**Rethinking PTI**

**All efforts to separate a chunk of the party from its founder chairman have miserably failed.**

[Lt Gen Naeem Khalid Lodhi Retd.](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/lt-gen-naeem-khalid-lodhi-retd)

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There should be no doubt in anyone’s mind that PTI remains the largest political party with an overwhelming following in KP, a majority in Punjab, significant presence in Sindh, GB, and AK, and some influence in Balochistan. No other single political group can boast such popularity across the length and breadth of the country. This assessment of the size of PTI’s footprint may not be appealing to opposing political parties or other entities (notwithstanding whatever happened during the last electoral process), and it is not the intent to prove it theoretically, as the outcome of any free and fair election is the only litmus test of such a contention. So we may wait for that. However, the author wishes to imagine a new broad framework within which such an important and popular political party may mould itself to effectively achieve national objectives.

This naturally brings us to the very basic question: what are the main political objectives of PTI? All parties have their manifestos, where their philosophies and intents are mentioned, which are all noble, attractive, and catchy. But the narrative and slogans that actually gain popularity among the masses work the magic. PTI is presently thriving on the slogan of ‘Rule of Law and Adhering to the Constitution’, which is the essence of any democracy. The political victimisation and thoughtless persecution by the government lend them the support of huge public sentiment. Also inherent in their political struggle are foreign policy and domestic policy elements, like ‘No External Dictations’ and ‘No Internal Suppression’. It is suggested that all such sentiments be properly converted into two or three popular slogans, well-articulated and boldly displayed everywhere in Urdu and other local languages.

Imran Khan and PTI are synonymous. All efforts to separate a chunk of the party from its founder chairman have miserably failed, and no such moves are likely to bear any political fruit. So, if party stalwarts wish to bring about some reforms or changes in the party’s direction, they will have to work within the party and through the mind and personality of Imran Khan. The founder chairman’s charisma and some sterling qualities notwithstanding, PTI should operate through a reliable, dedicated, and sincere group of individuals who share Imran Khan’s political philosophy but also have the grit and acumen to advise him on all matters. This central group (whatever the name) should then undertake the task of organising the structure and activities of the party. These individuals should enjoy the founder chairman’s confidence and should be granted some permanence in the political hierarchy, not being changed on whims or incomplete information.

Imran Khan must realise that he cannot strictly control the party while confined in prison. This is not possible due to a lack of communication or only selective communication being allowed sporadically. A reliable, clearly announced vice chairman should be appointed by Imran Khan, who should be authorised to make all day-to-day or time-sensitive critical decisions on party and political matters. Occasional guidance should be sought from the founder chairman when circumstances permit. Close family members should be kept away from apex leadership so that the party does not fall into the pattern of other parties run as family fiefdoms. All these steps will also dispel the impression of the party being a cult (which it is not) riding solely on populist slogans and the charisma of one person.

PTI should transform itself into a well-organised, disciplined political party rallying around a cogent political purpose, employing only suitable language and means to achieve its objectives. It should steer away from challenging state institutions and remain within the political arena, relying primarily on public support. Compete and cooperate with political forces to assume legitimate political power and work on reforming state structures and institutions according to constitutional provisions. Resistance to any legitimate and rightful demands of the party through physical suppression and manipulated state organs should be fought back legally and politically, employing public support in alliance with other political groups with overlapping philosophies. PTI should not identify itself with Mujib’s Awami League or similar insurrection movements but should instead emulate Quaid-e-Azam’s Muslim League or Bhutto’s People’s Party. It should flow like water, working its way around physical and ill-intentioned barriers, relying on the strength of its followers, applying indirect pressure on misbehaving elements of the state, and direct pressure on opposing political forces. It must never resort to open confrontation with state organs (judiciary, armed forces, etc.), but it should remain committed to the reforms agenda whenever in power.

Coming to power is a means and should not be the ultimate purpose and aim of any political party, although we have been witnessing otherwise. PTI must focus on delivering wherever it holds power. Good governance and political issues must be kept separate, as seen in KP, for example. The Chief Minister of the province should concentrate on the enormous challenges of law and order, education, health, and basic amenities. These achievements can then serve as a role model for people in other areas. This approach necessitates separate leadership for pursuing political motives and a professional party cadre to ensure development and good governance in areas where the party is in power. Within such a large party, it should not be difficult to reorganise along these lines.

While the leader and his or her political philosophy provide the energy, soul, and driving force behind any national struggle, the long-term survival of a political movement and its sustainability beyond its founding leaders depend on its organisational structure and the abiding philosophy of that movement. For PTI to maintain its relevance and succeed in its noble struggle, it needs to review its organisation, decision-making mechanism, and attitude towards other political parties and state organs. It must establish specialist task forces to work on important aspects of the economy, foreign policy, security, and good governance, and these ideas, once approved by the political hierarchy, should be applied in areas where the party is already in power and running the government.

In political strategy, the ultimate aim—serving the people and the country by forming a strong government—can never be achieved in one big stride. It requires the accomplishment of intermediate goals and building upon them. Imran Khan will survive the present high-handedness and political persecution, and the party can rebound successfully, provided a modicum of organisational skill and management acumen, along with political savvy, is exhibited by the part of the leadership that is not imprisoned. Proper authority to run the party must also be delegated by the founding chairman.

**Lt Gen Naeem Khalid Lodhi Retired**  
The writer has held various commands during his military career. For his services he has been conferred the award of Hilal-e-Imtiaz (M). He has also served as the Defence Secretary. He is currently an Advisor at the Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research (CSCR).