



CENTRE for AEROSPACE & SECURITY STUDIES

Strengthening National Cohesion: A Way Forward for Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

'National Cohesion' is an important prerequisite for an independent and prosperous country. Pakistan's National Security Policy (2022-26) identified 'National Cohesion' as an important pillar of the country's security architecture. National cohesion builds upon the notion that people and the nation can thrive only when they have a common strategic purpose, aim, and when they share a common future. Therefore, achieving national cohesion should remain a continuous process and states must strive for strengthening it against emerging threats and challenges. In order to consolidate Pakistan's national cohesion, the Government must invest efforts in reinvigorating the social contract between the state and its people, ensure economic equality, improve internal security, strengthen inter-provincial harmony, revamp the judicial system through reforms, and ensure good governance and social sector development.

Keywords: National Cohesion, National Security, Human Security, Reforms, Constitution of Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

'National Cohesion' refers to a state of unity and holding the masses together as a nation and is considered an important prerequisite for a peaceful society.¹ Absence of national cohesion leads to social fragmentation, therefore, achieving and strengthening this important pillar must remain a continuous process that starts with the inception of a state and must continue in perpetuity. It can be achieved by instilling a sense of belonging (towards the state) among the masses, cultivating shared values and promoting a collective response to emerging challenges. It should develop a sense of unity among people during peace and war, in comfort, and turmoil; and build upon the notion that people and the nation can thrive only when they have a common strategic purpose, aim, and when they share a common future achieved by focusing on collective strengths and similarities while working through and resolving differences.

As a country hosting diverse cultures and ethnicities, the continuous consolidation of national cohesion is an important pillar of Pakistan's national policy. Therefore, it formed an important part of the National Security Policy (2022-26) launched by the Prime Minister of Pakistan on 14 January 2022.² While the National Security Policy has identified various elements to forge national cohesion, an effective implementation strategy needs to be formulated by the government to ensure that the stated objectives are achieved within a specific timeframe.

This *Working Paper* aims to analyse national cohesion, its objectives vis-à-vis Pakistan, and identifies various areas that play a significant role in strengthening it. In order to benefit from collective wisdom on this subject, a series of roundtable discussions involving experts from various fields such as academia, retired government officials, lawyers, historians, and scholars, were also organised by the

¹ United Nations, *Creating an Inclusive Society: Practical Strategies to Promote Social Integration*, report (New York: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2009), <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/egms/docs/2009/Ghana/inclusive-society.pdf>.

² Government of Pakistan, 'National Security Policy 2022-2026', (Islamabad: National Security Division), <https://nsd.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/NSP.pdf>.

Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies. This paper also synthesises the input received and has added the proposed ideas into the recommendations.

National Cohesion and Its Objectives

For any task, it is important to lay out its objectives upfront. Therefore, thought leaders need to keep several objectives in mind when studying, drafting and finding ways for the attainment of national cohesion. These *National Cohesion Objectives* should focus on:

1. Creating an environment where people live and prosper with dignity, safety and prospects of a better tomorrow through equal and unrestricted access to education, justice and socioeconomic opportunities.
2. Providing an environment of peaceful co-existence through personal, social and economic security of every citizen of the state, regardless of their belief, race, ethnicity, gender, language, and caste etc.
3. Ensuring national integrity and peaceful co-existence of various ethnicities (especially marginalised groups) and bringing them together through a common goal and future.
4. Creating and sustaining conditions of internal and external possibilities and opportunities for all citizens for a prosperous future.
5. Guaranteeing national sovereignty and territorial integrity through diplomacy, alliances, cooperation and deterrence that will reflect positively on internal security and provide strength to internal cohesion.

In order to achieve these objectives, a state must ensure economic security that leads to traditional and non-traditional security. Only after securing both traditional and non-traditional security, can a state reinforce its national cohesion.

