INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES BULLETIN
ISSN: (E) 3007-1917 (P) 3007-1909
Volume 4, Issue 2, 2026

STATE, SOCIETY, AND SECURITY VIEWED THROUGH THE PRISM OF DOMESTIC POLITICS IN PAKISTAN

Dr Zia Ul Haque Shamsi

Corresponding Author: *
Dr Zia Ul Haque Shamsi
DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18466959

Received	Accepted	Published
17 January 2025	31 January 2026	02 February 2026

ABSTRACT

The state provides political, legal, military, and moral cover to the society that resides within its physical and territorial boundaries. A state is primarily a political entity recognised by international institutions for recognition and relations; however, it does not operate in isolation. While state security traditionally meant the defence of the homeland against external physical threats, societal security is evaluated in the context of human security. Pakistani society is highly compassionate and comes forward wholeheartedly in times of crisis, even if it knows the state may not be particularly considerate of people's needs. However, domestic politics in Pakistan are at variance with people's aspirations. The two-family rule, coupled with regular military interventions, has not allowed the country to realise its true potential; therefore, it does not figure prominently in Human Development Indices (HDIs). This paper aims to analyse the State's responsibilities, its failures to society, and their implications for the State's national security through the prism of Pakistan's Domestic Politics. Adopting a deductive approach, it is argued that domestic politics in Pakistan often outrun state interests, societal values, and even security imperatives.

Keywords: *State, Society, Security, Politics, Interests, Values.*

INTRODUCTION

A state is an integrated society that possesses a coercive authority legally supreme over individuals or groups within that society. In its broader sense, the state is a set of political, administrative and coercive institutions, headed by an executive authority. It defines the political framework and territorial boundaries within which societies conceive of themselves. State emerges within a society, gradually taking on its specific form and character. All modern societies owe their peace and order to the existence of the state, which is endowed with supreme power within the national territory and maintains it.

An analysis of any national society will reveal that individuals or their associations are free to promote all kinds of objects: religious, economic, cultural and political. Such a society is one in which the way of life to which both individuals and associations must conform is defined by a coercive authority binding upon all. The French state, for example, is a territorial society, divided into government and subjects, whether individuals or associations of individuals, whose relationship is determined by the exercise of this supreme coercive power.

Likewise, Afghanistan, for example, though a tribal society, comprised of highly diverse ethnic, linguistic, and religious leanings, have suffered immensely over four decades of wars and conflicts. Millions of Afghans from the last three generations were displaced from their homes and forced to live in exile, some with formal refugee status and many with illegal status in several neighbouring countries, including Pakistan, Iran, and Central Asian States. Afghan society, as we have seen, has valiantly resisted invasions and interventions by at least two superpowers of recent times: first, the erstwhile Soviet Union, and more

recently, the United States. It is now abundantly clear that Afghan society could not be subjugated even if the state could not provide them with physical security or any other element of human security, including political, personal, community, food, health, economic, and environmental security. This implies that societal strengths lie, in essence, in the values on which the society has lived, strived for, and thrived.

Afghan generations have not given up hope in these difficult times and stand firmly behind their incumbent government, even if it does not fully comply with the tenets of human rights as perceived by outside powers. There are concerns about policies regarding women's education and their participation in societal development. Yet, Afghan society is not prepared to live under foreign invaders under any circumstances.

Pakistani society is not as old as Afghan society, and perhaps has a different way of life. Since independence, the state and its people have not been under any foreign occupation, primarily due to the presence of its strong Armed Forces. However, it has had several wars and conflicts with its eastern neighbour, India, over unresolved disputes like Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). However, the state has not been able to manage, let alone provide, many of the other elements of human security for its incredibly vibrant society.

The people of Pakistan are young and hardworking, and this has been evident in their contributions to the development of many countries, both developing and developed, wherever they have gone, as temporary or permanent residents. Their remittances back home are essential to sustaining Pakistan's fragile economy.

The 21st-century generation in Pakistan is expected to bring a fundamental change in our society's outlook. Because the younger generation now understands and insists that national security cannot be ensured without safeguarding the fundamentals of human security and the well-being of the people, which is highly critical to Pakistan's national security. It is essential that the state also make efforts to ensure the basic needs of the people are met, so that they are not exploited by enemies and swayed against their own homeland.

Over the years, the people of Pakistan had accepted a particular way of life that may not have been ideal in a civilised world and true to its values and interests. However, the situation may be changing with the use of social media and growing awareness, driven by education and international travel among young people. The so-called Google kids have started asking questions, first to their parents and teachers, and now to the state, about the provision of their fundamental rights. However, the essence of security has a much broader canvas, and societal security requirements in the changed paradigm must be evaluated in terms of human needs.

