# A new social contract

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We are told that Pakistan is facing serious threats at its eastern and western borders – and indeed it is a reality that the situation on both fronts is serious.

We are told that nuclear Pakistan is a thorn in the eyes of external powers like the US, which has joined hands with India to destabilize Pakistan. And we start believing this too.

We are told that Pakistan faces the fifth generation or hybrid war and our enemies are trying to destabilize us internally by exploiting citizens’ distrust against the state and its institutions. We accept that too.

We are also told that wars are now not only fought with weapons, but also via the economy. If Pakistan is economically weak then we would not be able to counter our enemies. For a stable and growing economy, political stability is a prerequisite. Since it is convincing logic, we buy this argument as well.

Now the question is: who is destabilizing Pakistan internally? Why are citizens distrustful and suspicious of the state and its institutions and whose behaviour causes such distrust and apprehension? Who is behind the political instability and who is causing distrust among politicians, intellectual, scholars and media persons by pushing them to the wall on account of not supporting a specific narrative?

In the past, we were told to call Wali Khan, Attaullah Mengal, GM Syed, Abdul Samad Khan Achakzai and Bhutto traitors – and we complied. We were told that the Afghan Jihad was obligatory and our duty – and we accepted it. Then we were told that the Taliban were fighting a holy war in Afghanistan for the sake of Islam and Pakistan – and we started to prove them holy warriors. Then 9/11 changed the whole scenario and we were asked to prove the Taliban as enemies of Islam and Pakistan – and we whole heartedly did that, and paid a huge cost.

We were also asked to prove Benazir Bhutto as an agent of India and Mian Nawaz Sharif as a great patriot. We did that too. Then we were told to call Zardari a thief – and we did it. Then we were directed to call Nawaz Sharif India’s friend (Modi Ka Yaar) and a thief – and we ensured we did that.

Then we were told to accept Imran Khan as our messiah – and we accepted him as that. Then we were told to call the arm-twisting of the opposition ‘accountability’ – and of course we did that.

Then we were told to do ‘positive journalism’ about the government for six months – and we did that not only for six but for fifteen months.

Despite it all, there was no positive outcome of the incumbent government; the situation further deteriorated and is getting worse with each passing day. The sinking economy is shrinking investor confidence and leading to brain drain as well as capital flight. The distrust and apprehension of the people is increasing. Huge blunders in foreign policy are being committed which have even caused cracks to appear in our ties with the few friends we had. The most alarming among all is the fact that, while earlier only common citizens felt a sense of insecurity, now that insecurity can be felt in state institutions and other segments of society as well.

The judiciary considers itself under attack. Politicians too think they are being coerced, suppressed and maligned. Similarly, the media feels itself under attack. Now we have reached a point where even state security institutions feel that they are under internal and external attacks. This shows that every institution feels threatened and every institution seems to be engaged in a war for survival.

Some institutions even consider an attack on any individual within them as an attack on the whole institution. But the story of politicians and the media is quite different. Besides external attacks, they are fighting with each other as well. The religious community is also anxious and thinks that they and their religion are under attack. The liberal and secular community too feels it is being pressurized and silenced.

The state is like a family and each and every institution and class of society is like a member of the bigger family. Ideally, an attack on one institution should be considered an attack on all institutions of the state. But the tragedy in Pakistan is that every institution is only conscious about its own position, interests and individuals. This self-obsession has brought us to the point that if one institution is under attack and is being weakened, the rest rejoice.

Now, the question is: if every individual and institution of the state faces internal threats, how can we handle the external threats that Pakistan is exposed to? To counter the external threat, we must stand united internally. The only way for internal stability is a meaningful and open dialogue between all state institutions in which they may sit together, share with each other their concerns and grievances and find a way forward.

Such dialogue will be helpful to figure out which institution is crossing its limits and interfering in the work of others. It will also provide an opportunity to initiate a system in which all institutions cooperate and help address each other’s shortcomings instead of exploiting each other’s weaknesses. Through open dialogue and mutual consultation, we would be able to bring a new social contract in light of the 1973 constitution.

Moreover, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission should be constituted to identify past blunders and give a future course of action. This is a now or never stage; we need a new social contract for the sake of a stable and prosperous Pakistan. If we fail this time, we can easily face a Rwanda-like situation.

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