NATIONAL COHESION: IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

National cohesion is imperative for meeting the internal and external challenges of a state. The current geopolitical, regional and international environment has multiplied challenges, hence, forging unity and strengthening commitment on the part of the people towards the state of Pakistan is of paramount importance. Pakistan's national cohesion is also being challenged by internal fissures such as provincial grievances, a sense of deprivation among the tribal regions, economic vulnerabilities, frustration felt by the people due to the absence of speedy justice and economic opportunities, internal security, religious extremism, and governance issues.

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan includes detailed provisions to ensure national cohesion.³ These include security of person; religious harmony; provision of speedy justice; equal rights; non-discrimination in appointments in the services; preservation of language, script and culture of various regions; promotion of local government institutions; discouraging parochial and other prejudices; full participation of women in national life; protection of minorities; ensuring social and economic well-being of people; inter-provincial harmony and freedom of expression etc.

At this juncture, when Pakistan is celebrating 75 years of its existence, it is important to take stock of where the country was at the time of independence and the conditions prevalent now and to ask some important questions such as:

- a. Have we provided a sufficient level of security to the people from internal and external threats?
- b. Has the judicial system has been able to provide speedy justice to people and does the administrative machinery address the grievances of citizens?
- c. Are state institutions like the Parliament, local government institutions, provincial governments, and ministries/divisions responsible for the economic

³ Government of Pakistan, 'Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 10th April, 1973', (Islamabad: National Assembly of Pakistan), https://na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1549886415_632.pdf.

and social development of the country working in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Constitution?

- d. Have developmental activities, carried out by state institutions reached all parts of the country or have remained confined to specific priority areas?
- e. Are actions taken to stop elite capture and provide equal economic opportunities? Has the state done serious thinking to ensure that economic policies are beneficial to all sections of society?

Unfortunately, as one poses these fundamental questions, the reality on ground is that rather than introducing much needed economic and institutional reforms, Pakistan is witnessing deterioration and lack of progress in many areas, e.g. the provision of quality education and health facilities has become a major challenge.

WAY FORWARD

The opening line of Leo Tolstoy's classic novel 'Anna Karenina' is 'Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.'⁴ Similarly, all countries that enjoy strong national cohesion have things in common such as rule of law, good governance, strong leadership and stable economy etc., but all countries facing challenges to their national cohesion have unique challenges in all these domains. Therefore, there is no one size fits all formula to strengthen national cohesion. In order to deal with challenges, every country has to analyse the situation as per the domestic circumstances and local requirements.

Pakistan, as a country of varied ethnicities, has a unique set of challenges to its national cohesion. While there have been efforts of finding 'unity in diversity', it is easier said than done. In this regard, the following are important areas where national focus needs to be seriously and strategically focused:

1. Social Contract
2. Economic Equality
3. Internal Security
4. Inter-Provincial Harmony
5. Justice and Judicial Reforms
6. Governance
7. Social Sector Development

The subsequent section briefly looks at each of these and offers a list of policy prescriptions in each area that will help strengthen Pakistan's national cohesion.

Social Contract

There is a need to strengthen the social contract between the state and its citizens. The primary document that binds the state and its citizens is the ideology manifested in the constitution of any country. Many of the ills faced by the Pakistani nation are on

⁴ Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, Aylmer Maude and Louise Maude (Trnsl.), (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1995).

account of a lack of commitment and understanding of the Constitution of Pakistan. The Constitution provides guidelines to ensure national cohesion. If implemented in letter and spirit, the state will be able to forge national cohesion.

Policy Prescriptions

- While chapters on the Constitution of Pakistan are taught by educational institutions, there is a need to impart a deeper understanding of constitutional rights and boundaries of individuals as well as of institutions at different levels starting with the primary to the middle level of education.
- Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah united the divided Muslims of the subcontinent about the idea of Pakistan. He shared this idea and his vision for the people of this country through various speeches at different forums. All recorded speeches of Quaid-i-Azam should be made part of national curricula at different levels.

Economic Equality

National cohesion has a reciprocal and mutually reinforcing relationship with economic prosperity. On the one hand, a cohesive society lays the bedrock for a thriving economy, and on the other, a prosperous society ushers greater cohesion among a polity.