State and Society

A state emerges within a society, gradually taking on its specific form and character, and all national societies owe their peace and order to the state's existence. The state provides the framework, both politico-legal and in terms of value allocation, that characterises the dissent of dissenting groups in society and the means of expressing this dissent, such as violence. The core functions of any state in maintaining domestic peace include providing legal continuity for the national society, providing most of the institutionalised agencies and processes of social change, and providing agencies for the enforcement of its laws.

The state's contribution to domestic peace is indispensable, but it is not in itself sufficient. The national societies have disintegrated and split into several smaller units, either temporarily or permanently, whenever the state was incapable of maintaining its monopoly over organised violence and used whatever means of violence it retained to maintain peace and secure its own survival. Besides this, the forces of destruction arising within society, in the form of class, racial, religious, regional, or purely political struggles, will erupt in revolutions and civil war. The state is inevitably involved in these activities in two senses. One, that the state is the primary target of revolutions against which it must defend itself, and second, that the dissentions that disrupt society also split its organisation. In such a situation, the state will

cease to function as a single body, and its unity will dissolve amid a civil war.

Usually, all national societies are composed of multiple social groups. Some of these are mutually exclusive in the sense that their respective claims are mutually exclusive. This mutual exclusiveness of opposing claims is particularly obvious in the economic sphere, where one group may demand a share in the financial product which another group refuses to grant. This problem of the distribution of economic products is only one social phenomenon. The other is the problem of justice, which affects the national societies at two levels. One is the level of general principles shared by societies, and the other is the level of specific claims advanced by particular groups. On the first level, no threat to peace arises, for all are agreed upon the general principles by which the "common good" of the society is defined, such as democracy, social justice, equality, freedom of speech, etc. The other level concerns social groups, which advance their conflicting claims in the name of these principles. Society may be able to disregard the claims of small and weak groups without endangering peace, yet it cannot afford to ignore them without risking social unrest.

The state is a way of organising the collective life of a given society. It is vital to realise how an individual citizen perceives the state. The object of the state must be to fulfil, to the maximum possible, the desires of its citizens. To achieve this, the state must act without bias in the interests of all citizens. It cannot fulfil its ends, as a state, if it differentiates between them. The claim of the state to obedience rests upon its will and ability to secure to its citizens the maximum satisfaction of their wants.

The basic factor in any given society is the way in which the modes of production are realised. All social relations are built upon provisions for those primary material needs without which life cannot continue. There is a close connection between institutions, culture and the methods of production. A change in any one of these will result in a change or at least an alteration in the rest. The most vital factor among these is the change in methods of production, which initiates changes in all other social patterns. It is of utmost importance that society seeks to sustain stable relations of production to continue as a society. It needs a coercive element/instrument to secure the continuance of those relations, simply because otherwise they will not remain productive. Changes in the relative position of state and society and of different sequences of society are infrequent and are individual rather than general in character. For instance, as groups, enslaved people remain enslaved, employers remain employers, and wage-earners remain wage-earners, from generation to generation. Wholesale change is not possible in any society at any given moment without large-scale disruptions, such as revolutions, which threaten the fabric of the existing order. The society, thus, needs a mechanism to prevent that, if necessary, by force. Historically, this instrument has been the state or a function of the state, ensuring a peaceful process of production in society. The State, therefore, must be a referent of security because it is the only institution that provides a framework for political order. In the absence of a political order or without a legitimate and compelling state, no social values can be protected or enhanced.

In the developing world, when one talks of the state, one generally refers to the government, the bureaucracy, and the armed forces, which collectively have a shared interest, a unified goal, and a specified role vis-à-vis civil society. The control of an executive authority over the means of administration and coercion gives the state, in all societies, considerable potential to mould socio-economic change. A discussion of states in the developing world requires specifying the features of states in relation to developing societies within their social and historical contexts. In fact, the developing countries have historically lacked political cohesion and economic dynamism. As a consequence, they fell prey to colonialism. The absence of development within them was traditionally rooted in their social and political traits, which prevented them from developing a strong commercial base like that of Western Europe and also from resisting the onslaught of colonialism. These societal and political failures resulted in brittle state structures that were either over-centralised or fragmented, and in the control of economic resources by non-productive groups. The absence of socially rooted dynamism,

combined with colonialism, left third-world countries "underdeveloped."

