INTERNAL SECURITY: THE THIRD WORLD PERSPECTIVE

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There are both short term and long term threats to internal security. Domestic threats mean slowing down on, slackening in and dislocation of economic progress and a declining productivity; disruptions in the availability of economic/natural resources; vulnerability to such shocks; loss of domestic cohesion as a result of ethnic, religious, regional conflicts; conflicts between various segments of population and fragmentation into special interests; growing feeling of neglect and being left out by groups of people and the consequent loss of confidence and faith in national political leadership; internal terrorism, which apart from other ill-effects, disrupts the normal functioning of economic processes; and migration of people from neighbouring states because of political instabilities there; etc.

Third World security threats are mostly endogenous, rather than exogenous. National security considerations in the context of threat, for the Third World countries are different from the developed countries. The main threat here is socio-economic and from consequences of such socio-economic causes. Even the threat of external intervention, and the foreign-initiated political instability, are possible because of internal weaknesses arising out of socio-economic imbalances and maladies. In most of the Third World countries, internal political instability is as much a threat to vital national values as threats that originate externally. No doubt some internal instability may be initiated and encouraged by outside forces; but many a times, in order to hide their own inefficiency and mishandling, governments are apt to see an omnipresent and ever-convenient 'foreign hand' in such instabilities. Traditional methods of pursuing national
security in the Third World countries, by building up security forces, attempting fast pace socio-economic modernization and remaining under the protective umbrella of a big power, are no guarantee of a viable national security, as was apparent from the fall of the Shah’s regime in Iran, in 1979. Such a rapid pace of development and economic changes compounds the problems for national security. Such states become increasingly dependent on outside powers, due to internal reasons: there may be external/internal challenges to regime legitimacy and stability, economic pressures and demands, or problems of internal control. To meet such threats, the government may be forced to acquire more weapons from outside in a bid to keep the armed forces on its side and may have to seek foreign capital and access to foreign markets, to keep the economic elite on its side. So as to buffer themselves against shocks, such governments have to concede diverse, and even conflicting, concessions to political opposition.

The non-military dimensions of national security, such as protracted social conflict, economic vulnerability, communal/regional fragmentation and inadequacy of mechanisms to deal with such issues are equally important threats to national security. Among the direct internal threats to national security, in terms of scope and intensity, at the top is the insurgency and guerilla warfare, and other forms include disruption of normal functioning of governmental institutions and of activities of trade and commerce; kidnapping, hostage taking and hijacking of transportation means; extortion; riots; assassinations; terrorism; and large-scale group demonstrations and movements. External intervention in fragmented domestic politics may be thereby perpetuating local conflicts.

Since it is the socio-political cohesiveness that characterizes an entity as a state, the degree of such cohesiveness determines the strength or weakness of a state. In the absence of such cohesiveness, and in spite of formidable state power and wide range of resources and capabilities, even a superpower may face problems of being a weak state (like the Soviet Union). If political loyalties of people are more strongly oriented towards their ethnic, caste, religious or regional identities— as, unfortunately, appears to be in India—then, in spite of a strong central political authority over-riding such
considerations, socio-political cohesiveness is lacking. If local political identities are not in conformity with the central political authority, then identification with the idea of the nation is lacking. This makes a state vulnerable to diverse forms and patterns of internal instabilities. Certain characteristics may be identified whose presence in a state signifies the propensity of the state for internal instability: absence of a clear and viable national identity; contending sub-national identities; absence of a clear hierarchy of political authority; absence of popular faith in the integrity and fairness of the state-power; major differences over what are the core national values; frequent major changes in political structure; endemic political violence; conspicuous use of force by the government in internal political life; tight state-control over the media (the reverse is also true leading to proliferation of irresponsible yellow journalism); and the absence of a viable middle class. Such threats, in the Third World countries, may take the form of military coups, guerilla and insurrectionary movements, secessionist movements, terrorism, mass uprisings, intense and bitter political factionalism, regional and communal conflicts. Erosion of political authority increases the threats to regime stability which take the form of political protests, movements, sabotage, terrorism, revolts, political assassinations, and even external interference and war. The later may be evidenced from the happenings in Sri Lanka and Iran. Once the undisputed authority of the Shah of Iran was challenged, revolution was the inevitable result. Though Iran was militarily powerful, her political image in the eyes of Iraq changed, and a war ensured.

