

Rethinking national security

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For Pakistan 9/11 was an eye-opener for the complacent Establishment whose main obsession has been to strengthen its sinews on power. After the terrorist incidents we came to the conclusion that our policy of seeking 'strategic depth' in Afghanistan had outlived its usefulness. Likewise General Musharraf, whose national agenda with special reference to Kashmir, was very bold and in marked contrast to his predecessors symbolised in the acceptance of Jihad as the keystone in country's support to the freedom fighters in Kashmir, made a mini U-turn there as well. His campaign to ban religious outfits previously the Establishment's proxies, was motivated by compulsions to satisfy the international community.

And now Establishment's farewell to arms as a policy plank and assurance to India by President Musharraf of not allowing Pakistani territory to be used against it signals yet another U-turn. It is not the usefulness of these huge policy shifts that is under question, but the issue is that most of the

Since the initiation of this century Pakistan has had to undergo many changes caused more by the international circumstances and less by our indigenous requirements. In ways more than one, this reappraisal process carried out by the all-powerful Establishment has encompassed areas of our national life from internal security paradigms to the foreign policy. In this process of reviewing our past, present and future, many blunders committed by holier-than-thou controllers of the national security have come to fore highlighting huge gaps in our policy-making. What has been more than manifest is the lack of institutionalisation of our policy-making process with personal likes and dislikes of the rulers forming priorities informed by inability to look into the future with accompanying implications.

A look at the conduct of Pakistan as a collective organisation shows that both military and civilian leaders have been indulging in whimsical thinking without input-output principle in the formation of their calculations. This flawed and lop-sided approach towards security and economic issues may have brought some tactical advantages but long-term outcome has been more damaging.

zero-sum game of conducting itself in what is now termed as national interests. Since the Establishment has restricted the concept of national security to piling up of arms to make its borders physically secure from the hostile forces, the real ingredients of true national security paradigm have been missing.

So far our security perceptions have been formed by our external challenges from across the borders and no attention has been paid to the internal dangers. Those elements co-opted by the Establishment to address external challenges have been allowed to further their partisan agenda based upon protection of their sectarian interests at the cost of religious harmony and tolerance. Our half-hearted approach to security issues resulted in the creation of many rifts and cracks in our societal order making us vulnerable to international pressures.

It took 9/11 to make us realise the uselessness of our so-called strategic policies. Now two attempts on General Musharraf's life have intensified

the resolve of our security wizards to uproot terrorism from society. Why is it so that our policy-makers never noticed the glaring realities when they existed on ground and only some crisis situation forced important policy shifts?

This attitude is symptomatic of institutional breakdown in spite of having a plethora of security agencies and a semblance of decision-making arrangement. General Musharraf has done well to point out that Pakistan's real problem stems not from outside but from inside, a fact that has been ignored for so long by the Pakistan's ruling elite. Now that homegrown terrorism has been identified as the biggest challenge facing the country, it is hoped that the matter would not remain confined to diagnosis of the disease but a thorough effort would be made to explore the circumstances in which terrorism has grown feeding lethal ideology and funded by a vast network of sympathisers and supporters.

As societal reform and education play a major role in isolating these elements, good governance, health, availability of equal job opportunities and education, should be given priority at the time of formulation of national security policy.