In modern times, it is the responsibility of the state to ensure that its citizens and residents live, strive, and thrive in a vibrant society that provides a sense of safety and security, fosters a sense of ownership, and offers equal opportunities to all. Unfortunately, a perilous upward trend is evident in this regard. Be it for the religious hate crimes against minorities or the child abuse, be it for the criminal acts of violence against women or murders of the minors after rape and torture; there is no respite and relief for society in general and the parents of the victims in particular.

These criminal acts in our country may have been happening for decades, but the revolution in social media has made us all aware of these ills of society. Unfortunately, successive governments failed to educate the people and effectively marginalise criminality from society. The first of many such cases to appear and shake society was that of Zainab from Kasur. A seven-year-old girl was abducted, raped, tortured, and murdered in Kasur in January 2018. The entire nation rose to the occasion and called for the immediate arrest of the killer and be hanged publicly. Imran Ali was arrested and tried expeditiously, perhaps due to immense societal pressure and hanged in Kot Lakhpat Jail, Lahore, in October 2018.

Pakistan cannot afford to let societal degeneration reach a level which leaves its populace holding its girls and women locked in their homes to ensure that they are safe and secure. Pakistan's female population is over 50 per cent, and it is brilliant, hardworking, and results-oriented. From small villages to metropolitan cities, our women are making significant contributions to managing affairs at home and in offices. It would be worth noting that our girls have consistently outperformed our boys at the school, college, and university levels. Let our daughters and sisters feel safe and secure when they move out of their homes for education and work, and let us, as parents, feel confident that our society comprises not only criminals but also compassionate and civilised men.

The origins of societies and the formation of states were meant to provide their subjects with the necessities for well-being in the face of threats to their functioning and survival. Aside from natural causes such as droughts, floods, and storms, human insecurity also arises from conflicting interests over the distribution of power and resources. The state and its instruments are the primary sources of both security and insecurity. On the one hand, the state offers effective means to counter physical threats, alleviate economic deprivation, guarantee the right of self-protection, and help settle disputes among individuals, groups, and communities; on the other hand, the state poses a serious threat to the liberty and property of individuals by exercising capricious authority. This happens primarily due to two distinct characteristics of the sovereign state. The first characteristic is its monopoly over its instrument of force within the state, i.e., its capacity to impose and maintain political order, or say, its effectiveness. The second characteristic of the sovereign state is its monopoly over the authority to use force, i.e., its right to rule and impose order or the legitimacy dimension of political capacity. Both these characteristics of the sovereign states, i.e., monopoly over the instruments of force and over the legitimate authority to use instruments of force within the territorial confines of the state, quite often face the challenges leading to insurgencies and intra-state conflicts.

This phenomenon is more common in developing countries, particularly in South Asia. Be it former East Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Maldives or Kashmir, the neighbouring state is drawn to transform the conflict from intrastate to inter-state. Historically, the security of the South Asian region has remained suspect. Early invasions, colonial rule, social cleavages, the depth of animosities and the recent increase in the destructive weapons have placed South Asia as one of the most insecure regions of the world. All the governments of the South Asian states have treated security as strengthening their armed forces to deter the adversary. The ruling elite often confuses national security with the survival of their regime, thereby leading most institutions of state and society in South Asia to overlook the real sources of insecurity, which are military, strategic, political, socio-economic, cultural, and ecological.

Security and Politics

The concept of security has been widely used in national and international fora, foreign policy debates, and scholarly endeavours, yet it remains in search of a meaning. It has been weakly conceptualised and ambiguously defined. There exist four major strands of thinking vis-à-vis security. Some refer to it in terms of power, others equate it with the survival of the state. Another strand of thinking sees security in terms of war avoidance, and for some, it is the relative freedom from harmful threats. In the context of the last phrase, security is a concept which is rooted in the psychological orientation of decision makers and people. It is the result of history and the prevailing environment. It is this perception of people about security which leads to the drawing up of the iron curtain and instigates them even to extend their boundaries beyond their territorial limits. All such nations that have been repeatedly invaded tend to consolidate their strength beyond their territorial limits to avoid a recurrence of the past.

A nation's security can be appropriately assessed by examining the factors that shape its policy-making apparatus. Broadly speaking, security is an objective of individuals, something for which individuals are prepared to give up goods. In this basic sense, human security is defined as safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease, and repression, and protection from sudden and harmful disruptions in their homes, jobs, and communities. It denotes composure, tranquillity of spirit and the absence of anxiety upon which the happy life depends. Security in this regard would mean the protection which society accords to each citizen, for the conservation of his person (life, limb, honour .....), his property (shelter, business .....), and his rights (liberty, freedom of speech and expression, etc.)