Policy Prescriptions

- The government has been working diligently towards integrating user data between key agencies such as the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) and Federal Bureau of Revenue (FBR), among others. This data integration effort must be accelerated so that the public and private sector have more rigorous and comprehensive profiles of citizens for financial inclusion purposes. Then, active domestic (banking system plus local pools) and international financing sources (multilateral plus social equity) can be leveraged towards promoting financial inclusion based on rigorous data on creditworthy but excluded cohorts. Conversely, such a data integration initiative

will also improve the national tax effort by highlighting cases of tax evasion despite ability-to-pay.

- There are various media and public messaging platforms (from television dramas to social media) that can be subtly leveraged (with the help of civil society initiatives) to divert public tastes away from conspicuous consumption towards more austere, investment-driven socioeconomics. Such platforms and shows can be instrumental for civil society and government partnerships with the objective of cultivating a more down-to-earth and cohesive socioeconomic culture.
- Maintaining peaceful transitions of power and reducing political uncertainty will lower the risk premiums on all Pakistani asset classes (from equity to fixed income), by offering a greater amount of stability and predictability to domestic (as well as foreign) investors, and will help promote a wider investment culture predicated on continuity. In addition, political stability will also improve trust in society and boost consensus on major national economic projects.

Internal Security

There is a dire need to shift focus towards issues that are affecting national cohesion directly or indirectly on the domestic front. While domestic reasons such as ethnic and religious extremism played a role, the country's internal security has deteriorated significantly as a direct consequence of regional shifts, such as the war in Afghanistan, Saudi-Iranian rivalry etc. In view of the developing nexus of internal and external challenges, there is a need to take a fresh look at internal security management. The National Action Plan (NAP), 2014⁵ identified several steps that could lead to an improved security situation and better national cohesion across the country, however, half-hearted implementation was the main reason for NAP not yielding the desired results, unfortunately. Therefore, there is a need to formulate a long-term strategy at both strategic and tactical levels.

⁵ Government of Pakistan, 'National Action Plan, 2014', (Islamabad: National Counter Terrorism Authority Pakistan, 2014), <https://nacta.gov.pk/nap-2014/>.

Policy Prescriptions

- Revise and update the National Action Plan (NAP) through an inclusive and consultative process with its ownership at the highest level.
- Seek collective agreement among political parties to cease the use of religion for political gains.
- Strengthen accountability of public officials involved in arbitrary use of powers.
- Regulate foreign and local funding to/of all religious institutions.
- Initiate a country-wide 'Deradicalisation Programme' for all religious groups.
- Propose a 'Comprehensive Equality Act' to overrule all discriminatory laws made based on religion.
- Take religious leaders/scholars on board and seek a firm and clear stance against extremism and terrorism.

Inter-Provincial Harmony

With the 18th Amendment and devolution of powers, responsibility of the provinces to focus on the basic needs of the people has increased manifold.⁶ To ensure inter-provincial harmony, it is important that issues such as water disputes, construction of Kalabagh Dam, coordination between the federal government and policies on tax collection mechanism, coordination between the federal and provincial governments on security and law and order, introduction of uniform education standards, distribution of resources etc. are addressed sufficiently.

Although the unanimous passage of the 18th Amendment was a welcome change, it failed to address difficult issues like the realignment of roles and responsibilities of federal, provincial and local governments related to peace, order, good governance and growth. The Amendment stripped the federal government of its core functions such as security of life and property, protection of minorities or dealing with natural

⁶ Government of Pakistan, 'The Constitution (Eighteenth Amendment) Act, 2010', (Islamabad: National Assembly of Pakistan), https://na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1302138356_934.pdf.

disasters. Similarly, provincial claims on natural resources, power to tax agriculture income capital gains and services presented significant roadblocks to tax reforms.

Policy Prescriptions

- Policymakers need to revisit the 18th Amendment to address inter-provincial issues in line with current ground realities.
- An important element of the 18th Amendment was the devolution of power but it had weak and ineffective implementation. While there is a reference to the devolution of powers to the provinces in the National Security Policy, there is no roadmap provided for further devolution to the local bodies at the district and *tehsil* level. The current format of devolution has weakened the federation. There should be a mechanism to fix this.
- The Government of Pakistan (GoP) may create more administrative divisions (not on the basis of ethnicity) that will ensure an equitable division of resources and curb pernicious ethnocentrism.

