concept of nationalism within the society, which drives the whole behaviour of the population towards the various components of the State as well as numerous duties and commitments in day to day functioning of the country. For instance, if people fail to pay their taxes, it is the simplest manifestation of lack of nationalism. There are many other examples like violation of laws of the land etc.

Similarly, the most vital contributory factor in a nation's behaviour towards the State is its realization of sacrifices made by its founders so that the future generations live a free and sovereign life. All this realization can only be imbibed in the populace if it is exposed to the country's history in