**Saving Pakistan**

BY ASH RAF JEH ANG IR QAZI 2021-02-27

WHEN I returned from the UN in 2010 Pakistan was being misgoverne d by the PPP. This culminated in the national humiliation of the US assault on Abbottabad. This was soon followed by PML-N misgovernance which culminated in the national embarrassment of the Panama revelations and the politically tainted judicial process of removing the prime minister. The PML-N government was followed by the PTI and an untested and therefore unsullied prime minister. Tragically, the plague of misgovernance has not abated. Many feel misgovernance might even have worsened as a number of internationalratings,includingthatofTransparency International, have indicated.

If the three main political parties have each failed to govern justly, ef ficiently and successfully the question arises: why? Apart from the prevailing political culture and specific f ailings of political leaders, the answer lies in the unconstitutional, undemocratic and obstructive structures of power that underpin a façade of democratic governance. The movers and shakers in Pakistan are not invested in the welfare and security of the common man. They are self-serving, risk-averse and disconnected from the people.

What lies ahead? More misgovernance! This translates into a fatal worsening of the current situation including (i) irreversible climate disaster; (ii) possible nuclear catastrophe given India`s genocidal repression in India-held Kashmir; (iii)unending epidemics and pandemics; (iii) overpopulation limited only by the prospect of mass deaths; (iv) continued underinvestment in human resource development and human rights protections; (v) the absence of civil and political institution-building; and (vi) the prevalence of `military security` over `human security` which undermines national security, national development and nation-building.

Many Pakistanis articulate similar views and sentiments in their conversations, interviews, speeches, thoughts and writings. And yet a collective debility and individual lack of will prevents rational, organised and effective responses to the imminent threat of extinction. Those who are in a position to make a difference within a rapidly narrowing window of opportunity as suggested, don`t care. They shift blame away from themselves, stifle criticism, rhetorically commit to do what they have no intention of doing, make empty but highly publicised gestureswhich a betrayed people are expected to appreciate, and prepare escape routes while building nest eggs abroad.

Unsurprisingly, among the intelligentsia there is a profound pessimism, even hopelessness. Most political leaders and power brokers, however, promote a faith-and-resignation-based optimism, even hopefulness among the systematically exploited and deliberately misinformed masses. At the same time, they constrain the masses from collectively doing anything for themselves, their children and their country. Similarly, the jaded intelligentsia while often openly critical of the political and power elite also regard themselves as helpless witnesses to the destruction of all they claim to hold meaningful and precious.

It seems as if practical`wisdom and maturity` cautions commentators against too fervently alluding to `inconvenient truths` when publicly discussing political, economic, social, educational, administrative, institutional, foreign and security policies. Their central concern, whatever the specific subject of discussion, is how far they can go in their criticisms without exceeding the tolerance levels of elites who can reward or harm them.

The 21st century is unique in that it has no space for long-term policies. The existential challenges confronting human civilisation today are of a much shorter-term nature. For example, the `tipping point` for irreversible global warming is at most three decades away according to a universal scientific consensus. The nuclear threat which has been existentially exacerbated by the US withdrawal from four arms control treaties: ABM, INF, Open Skies and New START may be even more immediate. Noam Chomsky recently observed `all bars are down and we can race towards terminal war`.

The political division and implosion of the US, President Biden`s militarised foreign policy, and his barely disguised pursuit of regime change in Russia, China, Iran and Syria threaten international stability and nuclear disaster in a way the Cold War never did. The fascist and communal insanity of the Modi government in India, particularly its genocidal repression in IHK, represents a still more immediate nuclear threat.

Critically important questions, if not addressed in such a doomsday context, will be mere distractionsfrom dealing with survival imperatives. For example, regarding foreign policy: how will Biden manage US-Pakistan relations given the priority he gives to strengthening US-India strategic relations? What is the future of CPEC and China-Pakistan relations in an environment impacted by US antiChina belligerence? How realistic is the concept of maintaining a `balance` between Pakistan`s relations with the US and China? How far can Pakistan delink its Afghanistan policy from US strategy and the state of India-Pakistan relations? Can Pakistan become, and benefit from becoming, a strategic partner of China, if necessary, against an unbalanced and aggressive US? How should Pakistan respond to escalating Indian genocidal repression in IHK? Should Pakistan convey the truth about its limited capabilities and choices to the Kashmiri people? What are the implications of Pakistan making statements about independence for Jammu and KashmirincludingAJKincontraventionof UNresolutions on Kashmir and the Constitution of Pakistan, especiallyArticle257?HowdoesthishelpKashmiris given India`s adamant position on Kashmir? There are many more such critical questions relating to other aspects of national policy. They also need to be urgently addressed. But, likewise, this can only be done in the context of dealing with existential challenges that are already on the horizon, and which will either be averted through unprecedented Herculean efforts or succumbed to within a few decades. Outside this context, all critical questions become irrelevant because everything will be negated by impending existential catastrophe.

Accordingly, there is no alternative to urgently doing what it takes to engineer a comprehensive national transformation and deal with existential challenges in cooperation with even adversary countries. The impossible has to be made possible and achieved if Pakistan is to be saved along with our only planet. There is no alternative but deception and betrayal. And yet they do not care! What is to be done and how can it be done? The answers are known. Do them! The writer is a former ambassador to the US, India and China and head of UN missions in Iraq and Sudan.

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