Security is a condition and objective of individuals. Still, it can only be achieved through collective enterprise, because the concept extends from the security of the state to the security of groups and individuals. Security must be defined in relation to vulnerabilities that threaten to bring down or weaken the institutions or the state structure. However, the concept of security needs a paradigm shift, and we should move away from viewing security as exogenous threats to one that sees threats from within the state. However, it does not mean that the former is totally irrelevant. The most common threats to security that emanate from within the state or from societal sources are of an economic nature. The financial factor is the bedrock upon which the social superstructure is built, and the way in which it mainly operates is through the struggle of economic classes to possess state power. The strength of economics and the security of a nation are interlinked. State security can best be ensured if the country can hit back with large, sophisticated armed forces, which can only be sustained by vast resources.

In most of the developing countries, the real threat to the state emanates from within, but this phenomenon is not unique. The Chinese sage Sun Tzu also laid great emphasis on knowing the enemy well so that it can be easily countered and defeated. Sun Tzu's pronouncements reiterate that it is incumbent upon the State to correctly recognise its enemies, and give the proper emphasis in preparing the response in a prioritised order.

The UNDP report of 1994, prepared by a group of professionals under Pakistan's distinguished economist Dr Mahbub ul Haq, initiated a security debate that was more focused on human security, or non-traditional security. Human security is the most critical element of national security. It relates to basic human needs: food, health, economic, environmental, personal, community, and political; however, none would be possible without a concerted effort for the sound development of state institutions and systems.

Human security and the development of any state are mutually dependent, in that neither would be viable without the other. This implies that a state cannot ensure individual or societal security until it has developed itself and achieved self-sufficiency in food, health, environment, and employment for its citizens and residents. Therefore, developing countries face the dilemma of allocating their resources between state territorial integrity and human security development. Unfortunately, corruption, money laundering, incompetence, and insensitivity towards poor people have led developing nations further down the Human Development Index (HDI).

According to HDI reports, South Asia remains the world's poorest and most underdeveloped region. Afghanistan is placed at 50, Pakistan stands at 48, Bangladesh at 43 and India at 40. Though late, Pakistan has embarked on an ambitious plan to ensure certain aspects of human security for future generations. These elements include food security, health security, environmental security, and energy security, among others.

However, as the emphasis on security shifted from physical to human security, domestic politics became more pronounced in decision-making, particularly in Pakistan. Pakistan's political elite, instead of making policies for the people's well-being, thought it appropriate to provide benefits to their own class. The required emphasis on education, health, food, and the economy received little attention, leading to higher inflation and currency devaluation. The rising debt is now threatening not only the prospect of development but also the sustainability of the security architecture on which Pakistan's security imperatives are built.

The two-family rule from two larger provinces, with occasional disruptions by Pakistan's military establishment, impeded the desired development of the country, which is blessed with an abundance of natural resources, a fantastic landscape, a favourable climate for agriculture, a sound industrial base, and, above all, an industrious young population. There is little doubt that Pakistan has underperformed in the last 76 years, since its independence in 1947.

The most probable reason for this failure has been the wrong priorities imposed by domestic policy considerations. More often than not, domestic political compulsions have ignored the basic elements of state security, or, for that matter, Pakistan's national security. The national security of any state cannot be ensured without robust human security arrangements, including Personal, Political, Community, Economic, Food, Health, and Environmental.

The successive governments have failed to ensure the personal security of the people of Pakistan. Not only the political opponents, but the members of civil society, media, and non-political family members are repeatedly harassed by state agencies at the behest of the government. Such a situation not only embarrasses the state but also violates fundamental human rights and warrants sanctions by the international community; likewise, it undermines political security. The avoidance of holding provincial elections in Punjab and KP, despite the Supreme Court's directives, is ample proof of the ruling elites' fear of losing the elections and the government. Community security is also compromised by political polarisation. There has never been so much hatred and a loud voice against Pakistan's state institutions as is seen today. It is necessary to insist that nations can survive natural disasters like Tsunamis, Droughts, Floods, Earthquakes, and even Pandemics, but cannot successfully negotiate with internal dissent of this level for long.

No country can peacefully exist or progress among the comity of nations if it is not economically independent and secure. Pakistan is today struggling to navigate challenging economic conditions. The worst part of such an economic downturn is that the country cannot meet its security needs without compromising national development, thereby directly affecting human security.