States which face, or perceive facing, an unstable security environment, easily legitimize the use of force in domestic politics. It is always tempting to brand political opposition as a threat to stability and to equate it with the threat to national security. The real threat may be against the system of privileges for a particular group or a class in the society but it may well be pictured as a threat for the state. No doubt, domestic conflicts ultimately do become a threat to national security to the nation-state. Instead of an orderly political process, some state may witness more chaotic patterns in its
polity, but there may be no valid reason to treat such manifestations as a direct threat to the nation. This would be equating the interests of the nation with those of the power incumbents. This in fact, provides a government, which may be otherwise weak, a legitimacy for the use of force against its political opposition. Trampling of political rights internally has always been justified by states in the name of national security against external threats and imaginary enemies. But, ensuring regime security by provoking national security concerns is infested with dangers. There is always the possibility that invoking an imaginary external threat to divert internal crises may eventually backfire and further aggravate the internal crisis. All this may actually end up weakening the national security. To divert people's attention from acute inflation and severe economic crises, the Argentinian government in 1982 precipitated an external national security crisis, by attempting to regain the Falklands from Britain. The military defeat, in fact, resulted in further domestic crises and, finally, in the removal of the government—something which it had tried to avert by generating the external threat, in the beginning.

An erosion of political legitimacy of the government results in a decrease in people's identification with, and conformity to governmental policies; a decrease in the ability of the government to mobilize support or resources; a breakdown of policy coordination; a growth of apathy and indifference among the people; entanglement of the government in the web of external alliances to ensure regime survival; and consequent erosion of political autonomy and further erosion of legitimacy.

Protracted social conflicts result from a communal/regional divide that coincides with structural inequality producing structural exploitation of some groups and is the result of political-economic and ideological domination, or perceived domination, of one group by the other. The presence of such conflicts is undeniably a threat to the national security of many developing countries and plural societies. Communal conflicts erupt when there are prospects of loss of domination in inter-group relations. This may happen if the traditional domination of one group in the economic field is
challenged by the other group's emergence as an economic viability. This may also happen if a group perceives that the modernization is disrupting the traditional authority of the leadership of that group. Also, a perception of discrimination polarizes a group into social withdrawal instead of overcoming the disparities, as the economic gap widens between such groups, there is more demand for greater autonomy and secessionist attempts. Such attempts produce territorial disintegration and political fragmentation.

Terrorism creates disorder and aims at creating fear among the general public through its discriminate, random and only apparently irrational use of violence. All this is geared towards shaking the confidence of the people in the capability of the government in giving them security and protection and, thereby, destabilizing the viability and legitimacy of the government. Similar situation arises when a significant part of the society loses faith for whatever reasons in the fairness, integrity or effectiveness of the law and order machinery. This group then considers it not wrong to take law into own hands for security of life and property, giving rise to the phenomenon of lumpen elements. This is treated as law and order problem by the enforcement agencies; and the group in question thereby feels that its apprehensions are validated and vindicated, and this vicious circle continues, aggravating the threats for national security.

The failure to evolve commonly shared national values and interests is a definite long-term threat to national security. Deep rooted communal divides do not allow the aggregation of national values and interests and each group develops its own interests. Unless the interests of all groups are properly accommodated, such cleavages are apt to result in secessionist movements, as had happened in Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Such communal identities pose a threat to national security when they start demanding separate territorial identity based on their communal identity. Then threat scenario is expanded with the involvement of external powers. If the genuine grievances are not accommodated, or in the face of what these groups perceive as coercion, they start looking for support from external patrons, mostly from neighbouring countries, particularly if there are over-lapping
communal ties, as between the Tamils of Sri Lanka and India, or Kurds in Iran and Iraq.

Harmony built on suppression does not last but generates more conflicting activities. When coercion is used to suppress opposition, the structural victimization becomes a serious problem for the security of a state. Suppression negates the governmental claims for legitimacy and internal cohesion. A viable national security cannot be achieved through suppression. Domestic cohesion is the consensus-formation process and national integration. If this consensus is not voluntary and has been achieved through the use of the instruments of repression, stifling political opposition, then it is of no use from the national security perspectives. This is more so because domestic consensus is linked with legitimacy, a state has to adopt policies that satisfy the aspirations of the people. The degree of satisfaction of aspirations is directly proportional to the level of people's support for the government, and inversely proportional to their propensity for generating domestic instability. Satisfaction among the people gives legitimacy to the government. The more legitimate the government, the more loyalty and support it can get from the people. And the combination of legitimacy, loyalty and support provides domestic cohesion which is a prerequisite for internal security.