Justice and Judicial Reforms

The role of the judiciary and its contribution to national cohesion by providing speedy justice to the common man, ensuring rule of law, upholding fundamental rights of the disadvantaged people, protection of minorities, protection of women's rights and exploitation by the government machinery of poor people has been a subject of extensive debate in Pakistan. Besides, the number of cases pending in courts, particularly in lower courts, has mushroomed to an unprecedented level. According to the Annual Judicial Report 2020, a total of 1,824,386 cases have been lying pending in the Supreme Court, Sharia Court, High Courts and District Courts of Pakistan.⁷ This situation has led to disillusionment amongst a large section of society which is detrimental to national cohesion.

⁷ Supreme Court of Pakistan, 'Judicial Statistics of Pakistan 2020', (Islamabad: National Judicial (Policy Making) Committee), <http://ljcp.gov.pk/nljcp/assets/dist/Publication/JSP2020.pdf>. Total pending cases in the Supreme Court are 46, 695. Cases pending in the Shariat Court are 178. The number in Lahore High Court is 1, 88,176. Peshawar High Court backlog is 4194. Whereas in Islamabad High Court, a total of 16, 247 cases are awaiting disposal.

Policy Prescriptions

- The judiciary should objectively play a role to make sure that the state implements laws (especially those regulating resources) fairly; keep a check on Executive powers; and safeguard provision of equal opportunities to all Pakistanis.
- The judiciary should look into the grievances of different ethnicities and minorities within the parameters of the Constitution.
- The Constitution of Pakistan has a provision for inter-provincial transfer of judges.⁸ The government should make this compulsory to boost national integration, infuse diverse experience and fairness devoid of local interests.
- The government should form a 'Commission' headed by the Chief Justice of Pakistan, comprising of members of the Pakistan Bar Council and civil society to formulate recommendations for the provision of speedy justice, and binding courts to decide cases in a time-bound fashion.
- The number of judges, at the district, *tehsil* and sub-*tehsil* levels, needs to be increased (or reduced) in line with the demography of various areas.
- A qualitative and quantitative performance evaluation criteria for judges should be instated.
- The concept of 'Digital Judicial/Court Records' should be introduced in line with international best practices.
- The government needs to ensure administrative autonomy and budget independence of the judiciary.
- Capacity building of court employees and linked institutions is a need of the hour.
- Through Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), a 'Legal Aid System' may be introduced for those who cannot afford exorbitant legal fees.

Governance

Good governance is the bedrock of any state measured by various factors such as rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and

⁸ CommonLLI, 'Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan 1973, PART VII - The Judicature,' (Government of Pakistan), <http://www.commonlii.org/pk/legis/const/1973/8.html>.

efficiency, and accountability. In this regard, Pakistan should seriously focus on the following:

Policy Prescriptions

- While efforts have been made in this direction, Pakistan urgently requires ‘Civil Service Reforms’ that assure that technocrats (and not generalists) lead ministries with relevant expertise in the specific field. For such reforms, the Justice A. R. Cornelius Report, 1962⁹ may also be revisited.
- There should be wide-ranging action on curbing ageism and misogyny. Leadership roles should be assigned to qualified young generation while ensuring equitable representation of women.
- Across the public sector ambit of decision-making (from tendering to cadre promotions, and from project management to dispute resolution), pushing for transparency and merit-based processes that can be held accountable will bolster public confidence in the system of governance. This can involve a slew of parliamentary oversight, public sector oversight, and civil society oversight mechanisms. Although the basics of many such mechanisms already exist in Pakistan, they must be afforded greater enforcement powers, legitimacy, and operational resources. Such oversight mechanisms driven by transparency will also help reduce litigiousness (judicial case load), promote trust in institutions, and enhance social participation in governance.
- Stringent ‘Defamation Laws’ need to be enforced to curb arbitrary campaigns that malign institutions and individuals.
- The state and all its administrative structures should practice and enforce zero tolerance of corruption at all levels.

