**National security liability**

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November 2, 2020

In February this year Pakistan Air Force shot down two Indian fighter aircraft when they violated our airspace. That was when an attack came from outside. Nine years ago, in this very month of November, another attack came from outside – a NATO air strike martyred our 24 soldiers at Salala checkpost. That too was responded to as two days later the NATO route that delivered 80% of supplies to US forces in Afghanistan was completely shut down. American military theatre in Afghanistan which was occupied by over 140,000 troops and thousands of civilian support personnel could now only function through supply route from Central Asia from the North and by air. Our relationship with the US was disconnected and in fact for following nine months we had no relationship at all with the US. When attacked from outside, military can shoot down aircraft or block the GLOC (Ground Lines of Communication). But what should the military do if the politics of its own country loses the ‘sane head on its shoulders’ and starts attacking it? Does this happen anywhere else in the world? Why does it happen in Pakistan?

If this time the PML-N has made the bad choice of letting down its own military and its own country, in 2011 the PPP government led by President Asif Ali Zardari also made a similar choice. The US was conveyed that “a military takeover was imminent”. The memo scandal that followed saw President Zardari leaving Pakistan and staying in Dubai for medical treatment for over two weeks and it was rumored that he might never return and step down as President much like Nawaz Sharif whose return to Pakistan these days is also being termed doubtful. Why does politics fail to learn its lessons? Why does it continue to will fully ignore its national responsibilities? Comply while in power and threaten and blackmail when outside – is this democracy? Is democracy all about the possibilities of creating social unrest? Is democratic fight limited to winning and losing political space and political power or does it ever think about the future of the people as well?

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We all want to predict a better future for ourselves but our future we are already creating by doing what we are doing in our present. All futures are the product of our decisions in the present. This past week some political leaders lost their political balance and in the service of their political master made the erroneous judgement of bringing Pakistan military under attack. Few used the forum of National Assembly to execute that attack. But they cannot be blamed because the political master himself laid the foundations of this attack and some reasonable and seasoned politicians even forgot their national security responsibilities and said things that only the enemies of Pakistan could have said.

Unsurprisingly, in a very short span of time the PML-N which as a political party was once the defender of our national security has now relegated itself as a party that is more of a national security liability. The targeting of Pakistan military and its leadership by the PML-N is a poorly thought-out political strategy, and more than reviving the party’s political fortunes this strategy is fast damaging its political relevance and credibility.

In the past three decades, many leaders in the PML-N have built their political careers and in some cases fortunes by saying and doing things that their political master wished. But they must carefully read the future and must not overlook the political implications of the most dangerous game that their political master has now chosen to play – misleading the people. The PML-N may still be a major political party with a strong following but with its continued tirade against the military it is fast becoming a product in the political market about which it is usually said that it has outlived its usefulness – in political context, the loss of its usefulness to the national security establishment and to this country. And why not? Politics must never spread enemy’s narrative and must desist from directly attacking is own military and its morale.

Pakistan military stands with and for the common people. The whole idea of an externally driven strategy of driving a wedge between the military and the common people by exposing Pakistan military as a villain in the past is a failed strategy. Opposition continues to speak about ‘yesterday’ in its relationship with the military, not realising that the dangers of tomorrow are not like the dangers of yesterday. They are different and more intense. The most important military and national concern is to stop politics from executing “false and damaging public military accountability”. The staged ridiculing of your own military is a political sin that only a dying politics can commit. The people of Pakistan are all too familiar with such kind of politics and saw how it resulted in the division of the MQM into MQM-London and MQM-Pakistan. Is a similar fate awaiting the PML-N now?

The PML-N has exhausted both its low-risk and high-risk options – low risk when it stayed quiet for a very long time and carried out the backdoor diplomacy for accountability relief. The exposure of this definitely dented its political credibility. As it looks, the high-risk option of directly hitting the military is very unpopular with the common man in Pakistan and is hitting back and hurting PML-N itself.

Predictably, the most likely option that will work out for the PML-N is the middle option and that is what they are likely to get. Accountability – a process despite being agonisingly slow will eventually culminate; and because military will not be provoked by their actions, together with the military, Imran Khan’s government may finally not only break-even politics but the economy of this country.