**The only way forward for the PTI**

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Some days ago, former president Arif Alvi had said that his party’s founder, former prime minister Imran Khan, would talk only to those who hold “real power” in this country. The line of reasoning, presumably, was to talk to those who have the power to order the former prime minister minister’s release, or at least offer some concessions.

When former president Alvi made that statement, it didn’t really tie up with what the PTI and its leadership, including its incarcerated founder, had always been saying: that their struggle is for a democratic Pakistan and not for any personal gain or benefit.

So it is good that finally, as reported by PTI stand-in chairman Barrister Gohar, Imran Khan has now formally (and finally) given the go-ahead to talk to other political parties. The Supreme Court had quite clearly told Imran Khan in recent hearings that it was in his party’s and the country’s own best interest if it talked to other political parties. And now that has been given the go-ahead.

Of course, it goes without saying that had the PTI leadership had some sense and had its leadership some actual vision, they would have done this a long time ago. They would have realized and understood that a united front with all other political parties – including the PMLN and the PPP – was a win-win situation and would help advance democracy, not least because all of them had been done in hard at some point in time by the powers that be.

While a positive development, it remains to be seen how this will pan out. Imran Khan is in jail and he appears to be quite the micro manager so it won’t be clear how much of a mandate the PTI talks team would be given by him to take decisions.

However, cooperation among political parties should always be a preferred option. Imran Khan only has to see the case of his own Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, who, despite all his bravado and talk about issuing ultimatums to the federal government, seems to be working with the federal government to press home the demands of his constituents.

Had the PTI persisted with its purely anti-democratic approach to not talk to any other political party, it would have been reinforced that their primary objective is: one, to get Imran Khan out of jail; two, to get his cases dropped; and three, for him to become prime minister again.

And if that means getting into another deal with the establishment then so be it.

Granted that the PTI owes its meteoric rise to the powers that be, what it needs now is the wise counsel of others like it who have been in this very situation – and not just once but several times.

Furthermore, moving forward, the PTI needs to stop maligning state institutions, something that it keeps doing in particular on social media.

Take for example what happened with Imran Khan’s personal Twitter/X account over the past few days. A tweet went out to the effect of glorifying Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The tweet was also seen by most people as a direct attack on Pakistan’s institutions.

As expected, the blowback was considerable and so much that a day later Barrister Gohar had to give a detailed interview where he disassociated Imran Khan from Imran’s own Twitter/X account. Barrister Gohar’s explanation or ‘defence’ was that it was not aimed at any institution but rather was making a political statement. The fact is that any way you look at it, the basic aim of the tweet seems quite obvious.

Now there may be nothing wrong with having an opinion like that but for that to come from Imran Khan’s Twitter/X account and at a time when he is trying to get out of jail would suggest that the party still wants to follow the path of confrontation – or that it’s social media team (which must be managing the former prime minister’s account while he is in jail) is basically running on its own without any oversight.

Either way, the PTI needs to decide what it wants – continue on the path to confrontation or decisively move towards a way forward by seeking comment ground with other political forces. The agreement to talk to other parties is a positive step towards the latter.

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