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Way Out of Pakistan's Perpetual Political Morass

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by

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Pakistan is no stranger to political upheavals that altered the course of governance and policymaking in the country. The country's history is besmirched with four coup d'états, and notwithstanding the statements declaring apolitical policy posturing ad nauseam, military establishment's political machinations belie such insincere claims. The political players may change on chessboard but establishment's active role remains intact even in contemporary times even as the citizenry is under the harrow. In the 2018 elections it was Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) which was allegedly the beneficiary of establishment's electoral engineering in the of the shape of Result Transmission System (RTS) malfunction, whereas in the most recent elections soiled as "the form 47 elections", Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) and the Sharif brothers are able to curry favor with the self-declared ideological guardians of the country as they did so in the past as well on several occasions. However, what is critical this time around is that Imran Khan subsequent to being ousted by the establishment has up the ante to the point where a sizable part of the populace especially the young voters are denouncing Pakistan's military industrial complex and establishment's unconstitutional vires. Secondly, the country's economy continues to flounder only aggravated by the epidemic of violence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Baluchistan, most recently the ongoing sectarian onslaught in Kurram District. Amidst so much economic uncertainty and political infighting, the most germane question is whether there is a way out of this political morass. The answer is "yes" albeit saner heads need to prevail.

Political dialogue needs to materialize in the legislative diet

The wrangling between PTI and PML-N plus other status quo parties including the chronically dynastic Pakistan Peoples' Party, has been going on for some time that the average man has to bear the brunt of multifaceted instability that ensues. It won't be hyperbole to call PTI synonymous with sit-ins, and street politics; from the 2014 "dharna" to the "Haqeeq Azadi March" and most recent "Final Call March" to Federal Capital's red zone, even in a state of incarceration, Imran Khan has been able to mobilize protestors who have sort of wreaked havoc in the country and thrown the

government in a state of hysteria and overreaction becoming all the more unpopular with every passing day. It seems as if it is street politics that PTI actually thrives at, rather than engaging political adversaries in legislative diet, but agitation can only get you so far. Nonetheless, it is imperative to set aside colossal differences, and initiate an inter-political dialogue in the parliament; the elected representatives owe it to their constituents. Here Imran Khan needs to renounce the idea of sole engagement with the establishment and aversion for dialogue with the current civilian setup even though its legitimacy is under scrutiny. In other words this state of political limbo needs to be put a kibosh on as politicians need to create space for each other and meaningfully engage as well as mediate. It is also sine qua non to dialogue because the politics of marching on the capital or perpetual protests will only atrophy the already Potemkin village of an economy. In the same vein, the government must abandon the politics of vendetta and “take no prisoners” attitude, it is a matter of time that tables may turn. Here early elections could be the way forward which satisfies all political stakeholders; the government has to without passing the buck, need to take onus of the political dialogue with particularly PTI. Additionally there also needs to be a charter of economy as proposed several times by the current dispensation, which will help to dispel economic uncertainty and myopia, important to stabilize Pakistan's a basket case of an economy.

Much needed journey from same page to sane page

Pakistani politicians like to boast off the support of the establishment, be Imran Khan before his ouster who reiterated the presence of “one page” or Shehbaz Sharif who repeats parrot-fashion how the government is in “unison” with the military establishment. Elected representatives ought to draw power from their constituencies, rather than affinity with the Army Chief, that's why it is “for the people, by the people” since the masses are the wellspring and givers of power in a functioning democracy. Thereby, politicians with inchoate political maturity need a much needed journey from the “coveted” same page to the sane page where elected representatives are guaranteed reelection through the imprimatur of the people of Pakistan rather than assurances from the establishment. Additionally, sanity dictates that politicians allow each other space to co-exist and simultaneously the space given to military the establishment or the judicial establishment (resulting in judicial activism) need to “cease and desist” or contract. This sounds easier said than done in a state like Pakistan, but if there is a consensus amongst politicians that they won't relinquish political space, or stimulate as well as celebrate the intervention of the judiciary – the role of the judiciary is to interpret the constitution, rather than rewriting it – or the military establishment at the expense of their political adversary being politically relegated, then that door can be permanently closed eventually. Politicians ought not to be in a desperate search of an covert hand that on one side augments their chances to attain power, while on the other politically handicaps them, smearing the entire political class as a tawdry rabble. Need for bona fide politics and leadership

It goes without saying that Pakistan genuinely lack a bona fide leadership and politics of principles. In recent times we have often heard top politicians trumpet mere slogans like *“Vote ko izzat doh”* / *“Jaag Punjabi Jaag”* or *“Kiya hum ghulam”* / *“Absolutely Not”* to instrumentalize the popular sentiment of the people much like demagogues. These slogans successfully strike a chord with a huge portion of the society. Unfortunately, these slogans never truly materialize to lead the nation out of the storm of instability, poverty, injustice etc. To put it plainly, politicians need to stop condescending people and “put their money where their mouth is”. Pakistan needs a political leadership that can dispel disillusionment with the politicians; the average citizen views politicians as unscrupulous individuals, with no integrity and genuine connection with the public and bereft of a moral compass. This needs a profound volte-face in order to reinforce faith in the political class. Here it is noteworthy that politicians take a principled stand against the unconstitutional transgressions of the judicial or military establishment, in other words not be deployed as political pawns against each other. Rather politicians need to revitalize the disgraced parliament as the supreme legislature and competent state institution that is accountable to the people of Pakistan and has sole authority to enact law. Any move to undermine the parliament must not be tolerated and function as a rallying point irrespective the opposition or the treasury benches. The smoldering fire of instability needs to be extinguished before engulfs the entire country, where a change is brought through bloodshed and extreme violence in a nuclear state. Syria is just a recent example of how things can take a turn for the worst.