Social Sector Development

Building national cohesion also requires a renewed commitment to developing quality education, health, and social welfare services. Although Pakistan has observed an

⁹ Mohammad Mohabbat Khan, “Ruling Elite and Major Administrative Reforms: The Case of Pakistan Civil Service.” *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 41, no. 4 (1980), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41855055>.

improvement in enrolment rates at the primary school level, there is a sharp drop in educational attainment at the secondary school level, particularly among girls. According to UNICEF, an estimated 22.8 million children aged between 5-16 are not attending school in Pakistan - the world's second-highest number of Out-Of-School Children (OOSC).¹⁰ Beyond issues of access, there is also dearth of quality education with learning levels remaining low within the public school system.

While Pakistan managed the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic better than most countries, including developed ones, the healthcare system needs to come at par with international standards. This will require significant investment in the supply of quality and affordable healthcare services at the district and *tehsil* levels. According to the Economic Survey of Pakistan 2020-21, Pakistan's health expenditure was 1.2 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), far less than the 5 per cent as recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO).¹¹

Finally, given high rates of poverty and vulnerability, with an estimated 21.9 per cent of the population living below the poverty line,¹² it is important to continue expanding social safety nets to build resilience and protect livelihoods in the face of exogenous shocks such as floods, earthquakes, droughts, and pandemics.

Policy Prescriptions

- In order to improve education access and quality, the state needs to double the education budget and declare an 'Education Emergency.'
- An important lesson from the COVID-19 pandemic has been that it is vital to invest in quality and affordable healthcare services, and guaranteeing adequate supply of health clinics, hospitals, and facilities, not just in urban areas but rural areas as well.

¹⁰ '22.8m Children Between 5-16 Years of Age Not Attending School in Pakistan' *The Nation*, March 7, 2022, <https://nation.com.pk/2022/03/07/22-8m-children-between-5-16-years-of-age-not-attending-school-in-pakistan/>.

¹¹ Jamila Achakzai, 'Health Expenditure: 1.2pc of GDP against WHO-recommended 5pc,' *The News*, June 11, 2021, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/847694-health-expenditure-1-2pc-of-gdp-against-who-recommended-5pc>.

¹² Rizwan Shehzad, '22% Pakistanis living below Poverty Line, NA told,' *The Express Tribune*, September 28, 2021, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2322313/22-pakistanis-living-below-poverty-line-na-told>.

- With the help of civil society actors, the government can build and expand robust shock responsive Social Protection Programmes (SPPs) that protect the most vulnerable sections of society.
- Utilising and expanding municipal development authority budget expenditures towards the preservation and improvement of public spaces of inter-class congregation and commerce can also help foster greater social cohesion. The model of renewing interior Lahore can be taken as a template, and appropriately applied to all urban, semi-urban, and semi-rural zones where public engagement in well-designed and maintained spheres can be promoted. It will also provide a counterweight to private sphere investment through safe, accessible, and enjoyable public zones of interchange. As a secondary effect, this will also promote domestic and even international tourism.
- Pakistan's population is increasing at an alarming rate. All government organs should undertake a mass awareness campaign on population control.

CONCLUSION

Today, Pakistan faces a multitude of external and internal threats. While hard power is necessary for the territorial integrity of a country, the nature of warfare is no longer confined to regular battlefields and has transcended into various socioeconomic and political domains as well. The first line of defence against any hybrid threat is 'National Cohesion.' To fight a hybrid war, a nation must form a united front against internal and external threats. A nation, divided along ethnic lines, is internally weak due to unequal distribution of resources, absence of rule of law and justice, and is not a stakeholder in national development. Such a nation-state only degenerates into chaos and anarchy. The Government of Pakistan must develop a long-term strategy to uplift marginalised communities in all provinces, which, in turn will strengthen the federation and consolidate human security and national cohesion.

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