

National security vs welfare

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Should the priority and focus of the state be national security or the security and welfare of the people who live in it? This is an issue, which is being debated particularly in Pakistan and in other South Asian countries.

I belong to the school of thought which believes that social welfare should not be compromised by national security considerations. No doubt, territorial integrity and stability within the states and from inter-state conflicts must be secured, but the paramount consideration ought to be welfare of the people. If social welfare is not secured then the people tend to secure their economic interests in other countries.

Regrettably, in India and Pakistan our budget allocation priorities have remained riveted on the defence sector. If we cannot afford to make such huge allocations for the defence, we readily indulge in borrowings in billions of dollars, which makes our future generations also heavily indebted. This obviously results in neglect of the social sector. These arguments constitute simple common sense but unfortunately certain vested interests and the establishments of our countries, which thrive on promotion of hatred and conflicts, reject such simple logic and reasoning.

The prudent and advisable policies to secure both national security and social welfare of the people, is to establish warm, cordial relations and cooperation in all spheres with our neighbouring countries, rather than placing reliance on distantly located the US or the western block. China, in my opinion, appears to be

a more trustworthy neighbour to secure not only defence but also equitable economic developments. Last year in July a conference was held in China to discuss ways and means to promote collaboration between China and Saarc through Enhanced People to People Exchanges. It is obvious from the very decision to hold this Conference in China that both the government its think tanks are equally desirous of promoting more close and cordial relations with the Saarc countries. Greater cooperation and closer ties of the Saarc countries with China, in my opinion, would not only serve our national security concerns but also enable us to give greater priority and allocation to the social sector, which is the critical need of the oppressed people of the entire South Asia region.

It is very heartening to note that in the post-Cold War era, both the Congress Party and the BJP of India have wisely pursued a consistent policy of reconciliation and engagement with China. The past prime ministers of these parties and other leaders of India have repeatedly expressed that "India had no wish to hold China as an enemy or a threat." They reinforced the desire to establish friendly relations with China. At no point has the diplomatic engagement between India and China ceased. Even the 1998 nuclear tests by India did not cause any harm to India's policy and relations with China. To my knowledge, India has also succeeded in making some territorial adjustments with China. Lately, the economic ties between India and China have attained new heights, perhaps China is the biggest trading partner of India.

On the other hand, China is the most trusted ally and strategic partner of Pakistan for close to five decades. China, being the common denominator between India and Pakistan, is well placed to play a significant role in promoting cordial relations, peace and progress not only between our three countries but also in the entire South Asian region. China's high profile in economic interactions at both bilateral and regional levels has most favourable implications for the region as a whole.

It is necessary to highlight a most potent threat to our security: the curse of terrorism. It is not only destroying peace and security of both India and Pakistan, but also harming trust and confidence between the two. The incidents of terrorism are creating very serious impediments in the badly needed peace process between India and Pakistan. I want the people of India to realize that the "jihadis" and their terrorist activities are our common enemies.

It is imperative for Pakistan and India, being next-door neighbours, to devise a joint strategy with sincerity of purpose for combating terrorism in our region. Terrorism is not only a threat to our national security but also to the life and property of our people from within our respective countries. Those terrorists, who were involved in one of the worst tragedies of 26/11 in Mumbai, or in the terrorist attack on the Houses of Parliament in Delhi on Dec 13, 2001, or in the commission of the same barbaric acts of terrorism every other week in all nooks and corners of Pakistan, are enemies of Pakistan, and equally of India. Pakistan, in particular, is the worst victim of religious extremist terrorist organisations.

According to unofficial sources since 2002 more than 7,000 members of our military and paramilitary forces, including one lieutenant general, one major general, five brigadiers, and police have sacrificed their precious lives in confronting these terrorists. More than 70,000 innocent citizens in various part of our country have died in innumerable attacks by the terrorists during the same period. Terrorists are our number-one enemy. The two governments must clear the perception or allegations about any state actor or non-state actors in our respective countries involved in such unforgivable acts of terrorism.

The imperatives of the foreign policy of both India and Pakistan must be focused on the principles of peaceful coexistence and economic collaboration and to put an end to the blame-game strategy and the

hate propaganda by state or non state elements.

The Kashmir dispute should not be allowed to prevent forever the existence of cordial relations between our two countries. One of the viable, realistic and pragmatic solutions for resolving the Kashmir dispute, at least for the time being and without prejudice to the respective stands of the two countries on Kashmir, is to accept the Line of Control with some adjustment as the international border.

In my view, this is also the spirit and objective of the Shimla Agreement of 1972. This must, however, be followed by a treaty between India and Pakistan containing firm and sincere commitments: (a) that both countries must discourage and prevent aggressive actions, militancy or terrorism or policy of blame-games against each other; and (b) the border between the two countries and between the two Kashmirs should be opened to the people at large with free access, free trade, exchange of cultural activities, academics, intellectual groups, sports events, free access to the electronic and print media, etc.

We can draw incalculable dividends by establishment of peace, harmony, open borders, an environment of trust, cooperation and collaboration between the Saarc countries, and with China. This will usher in a new era of prosperity and peace. It will also provide free access between the Saarc countries and the Central Asian countries as well to serve our basic needs and interests.

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