The crisis of national integration exhausts and cripples the national capabilities because communal/ regional schisms are protracted both in duration and intensity. Not only it depletes human, physical, social and economic resources and military capabilities of a state, but the nation as such gets trapped in the vicious spiral of hostility, thus paralyzing the policy capacity of the state. No doubt, it may be possible that external threats promote internal unity and cohesion (as has happened in India, many times), but it is equally possible that the lack of internal aggravate the external threat (as has been the case in Lebanon). Then, the external threat may not always be handy to instil cohesion and unity internally.

Under development and perceived unequal distribution of national resources precipitate social unrest, frustrating internal fragmentation, triggering hostile reactions, challenging the regime legitimacy and provoking national
security crises. Further, the base of military power which is essential for national security, cannot be built upon a weak economy. Economic recession, depression, disturbances or such other economic issues tend to displace other core problems in the hierarchy of national values. A country greatly depending on foreign aid to finance investment or imports has to accept conditions detrimental to its autonomy and national security. Similarly, countries under heavy debt-burden can hardly be called secure. A national security policy requires an economic programme that can provide resources both for domestic needs and for an adequate defense establishment. Without a strong economy, a state cannot achieve national consensus in favour of defence spending that is required for its foreign/strategic policy. For an effective conduct of the latter, a strong political leadership is needed and its success in the conduct of security policy depends on politico-economic success, domestically. For a viable national security programme, an effective socio-economic programme is needed because it provides internal cohesion which is the base of a successful national security policy. National strength grows out of the state’s success in the fields of political freedoms, scientific-technological infrastructure and national economy. International economic policy may act as a leverage against other states, and may also be used to enhance own resources. Political leverage of economic resources involves affecting the behaviour of other states by applying economic sanctions or promising economic rewards. Both of these affect the export of capital, goods and technology as well as the flow of economic and military assistance. Thus, both carrots and sticks are used in an effort to affect the behaviour of other states. Economic pressure may not yield much for political objectives, but even then it is used by states in their relations with others, and is a factor that affect security considerations of states.

Besides the military connotation, there is now a management component in the concept of security because of the need of unification, integration and organization of various agencies involved in this task. Policy guidelines for a framework of national security involve integration of foreign and defence policy; strategic planning; threat perception
National security requires coordination and an inter-disciplinary plan of action of a number of national agencies. At the top are the command and control structure, which means the national legislature and the executive. It formulates the national security policy, based on political solidarity and, through the national budget and various development plans, decide about resource mobilization and provision. It also determines, as part of the national security policy, as to what constitute the national objectives which are to be secured. Then there is the structure of foreign relations which deals with foreign and diplomatic ties, including foreign trade and aid. The structure of armed forces and their industries provide the brute force necessary to carry out the national security policy. There are agencies which ensure resource mobilization and provision which include finance, trade, commerce, manpower, food, agriculture, mining, transportation, etc. The law and order machinery of the state is concerned with the maintenance of internal law and order and security. The intelligence gathering and information system is concerned with the inputs/outputs of information, and include agencies dealing with political, military, economic information, and include agencies dealing with political, military, economic information of other states, espionage and related activities, and about internal political developments, as also those which deal with diffusion of information, both internally and abroad. The scientific-technological institutions carry out fundamental and applied research for the specific development of material requisite for national security needs.

So, to have an optimum flexibility in options, it is essential that threats be recognized in the emergent stages properly detected, analyzed, classified and dealt with by the coordinated efforts of relevant political, security and intelligence agencies. Since it is not possible to be sure about the intentions of the adversary, a successful national security
policy should be based on an assessment of the adversary’s capabilities and on several projections of what he might do as Abraham Lincoln had once remarked, one should devote a third of one’s preparations to one’s own arguments of the adversary. An ineffective national security policy is the result of an inability of policy makers to properly and timely detect, evaluate and counter threats to national security.

National security concerns the way of life of a people, their socio-cultural, economic and political patterns and processes of organization and their right of self-development under self-rule. In this sense, it is more comprehensive than mere ‘state security’ which concerns with political independence and territorial integrity of the state. A national consensus on goals and policies facilitates comprehensive decision-making and effective implementation.