**Scapegoating**

**A critical exploration of Pakistan’s internal struggles, foreign policy challenges, and the pressing need for responsible governance in an increasingly interconnected global landscape.**

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The price of greatness is responsibility. Winston Churchill

Indeed, we are living in a complex yet interconnected world, where change is rapid and increasingly disruptive. As a permanent feature of life, change is ubiquitous. It is therefore not preposterous to say that the emergence of new security threats and new economic challenges is a result of the transformation process that the world has undergone, particularly in the past couple of decades. Dramatic political changes keep posing fresh challenges to multilateral collaboration. Quietly, a few ambitious countries have taken the definition of national interest beyond limits through audacious posturing toward their adversaries. Gone are the days when one feared the tabling of a sanction-prone resolution at the UN or a non-friendly case at the International Court of Justice. Conversely, the world claims to be still busy advancing global equitable governance and contributing to a phoenix called durable peace. In its bid to understand the intricacies of Artificial Intelligence, the world seems adamant in professing its revered pursuits of advancing global security, economic governance, and cultural supremacy.

Completely oblivious to the world’s transformation, Pakistan seems to be struggling to find its feet – as if it has come into existence only recently. Instead of adapting to the needs of the international order, the country is faced with serious issues in its own national order. From tax reforms to debt servicing to political stability to governance to law & order to terrorism, all areas of importance are crying aloud to be mindful of the inevitable. It would also be interesting to know the kind of foreign policy Pakistan is pursuing since the issuance of the National Security Policy (NSP) in 2022. Interestingly, all of us are aware of the consequences and have a clear idea of what is waiting for us around the corner. However, no one seems to have any clue about the real issue. Whose responsibility is Pakistan?

If the government is unable to keep track of demographic, migratory, economic, governance, security, political, and climate changes, it could at least visualise the far-reaching adverse effects of the erosion of societal cohesion. Perhaps, this vital aspect is not their headache…!! If the stakeholders are unable to strengthen energy resources and provide food security, they may at least look sincere in safeguarding the interests of the common man…!! As such, it is not a common man’s right to discuss or criticise the government’s policies or performance. It is someone else’s headache. The expression ‘headache’ is used here as an important responsibility that only the elite could satisfactorily fulfil as they alone qualify to wield power. While the common man revisits the Constitution and goes through his fundamental rights, he hears a diametrically opposite connotation of the word. These traders and the increased number of sit-ins are becoming a constant source of headaches for us…!!

Soon, the common man is informed by some government official that he must not talk about the institutions as it is the government’s headache. Instead, he is told that the government’s top priority right now is to complete the numbers game to have the concerned bill passed, as the month of October is approaching fast. The officials maintain that since they did not create the debt problem, the IMF and its related paraphernalia are not their headache. They are aware that the government is here for a limited time and someone else will be required to address the related issues – as and when another default carillon starts tolling. As for other ‘headaches’ such as the IPPs, the common man is required to understand the government’s limitations. Instead, he is expected to celebrate the single-digit inflation rate achieved magically within days through the government’s innovative policies. No one knows whose responsibility it is to address other ‘smaller issues’ like the provision of normal internet facilities or uninterrupted electricity.

South Asia is an intrinsically conflicting region. When you tell them that, as a sovereign nuclear state, Pakistan is deemed to have a correspondingly adequate foreign policy, they start pointing fingers at the Foreign Office. If you brief them on the determinants of foreign policy, including a country’s economic prowess, they ask the Foreign Office to come up with an independent foreign policy. If you respectfully tell them that to have a strong foreign policy, one must either be able to render assistance to others or be able to inflict harm, they remind the Foreign Office of the online bashing of ambassadors by a former PM to put things in perspective. Sadly, no one in the Foreign Office is clarifying that foreign policy is not a matter of choice – that you seek an ‘independent foreign policy’ today and stand on the IMF’s doorstep tomorrow. Hoping to get promoted or secure choice postings abroad, who, in their right mind, would dare to emphasise the importance of supporting multilateral mechanisms and institutions of regional and international governance?

Pakistani diplomats fail to understand why they are being subjected to continual castigation by all and sundry over every failure under the sun. Is it because they are the easiest prey, or no one fears any reaction from them? The general impression is that they draw salaries in US dollars but have delivered nothing. Neither did they win the Kashmir case at the UN, nor could they bring in FDIs. Come to think of it, if the Chinese Foreign Office could maintain a balanced foreign policy regarding India, why couldn’t our Foreign Office think of a similar strategy? If they are the first line of defence, they must have performed accordingly. The list of allegations is getting bigger by the day. Unfortunately, no one is there to call a spade a spade. It’s high time that the Foreign Office knew its due role in the formulation of foreign policy so that it could respond to all such queries ad seriatim. God helps those who help themselves.

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