A key element of human security is food security, without which people's well-being, which is one of the vital interests of Pakistan, cannot be guaranteed. From being an agricultural country to an importer of critical agro-based products, Pakistan has become a bad example in this domain, primarily due to poor governance and wrong priorities by successive governments. Likewise, the health security state for ordinary people is also not satisfactory by any standards. Health cards introduced by the previous government did bring some relief to nearly 65 per cent of the country's population; however, this was not continued, nor was its base expanded nationwide, again due to political compulsions. Environmental security was initially ignored until adverse climatic outcomes began to harm the country. Not only has the weather changed, but it has also caused regular flooding. Moreover, the rapid melting of glaciers is becoming a serious concern for water scarcity for human consumption and agricultural needs.

The human security needs call for policies and strategies that go beyond domestic politics and

ensure people's well-being. However, in most developing countries, this aspect is often overlooked for political considerations, and Pakistan is no exception.

Conclusion

The most worrisome faultline remains the poor state of the people of Pakistan, as seen through the lens of human security. Most developing and developed states regard the well-being of their people as a vital or survival national interest and work vigorously to achieve it. Since the state belongs to the people of Pakistan, whereas governments come and go, and their decision-making serves only their domestic political agenda, it is our collective responsibility to keep advising the in-place government, regardless of our political affiliations.

It is necessary to reiterate Islam's core values: equality, justice, fairness, honesty, truthfulness, tolerance, and freedom to practice religion. Pakistan is plagued by all these ills, primarily because these values have not been implemented. The situation has had profound implications, as people became accustomed to societal ills and adjusted their lifestyles to prevailing inequalities and injustices, without questioning the State. Perhaps, we forgot the golden quote of Hazrat Ali that, "Society can survive with kufr (infidelity), but not with injustice."

The human security elements, like personal security, political security, community security, economic security, food security, health security, and environmental security, are essential to help the society and state in its development and sustenance as a responsible state among the comity of nations. Another aspect that needs to be added to this essential element of human security is cyber and digital security (not discussed in this article), to ensure that people and state institutions are not harmed by non-state actors engaged by enemies as part of their hybrid war campaigns.

It is necessary to reiterate that domestic political considerations must not overlook Pakistan's interests, values, and security imperatives, as this would weaken the state's basic fabric and cause the country to lose its relevance among the comity of nations. Pakistan's armed forces have the resolve to ensure the territorial integrity and sovereignty, and have proved it in the recent short-duration war with India in May 2025. However, domestic politics must not ignore their genuine needs for the utmost operational preparedness.

REFERENCES

Harold J. Laski, The State in Theory and Practice (London: Gorge Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1935) p.38.

Atul Kohli, The State and Poverty in India (London: Cambridge University Press, 1987) p.21.

Laski, p.21.

Hans J. Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace (5th.ed. rev.; New York: Alfred. a. Knopf, 1973), p. 489.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 490.

Ibid., p. 483.

Laski, p. 76.

Ibid., p. 108.

Muhammad Ayoob, Security of South Asia: Searching for The Key-Variable," Newsletter of Regional Strategic Studies, Colombo, Vol. III, No. 4 (October 1997), p. 2.

Kohli. p. 23.

Marvin G. Weinbaum, "Security Regimes in South Asia: Definition and Priorities," South Asia Approaches the Millenium, ed. Weinbaum and Chetan Kumar (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), p. 4.

Ayoob, op. cit., p. 3.

Weinbaum, op. cit., p. 2.

Barry Buzan, People, States, and Fear: The National Security Problems in International Relations_(Essck: Wheatsheaf Book Ltd., 1983), p. 4.

Morgenthau, op. cit., p. 7.

Michael H. Louw, National Security (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 1978), p. ix.

James Barros (ed.), The United Nations: Past, Present, and Future (New York: Free Press, 1972), p. 17.

John E. Mroz, Beyond Security: Private Perceptions Among Arabs and Israelis (New York: International Peace Academy, 1980), p. 105.

Javeed Ahmed Sheikh, "Security Perception of Weak Nations: A Case Study of Pakistan," Security for the Weak Nations, ed. Syed Farooq Hasnat and Anton Palinka (Lahore: IZHARSONS, 1986), p. 84.

Emma Rothschild," What is Security," Daedalus, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Summer 1995), p. 61.

Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

Muchkund Dubey, "Culture of Peace in Central South Asia," A Report of UNESCO Sub-Regional Workshop on, The Culture of Peace in Central South Asia, Rawalpindi, November 20-22, 1995. Organized by Foundation for Research on International Environment, National Development and Security - FRIENDS (Islamabad: Margalla Press, 1995), p. 63.

https://humansecuritycourse.info/module-1-the-concept-of-human-security/un-approach/ (accessed August 14, 2023).

https://www.security-risks.com/post/human-development-index-2022-south-asia-a-review (accessed August 24, 2023).

https://tribune.com.pk/letter/2252595/quetta-attack (accessed August 13, 2023).