[**Three little words**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1753752/three-little-words)

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UNITY, faith, discipline: it would generally be agreed that Pakistan’s motto has broadly been more honoured in the breach than the observance throughout the past 75 years. Disunity and indiscipline have long been the norm.

Faith could be seen as an exception; given that it has proliferated in recent decades — but invariably in the shape of variants that would have bewildered the founding father who coined the motto. Tellingly, in the Urdu translation, ‘faith’ comes first. And, given M.A. Jinnah’s legal training, it’s likely that by ‘discipline’, he meant adherence to the rule of law rather than military-style regimentation, let alone the unison of the mob.

Anyhow, the events of the past week seemingly transcended previous bounds of disunity and bouts of indiscipline too. At least as intriguing as the [violence against visible military symbols](https://www.dawn.com/news/1752003), particularly in Punjab, was the subdued response. The Baloch have understandably been left wondering how harsh the response might have been had similar wrath been exhibited in their province, which has borne the brunt of military misrule at least since the 1960s.

The anti-military sentiment is both unusual and interesting. It is not unique, mind you. By the end of the 1960s, for instance, the field marshal who had ruled the nation for a decade was the target of considerable derision and discontent. Popular opinion also held the army in contempt for a while after the surrender of Dhaka — albeit without any recognition of the allegedly egregious war crimes.

The ship of state has drifted far from its moorings.

Like many other parts of Pakistan’s unfortunate history, that atrocious episode continues to be shrouded in obfuscation and misinformation. The general dubbed the ‘butcher of Bengal’ was given the opportunity to be recast as the ‘butcher of Balochistan’ from 1973 onwards. Wali Khan used to refer to the Bhutto phase in the early 1970s as a ‘diluted democracy’. That wasn’t inaccurate, but there was much worse to come.

The Ziaul Haq phase of military rule deserves all the ignominy it has attracted, and maybe more. But what followed the dictator’s demise in the skies was also a travesty, interrupted at the cusp of the millennium by another bout of military rule, but almost seamlessly renewed thereafter.

The security establishment never let go of its trump cards, and Imran Khan and his PTI was just another one of those. But it resoundingly backfired on the traditional arbiters of the nation’s fate after he apparently drifted off the ‘same page’ narrative he had proudly touted as a huge advantage in enabling his governance.

Now he tends to [blame the army in general](https://www.dawn.com/news/1752783), and former army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa in particular, for all of the nation’s woes during his tenure as prime minister. In that case, shouldn’t he have quit long before the no-confidence vote turfed him out of office? But then, hypocrisy is hardly a novelty. Nor is he the first prime minister to take that route.

What’s truly galling is the faith (yet another instance of the national motto’s misinterpretation, perhaps) of his followers that an egoist in some mysterious way represents a break from Pakistan’s misbegotten past or any kind of answer to its current distress. He’s merely another element of continuity in a hopeless trajectory that didn’t quite work out for his former masters — or for the nation.

What he managed to do was to cultivate a personality cult; adherents unthinkingly envisage him as some kind of messiah whose ascendancy will magically transform a failing state into a miracle. The absurdity of that assumption is hard to overemphasise.

Were Imran Khan seriously interested in divesting Pakis­tan of its asphyxiating cloak of militocracy, he would have been less unwilling to join hands in some way with other political forces that have also borne the brunt of the establishment’s ascendancy in far more testing circumstances than his two days in a police rest house where the idea of toilet breaks pushed him into a paranoid panic.

That won’t prevent him from winning a second term as prime minister, this time without the establishment’s imprimatur, but what exactly would that achieve?

A century ago, Benito Mussolini capitalised on a March on Rome to form the world’s first fascist regime. The ideology has resonated ever since. Pakistan is no stranger to fascist tendencies — mostly, but not exclusively — at the behest of the military.

Elections should not be postponed beyond October, and the PTI or its leader must not be excluded from them. But anyone looking upon the next elections as some kind of panacea is ultimately likely to be disappointed. The ship of state has drifted from its moorings, and no one really knows where it will land. If it’s not to turn into the Titanic, it needs a captain far more capable than Imran Khan.

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