

Two tasks of leadership

by

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It is of crucial importance for the leaders and policymakers of Pakistan to undertake two tasks seriously and efficiently. The first task is to acquire a crystal-clear idea of Pakistan's position in the current international system. In order for them to conduct this appraisal correctly, they should first ascertain what type of power Pakistan is. Is it a global, a great, a regional, a middle, or a small power? The second task is to obtain a scientific understanding of the exact state of the existence and interplay of all factors and sources of national power.

The clarity that will result from the proper performance of these two tasks will provide guidance on the kind of actions that must be taken, those that can be taken without too much ado, and those that should be avoided at all costs by Pakistan. In other words, they will help our policymakers identify necessary, optional, and unnecessary actions in the national and international realms.

One does understand that it may not be possible to be strictly objective in such a deliberative exercise. Different kinds of subjective considerations and interests are bound to influence the leadership's view of Pakistan's national situation and international position but it is possible nevertheless for this view to correspond largely with how things actually are in the world. The costs of the disjunction between reality and thinking can be dear.

When national leaders are uninformed and have not undertaken the two tasks properly, a small power may try to behave like a middle power, and a middle power may err into behaving like a great power.

National leaders miscalculate in this fashion because they fail to realize that what is necessary for a great power may be unnecessary for a middle power and, what is optional for a middle power may be necessary for a small power. Such a national leadership is bound to bring grief to itself and its country. Knowing what type of power their country is, allows the leaders to save their country from the disgrace of acting out of order which is always in bad taste in both interpersonal relations and relations amongst nations.

Two peculiar phenomena are likely to manifest themselves when a country's leadership has not performed the two tasks correctly. First, such a country may become geopolitically active but lag economically. This results in a situation in which economic dependency on outside powers co-exists with varying degrees of security self-reliance. Second, such a country may develop economically but remain supine geopolitically. This leads to a situation in which economic growth co-exists with security dependence on outside powers.

In both cases, the absence of balance in major spheres of national existence will encourage different types of external interference while the exercise of autonomy in national decision-making continues to remain partial and limited.

Moreover, the failure to perform the two tasks correctly causes sheer confusion in national planning. This confusion tends to perpetuate itself in successive national planning cycles across different regimes and governments. It will be very difficult to get rid of this confusion till the social, political, and institutional basis of the flawed self-appraisal, the erroneous identification of tasks, and misalignment of reality and thinking are corrected.

This process of correction is seldom spontaneous and may take decades, even generations, to discard biases and errors of the past. If the leadership attempts to right the situation quickly, it is criticized roundly for its radical tendencies and ruthless measures. If it adopts a more gradual approach, it is castigated for its dilatory tactics and pussyfooting.

A leadership that finds itself in this catch-22 may decide to carry on the business as usual. This decision to prolong the status quo means that it has made the poor choice of moving forward the resolution of challenges which should have been confronted and surmounted yesterday. Having found time to grow big and scary, the problems of today will become the disasters of tomorrow. Treating future as a dumping ground of all national problems is the surest way of having a bleak national future.

However, a wise approach will be for the leadership to do some things quickly and do other things gradually. Knowing which things need to be done first and fast and which things later and relatively slowly is the art of leadership.

It would be wise for national leaders around the world to remember by heart the *Serenity Prayer* composed by the American man of God, Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), which says, “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.”

The global effect of leaders of different hues acting upon this prayer would be that very few things will be left in the world that will not be changed for the better.

The article was published on August 15, 2018, in Daily Times and is available at <https://dailytimes.com.pk/283603/two-tasks-of-leadership/>.